

# THE LAW OF THE LAND

BY AL DUNHAM

**B** “Because I said so, that’s why!” There isn’t a man alive who hasn’t heard those words when they were a child, asking their parents why a certain rule was in existence. Usually, the parent would try and explain why the rule was there. Maybe it was for the child’s own safety. Perhaps it was because the parent was trying to have a little peace and quiet for a change. Or maybe it was to keep damage from occurring. Whatever the case, the parent would explain the consequences of what would happen if the certain rule was broken. For those occasions when the parent couldn’t come up with a good explanation, the ‘Because I said so’ was used. In the dictatorship known as parental guidance, it is a good enough response. In a league or tournament setting, where you have several grown men playing football games, “Because I said so” doesn’t cut it. They need some sort of rational reasoning for why certain rules exist.

Every game has rules. They have to, otherwise you would have utter chaos. The tricky part is, where do you draw the line? What makes some circumstances ok to follow without guidelines, and others that require explicit step by step directions? How do you chose which rules are good, and which are bad? This is a dilemma faced by anyone who is trying to create a game. Too strict, and the game becomes tedious and not much fun to play. Too lax, and the game becomes a free for all, which can also lead to it being not very enjoyable to play. Somewhere in between the two is what you aim for. It’s not an easy task. Many leagues run into this very same problem, causing friction and discontent among it’s members and eventual dissolving of the league itself. Rules need to be clear, concise, and fair to everyone. Most importantly, they need to make sense.

There are many different rules used by various leagues around the country. None are necessarily better than others, they are just

different. In some cases the differences are minor. Coaches can easily adapt their style of play between the two by making slight changes. Perhaps it’s just a matter of weight, or maybe a change in passing technique. Other times the differences can be quite pronounced, causing frustration when a coach tries to play in a system that he is not familiar with.

For many years, there has been an effort to try and establish one universal set of rule for playing miniature football. Unfortunately, for just as long, such endeavors have ended up in failure. It seems that compromise just isn’t within our reach. The funny part is, when

you get right down to it, about 95% of the game is the same, no matter who or where you play. You have an offense and a defense, both with 11 players, on a field that is turned on and the men run around until a tackle or score is made. Then you line up and do it again. It’s the 5% that creates all the problems. For whatever reason(s), guys just can’t seem to find that middle ground called compromise.



I’m not going to try and promote one set of rules over another. What I will do, is try and sort out the main differences that seem to keep our hobby from being unified. As you will see, all rules have specific purposes. Some work well together, and others don’t. Hopefully, this will give everyone a better understanding of why certain rules exist, and why you can’t randomly mix rules together.

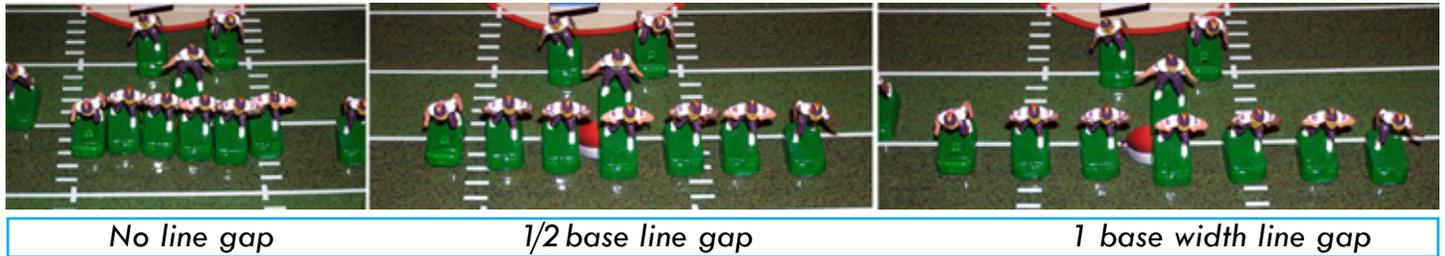
## WEIGHING THE WEIGHT DEBATE

No other rule has had as much impact on the game as weight limit has. It is the most divisive issue in our hobby, yet the most important rule around. Simply put, weight makes a player stronger. Because of that, limits have been placed. For now, the main categories are 3.3 grams, 4.0 grams and unlimited. Each has it’s merits, as well as it’s detractions.



3.3 grams has long been the standard for many leagues. It is easy to follow. Paint your figure, put him on a base and there should be no problem, provided that you use figures that were designed for miniature football and aren't too heavy. Their main drawback is that they are easily deflected by vibrations, which can be a major problem when being used under a certain rule set, which we will soon discover.

4.0 grams is the latest limit, which has come about because of the larger 2X4 boards being used by the majority of players these days, and because of some heavier figures that are available that don't make the 3.3 cut. Their main drawback is it forces new people in the



hobby to acquire a fast learning curve to be competitive, which can be intimidating.

Unlimited is actually the easiest to enforce, as just about anything is legal. Unfortunately, heavy figures require stronger vibrations which may be beyond the limits of some boards. It can also be even more intimidating for coaches, both new and old.

## TWO STOP, OR NOT TWO STOP?

There has been a lot of discussions about whether or not there should be multiple stops, or just one, during game play. The old rule of thumb was to turn the board on and leave it on until the player with the ball was tackled, goes out of bounds or scores. Many leagues and tournaments play this way, and is the most popular way to play. The main complaint stems from player control. In this system, you need to be sure that your players are going where you want them to go. That is usually easier said than done. Because of the different slants and vibrations of the boards, not to mention the field covers placed on them, the players don't always react in a predictable manor. All too often, a player will be going straight down the field, only to suddenly turn and go out of bounds for no apparent reason. This can be frustrating for many coaches, and no doubt led to the innovation of using multiple stops.

The idea of multiple stops is easy. You run the board for a predetermined amount of time, then shut it off. You make your adjustments and do it again. This allows you to correct the players who are heading in the wrong direction. For some, multiple stop, makes the game more 'life like' as you don't have players running

randomly around. The downside to multiple stop is that every time you turn the board on and off, the players may 'jump' or fall over from the sudden burst of vibrations. This is especially true if you are playing 3.3 grams or less. Light players are more likely to be distracted from their intended route than heavier players. If you wish to play under this rule, you may want to go to 4.0 grams or heavier.

## I NEED MY SPACE

Many leagues seem to play with some sort of gap between offensive linemen. Others don't. How far you spread the line will

be determined by what you allow on defense. Let me explain. With no gap, or very little gap, you run the risk of having your games turn into rugby scrums. With the 5 linemen elbow to elbow, and the defense lining up the same way, you end up with what basically forms a block. It's hard for a running back to break through without being touched by a defender simply because there isn't much room for him to go by. So, the offense resorts to trying to push the pile by having the QB and both backs pushing from behind. The defense counters by having 3 safeties push back. You have 2 masses pushing against each other, so the stronger of the two slowly pushes the other side back.

To prevent this, coaches started to spread the linemen out. Most are between 1/2 to 1 base width apart. This will create more one on one blocking and holes to open for the backs to go through, provided that you set a rule for the defense that makes them line up opposite the offense. Otherwise, all the defense has to do is shoot the gap to get at the runner. So, most leagues who play with a base gap usually say that a defender on the line must also line up opposite the offensive player. This is evident in the strategy divider that some leagues use. Basically, it is a screen



*Butch Carter and Keith Chalmers compete against each other using a Strategy Divider at the Seawall Brawl.*





*Allowing the defense to shoot the gaps when playing base width gaps, could result in the defense having easy access to the backfield and making the running game difficult.*



that is placed between the offense and defense along the line of scrimmage. It is made as to where the linemen line up. It provides a gap approximately the same as the width of a standard base between players.

## THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

Ok, it's not really from China, but the strategy divider remains another option for those looking to equalize the offense and defense. Basically, it is a screen that is set up between the offense and defense on the line of scrimmage. It is marked as to where to place the linemen, and spaces where the wide receivers are lined up. The object is to allow the offense to line up and have the running backs set up where the defense doesn't know exactly which direction they are set to run, so that the defense can't stack against it. This forces the defense to spread out and be prepared for just about anything the offense will try. When the divider is lifted, the defense is usually allowed to make one minor adjustment, most often a pivot by a safety. Drawbacks to the divider are they extra time involved in placing and removing the divider, and the risk of having it fall over and damaging a player.

## STACK 'EM UP!

This is another rule that has caused some controversy over the years. The concept is simple, if one man is strong, then two must be stronger. Stacking is just that, line 2, 3 or more men up and let them push. The idea is to overpower the offense to allow penetration into the backfield. Many leagues have outlawed it for just this reason. Given that both the offensive and defensive lines are of equal strength, stacking would not be necessary. It's when the offense is pushing the defense backwards that stacking becomes not just a viable option, but a necessary one. If the rules permit it, most guys will use it. Stacking will usually cause one or more defenders to push their way into the offensive backfield, often



*Requiring the defense to line up opposite the offensive linemen will help create holes for the running back to run in, making it easier for the rushing game.*



*Stacking the line on defense can force the offensive players to go backwards, and give the defensive tackles the chance to get into the backfield before the running backs can get back to the line of scrimmage. Best to go with FOB here.*



runner and a defender's base touch, the play is over. This can be frustrating, as the ball carrier can run into the back of a defender or glance off the side of a passing player and he is considered tackled. This is especially true if you allow stacking or shooting the gaps, as the defender simply has to appear in the backfield and the runner is almost guaranteed to run into him. Because of that, FOB was developed. In FOB, the defender must hit the ball carrier with the front of his base to make the tackle. If the runner hits him from behind or the side, the play continues.

causing the running game to struggle just to make it back to the line of scrimmage, which has led to the next rule....

## ARE WE PLAYING TOUCH OR TACKLE?

In the original Tudor rules, any touching of the base between the ball runner and a defender constitutes a tackle. This is the way that the game has been played for over 60 years. Recently, many guys have adopted a different way to play, and that is front of base tackle, or FOB. Any touch is easy to determine, anytime the ball

## PASSING FANCIES

Most leagues play using the TTQB. This requires the coach to be a part of the team, as his skill at using the TTQB to pass is a large factor in the games. Not all coaches are adept at using the TTQB. Arthritis, injuries or other handicaps make it difficult, if not impossible for some to use the TTQB. For them, passing sticks were developed.



*Jerome Bettis, #36, is FOB tackled by #77 and #91. In some leagues, this would cause a fumble.*

Passing sticks is a system that does not require the eye/hand coordination of the TTQB, but has it's own unique requirements. Depending on the distance from the QB to the intended receiver, a stick of predetermined length is used and a marker is placed to mark the spot where the ball is thrown. The receiver then must hit the marker to make a completed pass. If a defender gets to the marker first, the pass is intercepted. If there is a main drawback to using sticks, it is that you must account for the distance stick being used to determine whether or not a receiver is really open, as opposed to the TTQB method where the receiver is generally considered to be open if there are no defenders between the QB and receiver.





*TTQB, sticks or dice. Each system has it's good and bad points. Which way you wish to pass may be determined by the other coaches in your league.*

the line remains the best option, unless passing sticks are used. With sticks, mugging is probably the worst way to play. If a receiver breaks free, there is no one to catch up to him. Letting the receivers run their routes also means that the defenders will be out running with them. You will find that the defense can cover better because of the fact that the offense must place the distance stick at a spot that is usually within striking distance of at least one defender.

## CRYING FOUL!

Another heated matter revolves around penalties, fumbles and injuries. Some guys like them, others don't. No matter which side of the fence you're on, you have to admit that in real life, these things happen. Players lose the ball, the ref's throw flags, and guys get hurt, sometimes for the year. If you want realism, you must include these things. Now, in defense of those that don't want their games to depend on fate, you have to take into account how the game is being played. If the games are short, say 10 plays per quarter, then it may be best to play without these things happening. Since the teams have a small number of plays to run, it makes sense to let the players determine what happens, rather than having fate intervene. If you're playing longer games, say 20 or 25 plays per quarter, then you might find that fumbles and penalties add another dimension to the game, as you will find that some teams handle adversity better than others.

## THE CENTRAL PARK DEFENSE

Most leagues allow the defense to mug the receivers at the line. The reason is because too many coaches are so good at passing, that any receiver that gets open is almost guaranteed to complete the pass. Mugging the receiver is the defenses' best hope to prevent this. Some coaches prefer to let the receivers run their routes. Their contention is that in real life, defenders aren't allowed to hold the receivers. They get 1 shot before the receiver runs 5 yards and can not touch him from there. The problem lies in that a coach who is good with the TTQB will tear the defense apart. What is a person to do?

Since the players are plastic and can not think for themselves, mugging at

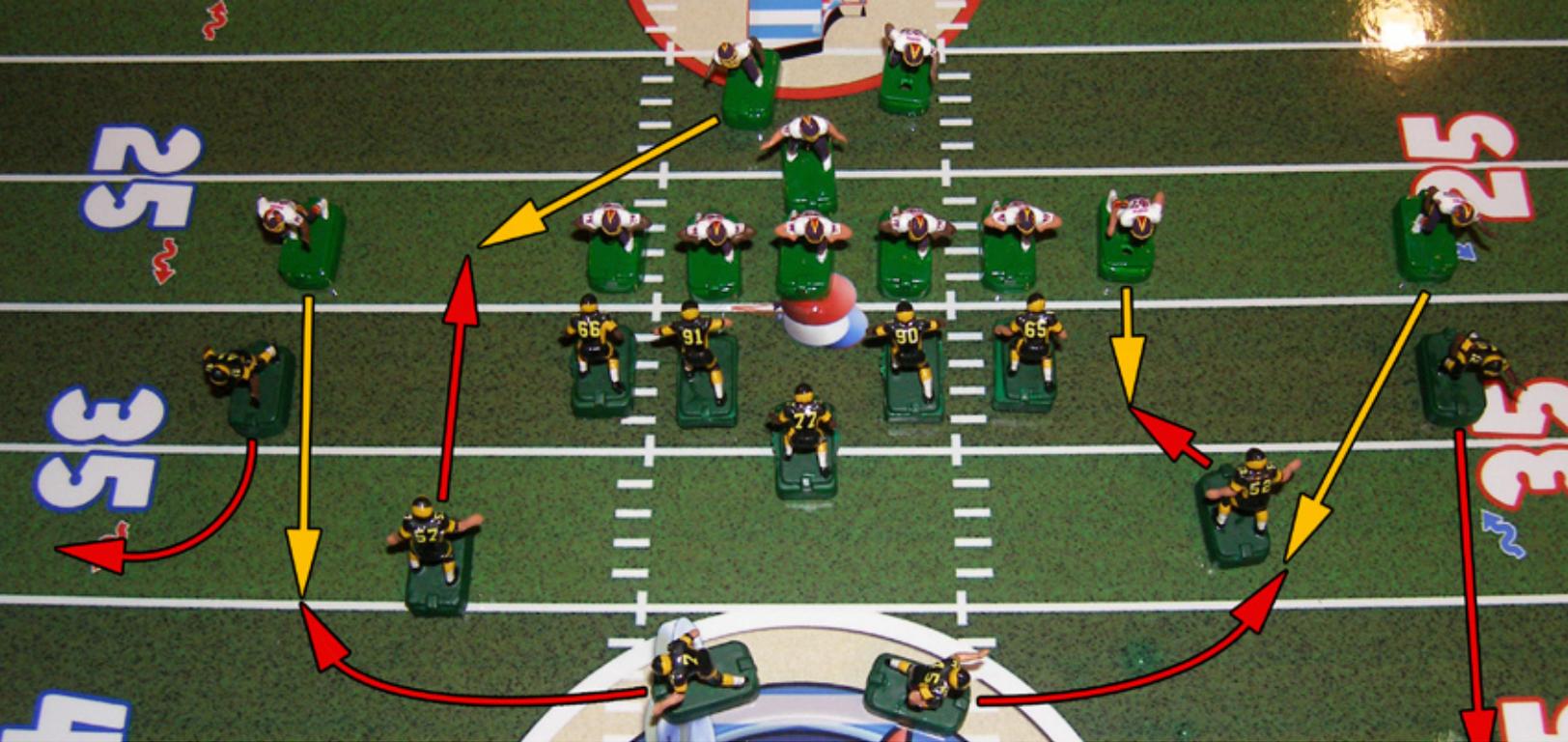
*Many coaches prefer to stack against the receivers to prevent them from getting open.*



Some people don't object as much to fumbles and penalties taking place, but more as to how they occur. Many leagues that have fumbles and penalties use dice to determine when they happen. They roll one or more and depending on what comes up, a penalty or fumble may take place. For them, the randomness of the dice is no problem. For others, they want the players actions to determine the outcome. For those people, they may have a designated defender picked as the fumble man. If he makes the tackle, then the offensive player fumbles the ball. Or, they may have a rule that if 2 or more defenders hit the ball carrier with the front of their base, then a fumble occurs.

For penalties, many limit them to what may happen during the game. A coach may set up too close to the line of scrimmage and be off sides, or he may have 12 men on the field, of line up with only 6 men on the line. These are ok for those who wish to keep





*Using dice or sticks allows the defense to play zone coverages and the receivers to run their routes.*

penalties to a minimum, but they will not see the more common penalties that occur during real games, such as holding, personal fouls, illegal motions, pass interference, illegal use of hands etc. In order to get those, you will need use a system that can generate random flags to happen, like dice, cards, a random generator set up on a computer that runs while the coaches play etc.

## TIME IS ON MY SIDE

How long a game should be and how to keep track of it will vary from person to person. Many leagues have time limits for the games, as well as time limits for setting up the plays. These are usually the result of some coaches taking quite a bit of time to set up one play. This can draw a game out to several hours. To prevent this, 30 or 40 second time limits to set up the players have been used to keep the games from becoming marathons.

## SETTING YOUR OWN STANDARDS

Another method is to use a set number of plays per quarter. These usually range from 10 to 25 plays, with 12-15 being the most common. Using this method let's the coaches play at a more relaxed pace, and guarantees a consistent number of plays per game. If time isn't a concern, using a play sheet might be for you.

There are those who like to follow the NFL or NCAA and adopt their rules to their games. They will say that if it is legal in real life, then it should be legal in MF. To an extent, they are correct. However; what they sometimes fail to take into account, is that in MF, the players are made of plastic and can not think for themselves. This is a game, not real life. It can be frustrating, but you have to be willing to make adjustments because of that.

When making rules for your league, try and use those that work together. If you want to play multiple stops, you should also go with heavier teams to keep the sudden vibrations from spinning the players around causing them to go in the wrong directions. You may like the idea of allowing stacking on defense, but if you do, you will probably want to use FOB to allow the offense to be able to run the ball. Letting the defense shoot the gaps on the line is fine if you also allow the offense to line up elbow to elbow, but not with a base width between players. You may also take into consideration the size of board you are playing on. If you are using Tudor or Miggle boards, especially those that are smaller than the 620's, you may want to reconsider gaps in the line and limit them to about ½ base width, as wide gaps will intrude on the space available for the wide receivers. Conversely, playing with no gaps on a 2X4 board will leave large, open space between the O line and the side lines.

Penalties and fumbles are ok when playing longer games, but may prove to be detrimental if using a shorter, tournament style format. TTQB's can be fun when used by an experienced coach, but if you have a lot of newer players, of some with physical handicaps, you might want to switch to passing sticks, or at least allow those coaches the option to use them while the more experienced coaches use the TTQB. If you like the spread linemen with no stacking and no shooting of the gaps, or using the strategy divider, you might find that any touch is best, as FOB may lead to long runs under those situations.

Whatever rules you decide on, be sure that they are fair to everyone and allow for the games to be fun to play. Rules that are too restrictive or difficult to follow will cause people to lose interest in playing, which is not a good thing. Keep it simple, easy and fun, and your league will enjoy success.

