

# So You Want To Play Football?



**What You need to know about  
America's most popular game.**



# Introduction

*What is Football?*

American football (known as football in the United States and gridiron in some other countries) is a sport played by two teams of eleven players on a rectangular field 120 yards long by 53.33 yards wide with goalposts at each end. The offense attempts to advance an oval ball (the football) down the field by running with or passing it.

They must advance it at least ten yards in four downs to receive a new set of four downs and continue the drive; if not, they turn over the football to

American football evolved in the United States, originating from the sport of rugby football. The first game of American football was played on November 6, 1869, between two college teams, Rutgers and Princeton, under rules resembling rugby and soccer.



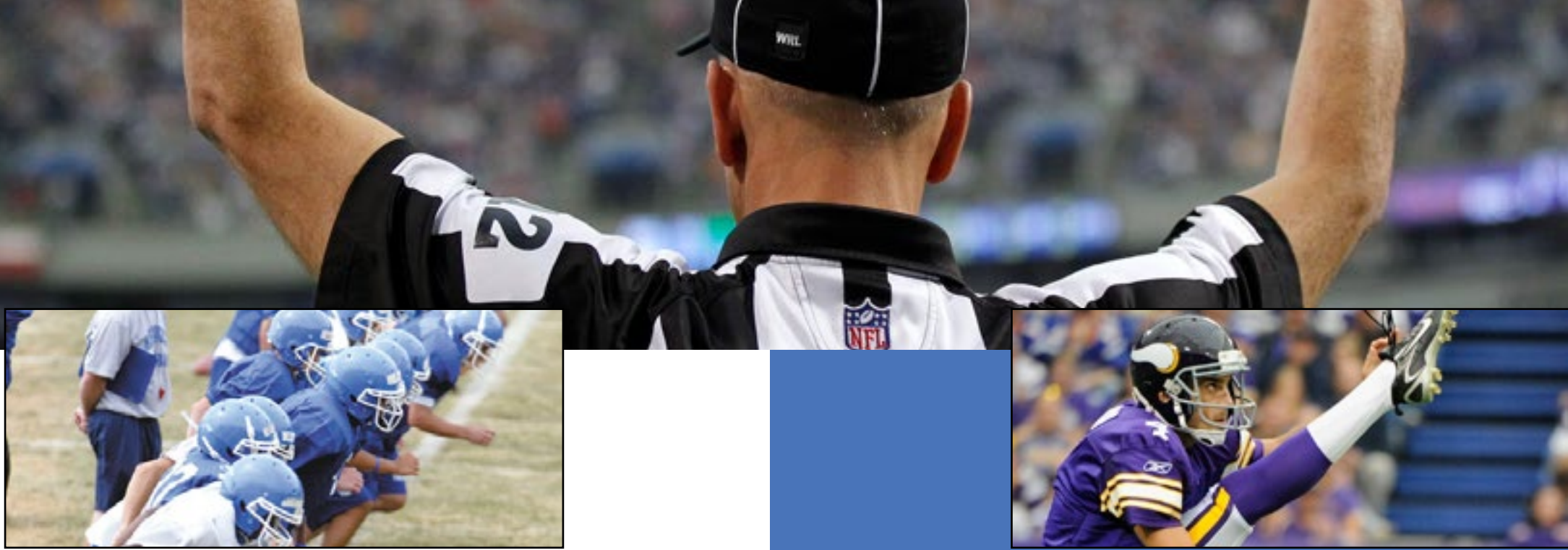
## Why Football?

American football as a whole is the most popular sport in the United States; professional football and college football are the most popular forms of the game, with the other major levels being high school and youth football.

The NFL's championship game, the Super Bowl, is the most popular single-day sporting event in the United States and among the most-watched club sporting events in the world.

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# Rules & Regulations

In American football, the winner is the team that has scored the most points at the end of the game. There are multiple ways to score in a football game.

The touchdown, worth six points, is the most valuable scoring play in American football. A touchdown is scored when a live ball is advanced into, caught in, or recovered in the end zone of the opposing team. The scoring team then attempts a try or conversion, more commonly known as the point(s)-after-touchdown (PAT), which is a single scoring opportunity. A PAT is attempted

is a single scoring opportunity. A PAT is attempted from the two- or three-yard line, depending on the level of play. If scored by a placekick or dropkick through the goal posts, it is worth one point, and is typically called the extra point. If it is scored by what would normally be a touchdown, it is called the two-point conversion and is worth two points. No points are awarded on a failed extra point or two-point conversion attempt. A field goal, worth three points.

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# Penalties

Officials are responsible for enforcing game rules and monitoring the clock. All officials carry a whistle and wear black-and-white striped shirts and black hats except for the referee, whose hat is white. Each carries a weighted yellow flag that is thrown to the ground to signal that a foul has been called. An official who spots multiple fouls will throw his hat as a secondary signal. The seven officials on the field are each tasked with a different set of responsibilities.

Another set of officials, the chain crew, are responsible for moving the chains. The chains, consisting of two large sticks with a 10 yard-long chain between them, are used to measure for a first down. The chain crew stays on the sidelines during the game, but if requested by the officials they will briefly bring the chains on to the field to measure. A typical chain crew will have at least three people -

The referee is charged with oversight and control of the game and is the authority on the score, the down number, and any and all rule interpretations in discussions between the other officials. He announces all penalties and discusses the infraction with the offending team's captain, monitors for illegal hits against the quarterback, makes requests for first-down measurements, and notifies the head coach whenever a player is ejected.



# Safety & Tips



## Injuries & Concerns

Football is a full-contact sport, and injuries are relatively common. Most injuries occur during training sessions, particularly ones that involve contact between players. To try to prevent injuries, players are required to wear a set of equipment. At a minimum players must wear a football helmet and a set of shoulder pads, but individual leagues may require additional padding such as thigh pads and guards, knee pads, chest protectors, and mouthguards. Most injuries occur in the lower extremities, particularly in the knee, but a significant number also affect the upper extremities. The most common types of injuries are strains, sprains, bruises, fractures, dislocations, and concussions

Concussions are particularly concerning, as repeated concussions can increase a person's risk in later life for chronic traumatic encephalopathy and mental health issues such as dementia, Parkinson's disease, and depression. Concussions are often caused by helmet-to-helmet or upper-body contact between opposing players, although helmets have prevented more serious injuries such as skull fractures.

Various programs are aiming to reduce concussions by reducing the frequency of helmet-to-helmet hits; USA Football's "Heads Up Football" program is aiming to reduce concussions in youth football by teaching coaches and players about the signs of a concussion, the proper way to wear football equipment and ensure it fits, and proper tackling methods that avoid helmet-to-helmet contact.



## Equipment

Protective equipment in gridiron football ("football gear") consists of equipment worn by football players for the protection of the body during the course of a football game. Basic equipment is worn by some football players including helmet, shoulder pads, gloves, shoes, and thigh and knee pads. Neck rolls, elbow pads, mouth guards, hip pads, tailbone pads, rib pads, and other equipment may be worn in addition to the aforementioned basics.



Football protective equipment has remained consistent in use for decades with some slight modifications made over the years in design and materials. The assignment and maintenance of football gear belongs to the team equipment manager



## Risks of playing Football

Health issues in American football comprise a number of health risks associated with participating in the sport. Injuries are relatively common in American football, due to its nature as a full-contact game. Injuries occur during both practice and games. Several factors can affect the frequency of injuries: epidemiological studies have shown older players can be at a greater risk, while equipment and experienced coaches can reduce the risk of injury. Common injuries include strains, sprains, fractures, dislocations, and concussions. Concussions have become a concern, as they increase the risk of mental illnesses like dementia and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). In individual leagues like the National Football League (NFL) and

and National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), a public injury report is published containing all injured players on a team, their injury and the game-day status of each player. In many cases, injuries sustained while playing can cause long-term damage. In addition to neurological damage caused by hits to the head, injuries to the mid and lower body can force players to retire or lead to nagging ailments in later life. Various methods have been used to reduce injuries in football, including rule changes such as the abolition of large wedge formations; a sharp decline in cervical spine injuries since the 1970s has been attributed to rule changes that altered blocking and tackling techniques.

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# Youth Football(Pop Warner)

American Youth Football, Inc., established in 1996, is an international youth football organization established to promote the wholesome development of youth through their association with adult leaders in the sport of American football. Rules and regulations are established to ensure that players play in an atmosphere of safety with a competitive balance between teams. American Youth Football is on a mission to give back to the community.

learning, playing, and enjoying the sport while instilling high moral standards by stressing the importance of academic achievement and community involvement. Helping kids become leaders and teammates, AYF players will learn to both foster confidence and a sense of self-worth that extend beyond the gridiron and into the school, family and community.

AYF is one of the largest membership organizations dedicated to teaching



*“You just wish you can go back to those days. They were the best days of my life” - Joe Montana*



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## High School Football

*The best level of Football.*

High school football is gridiron football played by high school teams in the United States and Canada. It ranks among the most popular interscholastic sports in both countries.

High school football began in the late 19th century, concurrent with the start of many college football programs. In the late 19th and early 20th century, many college and high school teams played against one another. Other traditions of high school football such as pep rallies, marching bands, mascots, and homecomings are mirrored in college football.

The regular season typically consists of ten games in most states; Kansas is one of the few states which limits teams to nine. Teams in New York typically schedule only seven. The first game of the season is usually in early September, or late August, and the final regular season game is usually in mid to late October, with the end of the season varying by state and climate. Teams may have one or more bye weeks during the regular season. Larger schools (especially those with successful programs) can often draw attendances in the thousands, even for regular season games, and in some cases may play the game at a college or professional stadium to accommodate the expected large crowds.

## College Football

*America's favorite collegiate sport.*

College football is American football played by teams of student athletes fielded by American universities, colleges, and military academies, or Canadian football played by teams of student athletes fielded by Canadian universities. It was through college football play that American football rules first gained popularity in the United States. The first ever intercollegiate football game between two American teams played under rules which would eventually become the rules under which modern American football is

governed occurred between Princeton and Rutgers University in 1869. However, this game was far more like that of soccer than what has come to be recognized as American football. The completion of the first ever American football season came as a result of only two total games being played. College teams mostly play other similarly sized schools through the NCAA's divisional system. Division I generally consists of the major collegiate athletic powers with larger budgets, more elaborate facilities, and more athletic scholarships.





## Flag Football

*Safer option?*

Flag football is a version of American football or Canadian football where the basic rules of the game are similar to those of the mainstream game (often called “tackle football” for contrast), but instead of tackling players to the ground, the defensive team must remove a flag or flag belt from the ball carrier (“deflagging”) to end a down.

Chiefly because there is no dominant sanctioning organization for the sport, the game has mutated into many variations: 9-man, 8-man, 7-man, 6-man, 5-man, and 4-man on a side; coed or single-gender; with kicking and punting and without; with point-after conversions (including some with 1, 2, and 3 point

tries) or without; and field sizes that vary from full CFL size, NFL size (120 yards long by 53 1/3 yards wide), to fields a third that size. In non-contact flag football, there is no blocking, usually no linemen, and if there are linemen they can not use their hands to block an opponent. In some leagues defensive players may not get in the way of a runner; they can only attempt to grab the flag without impeding the path of the runner. only around chest area. The ability or inability for the quarterback to advance the ball past the line of scrimmage by running is another rule subject to variation by league.

## Rules

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An important distinction is whether linemen are allowed to catch passes (“Eligible Linemen”) or, as in the CFL / NFL, are not allowed to do so (“Ineligible Linemen”). Flag (and touch) football may also be divided into “contact” or “non-contact”, depending on whether or not blocking is allowed; if allowed, blocking is usually restricted to the chest.



The NFL conducts their own Youth World Championship for children 12–14 years of age. Held in different nations around the world. It is five man no contact football played between ten countries. Previous NFL Flag Football World Championships have been held in Beijing, Cologne, Mexico City, Tokyo, Toronto, and Vancouver. The NFL has also at times sanctioned “Air It Out” competitions aimed primarily at its fans in which tournament-winning teams All-Pros.



# The Quarterback

*The Captain.*

In modern football, the quarterback is the leader of the offense. The quarterback touches the ball on almost every offensive play, and his successes and failures can have a significant impact on the fortunes of his team.

Accordingly, the quarterback is among the most glorified and scrutinized positions in team sports. Prior to each play, the quarterback tells the rest of his team which play the team will run; after the team is lined up, the center will pass the ball back between his legs to the quarterback (a process called the snap). On a running play, the quarterback will then hand or pitch the ball

backwards to a running back. On a passing play, the quarterback will try to throw the ball downfield to a wide receiver, tight end, or running back. Additionally, the quarterback can run with the ball himself. This could be part of a designed play like the option run or quarterback sneak, or it could be an impromptu effort to avoid being sacked by the defense.



Early NFL quarterbacks typically were responsible for calling the team's offensive plays with signals before the snap. The use of the huddle to call plays originated with Stagg in 1896, but only began to be used regularly in college games in 1921. In the NFL, players were typically assigned numbers, as were the gaps between offensive linemen. One player, usually the quarterback, would call signals indicating which player was to run the ball and which gap he would run toward. Play-calling or any other kind of coaching from the sidelines

was not permitted during this period, leaving the quarterback to devise the offensive strategy. Substitutions were limited, and quarterbacks often played on both offense and defense. A dual-threat quarterback possesses the skills and physique to run with the ball if necessary. With the rise of several blitz heavy defensive schemes and increasingly faster defensive players, the importance of a mobile quarterback has been redefined. While arm power, accuracy, and pocket presence – the ability to successfully operate from within the “pocket” formed by his blockers – are still the most important quarterback virtues, the ability to elude or run past defenders creates an additional threat that allows greater flexibility in the team's passing and running game.



***“If your team is going to win, you need to play better than the other quarterback”***  
***- Peyton Manning***

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## Running Back

*Most versatile position.*

The halfback (HB) or tailback (TB) position is recognized as one of the more glamorous positions on the field, as it is often integral in both the passing and running attack. He is responsible for carrying the ball on the majority of running plays, and may frequently be used as a receiver on short passing plays. In today's game, an effective halfback must have a superior blend of both quickness and agility as a runner, as well as sure hands and shrewd vision upfield as a receiver. More and more quarterbacks depend on halfbacks as a safety valve receiver when primary targets downfield are covered or when they are under pressure. Occasionally, they line



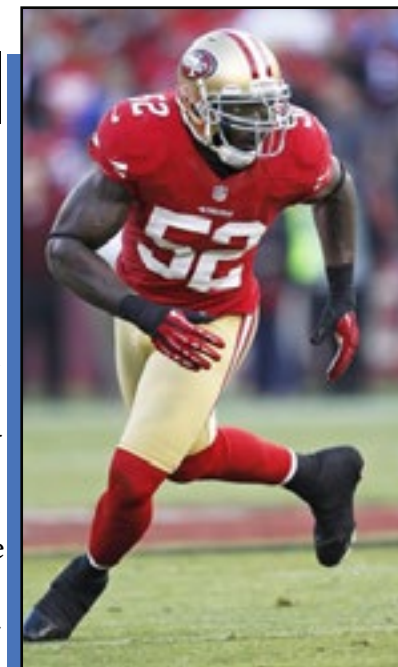
up as additional wide receivers. When not serving either of these functions, the primary responsibility of a halfback is to aid the offensive linemen in blocking, either to protect the quarterback or another player carrying the football. As a trick play, running backs are occasionally used to pass the ball on a halfback option play or halfback pass. No position in Canadian/American football can perform his duties successfully without the help of other players. Like the wide receiver, who generally cannot make big plays without the quarterback passing to him (with the exception of the end-around or a reverse), the running back nearly always needs good blocking from the offensive line to successfully gain yardage.

## The Linebacker

*Most physical position.*

A linebacker (LB) is a playing position in American football and Canadian football that was invented by football coach Fielding H. Yost of the University of Michigan, with Germany Schulz being his first linebacker in 1905. Linebackers are members of the defensive team, and line up approximately three to five yards (4 m) behind the line of scrimmage, behind the defensive linemen. Linebackers generally align themselves before the ball is snapped by standing upright in a "two point stance" (as opposed to the defensive linemen, who put one or two hands on the ground for a "three point stance" or "four point stance" before the ball is snapped). The goal of the linebacker is to provide either extra run protection or extra pass protection based on the particular defensive play being run.

on the particular defensive play being run. The middle or inside linebacker (MLB), sometimes called "Mike" or "Mack", is often referred to as the "quarterback of the defense." The outside linebacker (OLB), sometimes called the "BUCK," is usually responsible for outside containment. The strongside linebacker (SLB) is often nicknamed "Sam" or striker or purposes of calling a blitz. The weakside linebacker (WLB), or the "Will", or bandit must be the fastest of the three, because he is often the one called into pass coverage.



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## Wide Receiver

*The flashiest position.*

A wide receiver is an offensive position in American and Canadian football, and is the key player in most of the passing plays. Only players in the backfield or the ends on the line are eligible to catch a forward pass. The two players who begin play at the ends of the offensive line are eligible receivers, as are all players in the backfield. The backs and ends who are relatively near the sidelines are referred to as “wide” receivers. At the start of play, one wide receiver may begin play in the backfield, at least a yard behind the line of scrimmage, as is shown in the diagram at the right. The wide receiver on the right begins play in the backfield. Such positioning allows another player, usually the tight end, to become the eligible receiver on that side of the line. Such positioning defines the strong side of the field.

The wide receiver’s principal role is to catch passes from the quarterback. On passing plays, the receiver attempts to avoid, outmaneuver, or simply outrun defenders (typically cornerbacks and/or safeties) in the area of his pass route. If the receiver becomes open, or has an unobstructed path to the destination of



of a catch, he may then become the quarterback’s target. Once a pass is thrown in his direction, the receiver’s goal is to first catch the ball and then attempt to run downfield. Some receivers are perceived as a deep threat because of their flat-out speed, while others may be possession receivers known for not dropping passes, running crossing routes across the middle of the field, and generally, converting third down situations.

A receiver’s height and weight also contribute to his expected role; tall height and light weight are advantages at the receiver position.

*I played a lot of football when I was younger. I’m a good receiver, actually.*  
- **Shania Twain**



## Defensive Backs

*The most athletic position.*

In American football and Canadian football, defensive backs (DBs) are the players on the defensive team who take positions somewhat back from the line of scrimmage; they are distinguished from the defensive line players and linebackers, who take positions directly behind or close to the line of scrimmage.

The defensive backs, in turn, generally are classified into several different specialized positions:  
Safety: Free Safety - most often the deep-

Strong Safety - the bigger more physical safety, much like a small, quicker linebacker

Defensive halfback (Canadian football only)

Cornerback - which include: nickel back - the fifth defensive back in some sets, like the Nickel formation

dime back - the sixth defensive back in some sets, like the Dime formation

The seventh defensive back, in the exceed-



ingly rare ‘quarter’ set known as a dollar back or a quarter back (not to be confused with the offensive player who throws the ball). The group of defensive backs is known collectively as the secondary. They most often defend the wide receiver corps; however, at times they may also line up against a tight end or a split out running back. They

most often defend the wide receiver corps; however, at times they may also line up against a tight end or a split out running back. They are usually the smallest, quickest players on the field.



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# Offensive Line

*The foundation of every team.*

The interior offensive line consists of the center, who is responsible for snapping the ball into play, two guards who flank the center, and two offensive tackles who flank the guards; NFL rules require that a team have all five of these interior linemen on the field for every offensive play.



In addition to the interior line, a full offensive line may also include a tight end outside one or both of the tackles.

Interior offensive linemen are not eligible to catch forward passes, and are not allowed to advance more than 2 yards past the line of scrimmage at the time a pass is thrown, whether they are engaged with a defensive player or not. However, ends (whether tight

ends or wide receivers) are eligible to catch passes.

On running plays, the primary job of the offensive line is to create space for the ball carrier to run, either by pushing all defensive players backwards past the line of scrimmage, or by pushing defensive players to the side to allow the

ball carrier to run past them. On some running plays, an offensive lineman will pull by backing out of his initial position and running behind the other offensive linemen to engage a defensive player beyond the initial width of the offensive line; in modern games this duty usually falls to guards.



The defensive line consists of one or two defensive tackles and two defensive ends who play outside the defensive tackles. The defensive line works with the linebackers to try to control the line of scrimmage. The 4-3 defensive formation, most commonly used in the NFL, employs two defensive tackles (and a defensive line of four men, with three linebackers behind them), while the 3-4 formation uses just a single defensive tackle, called the nose tackle (and a defensive line of three men, with four linebackers behind them). However, defensive ends in a typical 3-4 have responsibilities more similar to a 4-3 defensive tackle than 4-3 defensive ends.

On running plays, the goal is to tackle the ball carrier. The defensive line attempts to maintain their original formation (even spacing without holes), but also

# Defensive Line

*The strength of the defense.*

to prevent any members of the opposing offensive line from successfully engaging the linebackers, who chase down the ball carrier. The defensive tackles are usually the most skilled run defenders on the team.

On passing plays, the defensive line tries to reach the quarterback. Ideally, the defensive players are able to tackle the quarterback for a loss (a sack), but in practice the quarterback will usually manage to throw the ball before an actual tackle is made; the goal is thus to put pressure on the quarterback as quickly as possible to force him to throw the ball before he can find an open receiver. Defensive ends are usually the most skilled pass rushers on the team. In order to increase the pressure on the quarterback, teams will often have players other than the defensive line attempt to tackle the quarterback; this is called a blitz. Defensive linemen--particularly defensive ends--are called upon to do more running than offensive linemen, thus they usually tend to be somewhat lighter and faster.

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