

A Brief History of Football in Iowa High Schools

TIMELINE

- 1860 Secondary schools in Eastern U.S. start playing. 24 players to a team; game was 90 min.
- 1869 Scoring only by a goal by kick only for 1 point
- 1876 Number of players reduced to 15; playing field was set at 140 yards by 70 yards
- 1878 Canvas pants and jackets required equipment
- 1880 Field reduced to 110 x 53 yards.
- 1881 Two overtime periods of 15 minutes used each to break tie games. Teams had three downs to advance the ball five yards for a first down
- 1883 Scoring by touchdown - 4 pts; try by successful kick 2 pts; safety – 2 pts; field goal – 5 pts
- 1890 Some Iowa high schools start playing football, but many teams representing schools were “club or town” teams sometimes using players not enrolled in high school.
- 1894 Game time reduced to 70 minutes.
- 1885 Intentional offside – opponent awarded 1 point; slugging – opponent receives 2 points
- 1898 Five points awarded for a touchdown and one point for a successful point after try
- 1905 After 18 deaths and 180 serious injuries due to brutal play in college games, President Theodore Roosevelt called upon college leaders to “save the sport,” in a special White House Commission and testimony before the U.S. Congress
- 1905 Newly formed IHSAA member schools banned from playing football.
- 1908 IHSAA lifts playing ban allowing member schools to resume games in 1909
- 1909 Playing rules codified by Presidential Commission on football was the forerunner of the NCAA; Points for a field goal set at 3; forward pass was legalized
- 1910 Game is played in four quarters of 15 minutes each.
- 1912 Field length is reduced to 100 yards with 10 yard “end zones.” Teams are given four downs to advance the ball 10 yards and receive a new series.
- 1922 The down for the try after a touchdown was moved to 5 yard line (previously was at the 10)
- 1932 NFHS publishes rules for high school football and departs from previously used NCAA rules
- 1935 Helmets required by NFHS rules
- 1938 Time of each quarter reduced from 15 to 12 minutes
- 1954 Legalized the use of plastic face mask
- 1958 Successful try after a touchdown: 1 point by kick and 2 pts. for a successful run or pass.
- 1960 IHSAA requires tooth and mouth protectors
- 1968 IHSAA among first in the nation to ban spearing and illegal helmet contact
- 1970 IHSAA and Iowa Football Coaches Association produce a film for schools on the dangers of spearing and illegal helmet contact; NFHS recommended the use of four officials
- 1971 Goals widened from 18'6" to 23'4"
- 1972 Iowa first state to adopt an overtime procedure in case of ties
- 1972 IHSAA initiates football play-offs (4 classes; 4 qualifiers in each class)
- 1973 NOCSAE labels required on helmets and other equipment
- 1972-75 Championship games played at Kinnick Stadium, Iowa City; Clyde Williams Field & Jack Trice Field in Ames and at member school neutral sites
- 1975 Play-off qualifiers in each class increased to eight.
- 1976 Play-off Championship Games in the UNI-Dome at Cedar Falls
- 1979 IHSAA makes restrictions on blocking below the waist; IHSAA starts surveying member schools concerning injuries. Most ever member schools with a high school team — 435 of 506.
- 1981 Class A added to the play-off system
- 1984 8 qualifiers in Class 4A; other classes expanded to 16 play-off qualifiers
- 1986 Class 4A moves to 16 play-off qualifiers
- 1989 IHSAA starts furnishing member schools with information on heat indexes and preventing dehydration, continuing those efforts annually to the present day
- 1992 Start of District Football; 50-point mercy rule adopted
- 1993 IHSAA has game officials rate players, coaches and fans on their sportsmanship
- 1995 IHSAA approves 5-officials
- 1998 Semifinals of play-offs go to the UNI-Dome; 8-player football revived-dropped in the late 1950s.
- 2000 8-player added to the playoff system (4 qualifiers)
- 2002 IHSAA and Iowa Football Coaches Association produces and mails to each school a video on “keeping the head out of football.”
- 2002 8-player qualifiers increased to 8
- 2006 IHSAA and Iowa Medical Society send a joint reminder to schools on “concussion management”; 8-player qualifiers increased to 16; Semifinals in 8-player in the UNI-Dome
- 2008 Post-season play adds a round of substate games for 32 teams in each class.
- 2010 IHSAA furnishes schools with a protocol treatment for athletes who may have a concussion/brain trauma, which is embodied in statewide legislation in 2011
- 2010 Sub-state designation dropped; 32 qualifiers in each of the six classes
- 2012 Teams in Class 3A, 2A, 1A set at 56 teams thus expanding Class A

2013 Board of Control approved changes regarding heat acclimation of athletes, a video on safety, and guidelines on hydrating athletes, length and restrictions on pre-season practices, and continuing emphasis and course work on protocol and minimizing brain injuries

Each fall football talk in virtually every Iowa community is of high school football. Friday Night is traditionally reserved for the "Legends of the Fall" and with nearly 23,000 participants in grades 9-12, the sport is the highest participation activity in Iowa high schools.

You can call it "Pride in Pads," "Courage in Cleats," or "Glory on the Gridiron," but it does not change the fact that football season is embraced by students and adults alike. It is a phenomenon in towns and cities across our Iowa landscape. The names of top players and teams may change each year, but the tradition never does.

Iowa high schools began playing the sport in the mid-to late 1800s, with difficulty placing an exact starting date. With no lighted fields, games were played in the afternoon. Transportation was limited, and often the teams playing the game were located along railroads. The early fields ranged from stock yards, fairgrounds, to pastures and eventually to high school fields. The season would usually start with games in mid-September and end with a game on or near Armistice Day and in a few instances Thanksgiving. The early rules had little uniformity until the turn of the century, and the equipment was only minimal compared to the safety standards that followed. It was not uncommon for the early teams to be a collection of high school and non-high school players.

It was a rugged game that often bordered on brutality. In 1905 the college game reported 18 deaths and 180 serious injuries. Thus, when the newly organized IHSAA was formed in 1904, its members immediately voted for a ban on playing the game. Some non-member schools continued to play as the fledgling organization sought to gain control and leadership over educational athletics. Nationally, President Theodore Roosevelt called college leaders together to try and preserve the game by making changes in the rules to make it safer. Before reinstating the sport in 1908, the membership of the IHSAA drafted age and grade eligibility rules and required a physical prior to participation. For over a century Iowa students now have been playing the game that faced extinction. The IHSAA and its coaches have led the nation in many rules changes emphasizing safety. The IHSAA secured permission from the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations (NFHS) to implement these changes and reported on their success. Many of the changes were codified in the national rule book later. Several of them follow below:

In 1960 Iowa was the first state to mandate mouth pieces; in 1968 it was the first state to eliminate spearing and prevent the use of head in tackling and blocking; and in the late 1980s and early 90s Iowa was the first to experiment with bringing coaches onto the field during time outs to check their players for heat stress and exhaustion. By 2004, Iowa was the only state to provide coaches with instruments and charts for measuring levels of heat and humidity, thus trying to eliminate injuries related to heat and cardiac stress. The IHSAA has enjoined the Iowa Football Coaches Association, which was organized in 1963, in emphasizing safety issues and promoting the sport.

As football became more popular each year, rules continued to emphasize making the game safer. Equipment likewise has improved. In a game that emphasizes sportsmanship, safety has always remained a primary focus of the IHSAA and Iowa has led the way in making the game safer. Besides equipment, changes that improved game included playing facilities that were well-lighted with natural turf nurtured by watering systems, as well as some artificial surfaces.

In a related change, the 1930s and 1940s saw over 140 schools with a six or eight man team in addition to a over 270 with 11-player teams. Yet even when you add these numbers, less than half of the membership of the IHSAA prior to 1960 offered the sport.

But football enjoyed a resurgence of popularity, thanks in good measure to the creation of a playoff structure that breathed new life into it. After several discussions with the football coaches association, the Association's Board of Control implemented one of the more popular innovations connected with the sport — the playoff structure in 1972. Prior to 1972, teams would have an 8 or 9 game schedule and the season would end. It was the only Iowa high school sport that did not have a state tournament to determine a champion and the IHSAA and the coaches felt there should be a better way to end the season. The member schools supported the idea and a new age of football was born for Iowa kids. By 1979, the number of schools offering football reached high tide with 435 teams from the 506 member high schools. Today there are 341 teams involving 372 of the 395 member schools. Until 1972, the State Champion was "mythical" — the school that finished first in the ratings poll. The playoffs, in each of the five 11-player and the one 8-player class, crown champions that are made on the field. Each year, a special story about a school, a player, group of players, or a coach captures the interest of fans.

In 1993 after athletic conferences started losing members due to school closings, consolidations and shrinking enrollments, teams had difficulty in securing complete schedules. The solution was district football and kept competition among schools with like enrollment with re-districting is done every two years. In 1998, the 8-player game

was re-introduced with Elk Horn-Kimballton, Whiting, Sentral, Fenton; Charter Oak-Ute, Exira and Walnut leading the way. By 2000 there were 26 schools playing and the playoff format included 8-player teams.

Iowa players have an extraordinary record of achievement beyond high school, and boast a legacy of which fans can revel. From all-time high school and University of Iowa greats, Aubrey Devine of Des Moines, Gordon Locke of Denison, one of Notre Dame's fable Four Horsemen Elmer Layden from Davenport to modern day greats the legacy continues. The first Heisman Trophy winner was Jay Berwanger of Dubuque, and Adel's Nile Kinnick, one of the most prolific athletes the state has produced, won the Heisman in 1939. Other native Iowans who prepped on the gridirons of our state have finished high in the Heisman voting including "Sonny" Franck of Davenport, Bob O'Dell of Sioux City and Randy Duncan, Des Moines Roosevelt each finished among the top three. Numerous other Iowans have won national collegiate awards for their position play such as Chad Hennings, the first ever Outland Trophy winner, and Robert Gallery the 2003 Outland Trophy winner; Trev Alberts, the 1993 Butkus Award winner, and Nate Kaeding, the 2002 Groza Award winner. Several Iowans have gone on to star in the NFL and other professional leagues. Near the top of the list is former Super Bowl MVP, Kurt Warner, a former prep at Cedar Rapids Regis. Former Iowa preps have finished high or won individual honors in Division II (Chris Hegg of Hudson at Truman State 1985, and Adam Timmerman of Cherokee, D-II offensive lineman of the year in 1994 when he played for South Dakota State.) In Division III, Marion's Carey Bender while playing for Coe won the 1994 Gagliardi Trophy, that division's equivalent of the Heisman.

A total of 151 former players have been inducted into the IHSAA's Players Hall of Fame through 2012. Twenty-one former Iowa preps have gone on to earn First Team Consensus All-American recognition at NCAA Division I schools and 83 have become first team All-Americans in Divisions I-AA, II and III, with several others winning NAIA honors. Twenty-three former Iowa prep players ended the 2012 season on the roster of National Football League teams. But, the huge base of hometown heroes, forever nameless to many, continues to be your typical high school youngster who remains the heart and soul of high school football. Also, key to the success are the coaches and administrators who have endeavored to deliver a great educational experience to their student-athletes. Since 1969, the football coaches' association has inducted 207 coaching greats. Ten coaches have 300 or more victories, 38 others have 200 or more career wins while another 60 have 150 or more career triumphs.

While the individual player and coach achievements are many and signify a strong measure of school and community support, the underpinning of success, is a large core of players who participate and dedicate themselves to representing their school. They and the fans make "Football Friday" a true community celebration. It is an experience that attracts slightly more than one out of every four high school boys in the state and reminds those who have gone before of the thrills and values they enjoyed. The act of an athlete playing football for his/her local school is a bond with nearly the three-quarters of a million who have preceded them.

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