

Castleball:

Proposal for a new team sport designed for co-ed play

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Castleball is a team field sport designed to be played by mixed gender teams with a simple rule structure designed to enhance the pace of the game, emphasize endurance over power or strength (although power will still play a role), and reward strategy, tactics, and communication in-play. Castleball emphasizes conditioning, by spreading out the field while limiting incidental physical contact without complicated restrictions on movement or positioning.

Castleball is a variation of the football-style game in which teams move a ball down a field toward a goal (e.g., soccer) or a zone (e.g., American football). It borrows ideas from a number of field sports to encourage fast-paced and highly-skilled play. Like American Football, rugby, and other field sports, there are multiple ways to score and players must consider scoring options and strategies during play.

Field and Players

Castleball leverages existing facilities and equipment – the American Football field (120 yards by 53-1/3 yards with goal posts at each end). However, the field is utilized differently as shown in Figure 1. The ball is a standard size-5 soccer ball.

The field is divided in several zones. The American football end zones are called *scoring zones*. The *moats* are five yards deep and run from the goal line to the 5-yard line. The ground within the moat is out-of-bounds, with one exception given below. The 30-yard line in each direction is called the “blue line” (idea borrowed from ice hockey) and represents the line that an offensive team must retreat to if they earn the right to keep possession of the ball after scoring (this is explain in the Scoring section). The offensive and defensive zones are the sections of the field from the 5-yard line to the 50-year line.

Substitution is freely conducted during play, however a player must clear the field and cross a *substitution line* 2 yards/meters beyond the sideline. The replacement must stay completely behind the substitution line until touched by the outgoing player.

Team consist of 14 players each on the field (as of currently, the game is designed for 7 men and 7 women, hereafter described as 7M/7F) with no restrictions on substitutes. However, players are zone restricted. 1M/1F “receivers” must be positioned in the offensive scoring zone, 2M/2F “forwards” in the offensive zone from the 50-yard line forward, 2M/2F “defenders” in the defensive zone from the 50-yard line back, and 1M/1F “fullbacks” inside the defensive scoring zone. 1M/1F are designated as rovers and are positioned at the middle of the field.

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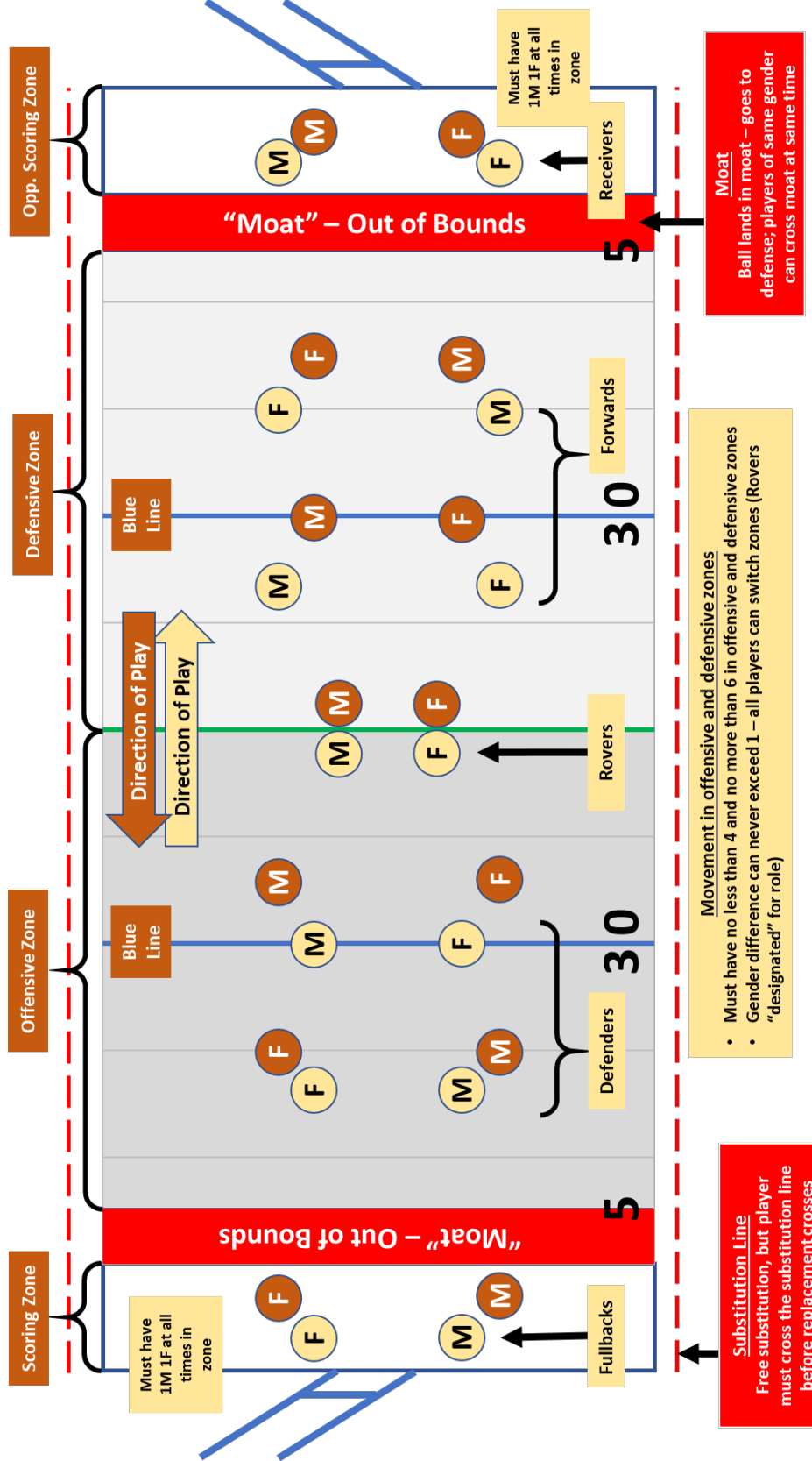


Figure 1. Field Layout, Positions, and Positioning Rules

Players can switch zones in play under the following circumstances:

- Players are free to move between the offensive and defensive zones so long as both zones have no less than 4 and no more than 6 players, plus there cannot be a difference in either zone of men and women greater than 1. In other words, all the men cannot move to the offensive zone while the women revert to defense. The Rovers nominally have the purpose of moving back and forth, but all players can change zones within the restrictions.
- Players may cross the moat in two circumstances:
 - (1) when switching with another player of the same gender in the adjacent zone. In other words, a man may switch with another man between the offensive scoring zone and the defensive zone. Purpose could be to free a player from the defense for a scoring opportunity.
 - (2) when the ball has entered the scoring zone, anyone can cross the moat into the scoring zone (this is dubbed *storming the castle*). Once the ball leaves the scoring zone or a scoring play is completed, players must return to their original zones.

The Play

Game

Proposed length of the game is 80 minutes, divided into four 20-minute quarters. Direction of play determined by coin toss. Team winning toss can select the direction for the first & third quarters.

Teams switch directions between quarters. Play begins each half with a bounce-off, where the ball is bounced off the ground and the two male (1st half) or female (2nd half) rovers chase after it.

Moving the Ball

Players can gain possession in a couple ways. They can catch the ball before the ball touches the ground. They can secure a bouncing ball so long as the ball is *above the knee* when touched). If the ball is on the ground or bouncing below the knee, they must kick it up to themselves using the foot or any part of the leg. The exception to this rule is when the ball is in bouncing in the offensive scoring zone, in which case the player may reach down to secure it for a point (see scoring).

Running with the ball is allowed. However, each ten yards, the player must drop the ball to one's own foot and kick it back up to the hands (borrowed from Gaelic football) without the ball touching the ground. Once the ball touches the ground, the

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player can retrieve the ball but is not allowed to advance further – one foot must stay in place, the other foot can pivot.

Players play the ball to a teammate by kicking or striking the ball either with a closed fist or a flat open hand like in volleyball. Throwing or hurling the ball with their hands is not allowed.

Players must stop once tagged. Tagging is primary physical contact in the game. A defender tags the ball carrier on the shoulders, arms, or hands only. Defenders tagging the ball carrier's head, torso, or legs commit a foul. Moreover, the defender cannot pull on the shoulder or arm, nor can they touch the ball or otherwise cause it to come loose. Once tagged, the ball carrier stops and has five seconds to play the ball (kicking or striking) or possession is forfeited. At this point, the carrier cannot play the ball to oneself (bouncing the ball off an opponent is also not allowed – a different player from the carrier's team must touch it first). Tagged players also cannot score.

Once they have tagged the opponent, defending players must stay more than a meter away from a tagged player but are allowed to jump, block, and otherwise influence the ball carrier's ability to play the ball. The moment the ball is played, the defender can attempt to gain possession.

If a player successfully kicks a ball that a teammate catches (and no other player has touched it beforehand), this is called a *catch* (like a 'mark' from Australian Rules Football). The catching player is afforded ten seconds to make an uncontested play at the ball – all opposing players must back away at least ten yards. On the other hand, if the ball was touched before being caught, play continues and the catcher is eligible to be tagged.

- Important point – if the catcher makes a catch inside the offensive 15-yard line, defenders cannot be in front of the player as they would be in or on the other side of the moat.

If a player kicks the ball but there is an even chance of a player on either side getting to it, then the following occurs: Players must compete to establish position, meaning being clearer at a spot to claim possession. Position is declared when the player stops and raises their hand. Challengers *must be of the same gender*. The two players (cannot be more than two) may only use their hands and arms, not their bodies, to jockey for position. They can strike the ball to prevent the other from catching it.

If the ball lands out of bounds outside the lines of the field, possession is given to the team who was not the last to touch it before going out of bounds. One player uses a throw-in (borrowed from soccer) to continue play. If the ball lands in the moat (including on the lines of the moat) or goes out of bounds in the scoring zone, then the

ball goes to the defending team for an uncontested free kick. It is therefore ok for the defense to intentionally play the ball out of bounds or into the moat.

When a score is made, *play immediately continues*. Either the defending team gains possession and puts the ball in play from the defensive scoring zone *or* for certain scoring plays, the offensive team keeps possession and plays the ball back beyond the blue line (nearest 30-yard) before attempting to score again.

Scoring

There are three primary ways to score. See Figure 2.

The *three* or *field goal* is when the ball is kicked or struck over the goal. This can occur anywhere on the field by an untagged player, except from the moat. Three points are given to the scoring team and the defending team gains possession and an uncontested kick from their scoring zone.

- The *penalty three* is a type of field goal scored when the defending team commits a major violation that prevents a score or scoring opportunity. An offensive player is given a free kick from the 15-yard line for goal, after which the offensive team is given possession at the offensive blue line and play resumes.

The other two ways to score are related and involve the act of kicking or striking the ball from outside the moat into the scoring zone. If it is caught by a receiver in the scoring zone without being dropped, the team scores five points. This is called a *five* or *touchdown*. However, *play continues and the offense has an opportunity to score more points*. The catcher has two options:

- The *plus-one* or *six* is when the receiver touches the ball to the ground before being tagged and is then given an uncontested free kick from the 10 yard line roughly aligned with where the ball is downed. The free kick must go through the goal to earn the extra point. (This kick cannot be taken outside of the American football “hash marks”.) The player does have the ability to move the ball toward the center of the scoring zone for a straighter kick before touching the ball down.

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The “plus-three” or “eight” is when the receiver kicks or strikes the ball in play through the goal before being tagged. Player can choose to touch the ball down at any time until the kick or strike is attempted.

- If the player is tagged before exercising either option or goes out of bounds (including into the moat), the team only earns the five points and the defending team gains possession. Also, the player cannot give the ball to a teammate to score the extra points – once possession is lost (e.g., the scoring player drops the ball), play stops and possession changes.

If the ball enters the scoring zone but is not caught, then when a receiver secures possession that team scores one point – a *single* -- no matter what happens. If the player can secure the ball and *touch the ball down before being tagged*, the offensive team also keeps possession. They get a free kick to play the ball back toward their offensive blue line. Once the ball is beyond that line, they can attempt to score again. If, however, the player is able to kick or strike the ball for a *three*, then the single is converted to a three and possession goes to the opponent.

A single is also scored when a defender in their own defensive zone is tagged with the ball. The scoring team gains possession, and must play the ball back outside the blue line before attempting another score. (Defenders should instead try to play the ball out of bounds, which automatically grants them free possession).

Infractions

Infractions are divided into minor and major levels. Minor infractions include administrative fouls such as improper substitution, illegal distribution of players (too many or too much gender imbalance in one zone), illegal shifting of players across the moat (two go to switch but one turns around and crosses back). Minor infractions in play include illegal tagging (touching the torso, etc.), obstruction (not allowing sufficient space to a tagged player or marking player; hindering the movement of a player), dangerous play (reaching down for a ball about to be kicked), or failure to clear the blue line after keeping possession from a scoring play. Time wasting/delay of game is also an infraction in which a player fails to put a ball back in play within the prescribed period.

Minor infractions may result in change of possession and/or free uncontested kick.

Major infractions can involve physical contact such as pushing, tripping, or pulling an opponent away from the ball. If these occur inside the offensive blue line, the penalty would be a free uncontested kick for goal plus possession at the blue line. If in the scoring zone, a five is automatically awarded plus possession at the blue line.

Elsewhere, the officials may award a 15- or 30-yard advance of the ball (borrowed from Gaelic football).

Unsportsmanlike conduct or other flagrant or violent acts can also result in expulsion from the game.

Ending the Game

Stoppage time can be added to the end of each quarter.

If time is expired when a kick is made, the referee can wait until the kick is resolved (i.e., caught, scored through the goal, or an infraction assessed). The half cannot end on a defensive infraction, so depending on the nature of the infraction the offensive may be granted more time and/or allowed to advance the ball (15- or 30-yard penalty).

At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins. Draws may be kept as a draw or an extra period of play may be used to determine a winner. It is not preferred to use an alternative tiebreaker, such as a goal-kicking contest.

Character of Play

Castleball differs from other team sports in several ways, each designed to emphasize endurance and conditioning over upper body strength. It also sets conditions for a fast-paced game presenting a range of tactical and strategic choices. This makes for a more enjoyable game to watch.

First, the players are spread out on a large field. This allows movement. Speed and conditioning are important because a player will only have 7-11 other players on roughly half of an American football field. The play encourages maintaining a limited concentration of players near the ball. Instead, there should be a lot of play side-to-side as well as long plays forward.

Free substitution enhances the speed of play by limiting the need for players to reserve energy - a common reason for some team sports to experience slower pace. However, substitutions would need to be carefully governed, as players from the side opposite of their own bench will have a long ways to go to come out. An approach may be to have players enter and move to the far end of the field for the beginning of their shift, then migrating to the near side as their shift concludes.

Using an end zone vice a central "goal" as the primary scoring means prevents players from bunching up. The ability to score a field goal from anywhere on the field also precludes bunching up near the moat. The concentration of players in a small area will be naturally disadvantageous as this opens up the rest of the field.

Another important factor is the limiting of gamesmanship – actions that push the boundaries of the rules and improperly disadvantage players. Such actions include holding or tugging jerseys, feigning injuries, minor delays, intentionally fouling, etc. Because physical contact is limited to tagging and establishing position, there should be fewer instances of such unwanted conduct.

The moat offers both an important obstacle and an opportunity for creative tactics. If at the appropriate time, the offensive team switches players across the moat, this may allow a player to be wide open for an attempt at a five, six, or eight. This is called a *switch play* (see Figure 3). Communication would have to be very strong among the players as the ones crossing the moat must be of the same gender and move simultaneously (that is, once a player enters the moat, someone must move into the moat from the opposite direction before the first player makes it across – otherwise it is an illegal switch. Also, neither player can stop or slow down or change direction once in the moat.)

Storming the castle is another potential tactic, as Figure 3 shows. The offensive team may be on one side of the field with the ball – too close for a good shot at a field goal and not able to play to ball to a receiver for a five. An option is to simply play the ball into the scoring zone and have the players race for the ball (especially where an offensive player crossing the moat would likely get there first). *The ball has to land in the scoring zone before players can freely cross the moat. Zone restrictions are restored once a scoring play occurs or the ball leaves the scoring zone.*

The catch is an important event as it provides a player with ready options. If close enough for a three, should the catcher use the free kick to get a sure three or allow the players in the end zone to get open for a possible eight?

Other Considerations

Uniforms. Part of the goal was to minimize the need to differentiate male and female players, however it may be necessary as certain actions on the field necessitate being able to track players by gender. The simplest way to do so would be to specify variations of the uniform, such as males wearing solid color uniform tops while females wear uniforms with different colored sleeves. For example, a team whose colors are green and gold may see the men wear solid green while the women wear a top of green with gold sleeves.

Officials. Castleball would require a number of officials to monitor play. There would likely be two “referees,” two or four line judges, two back judges, and two substitution judges. The line judges would be responsible for the offensive and defensive zones. Back judges monitor scoring plays and the moats. Substitution judges ensure that the flow of players is done properly.

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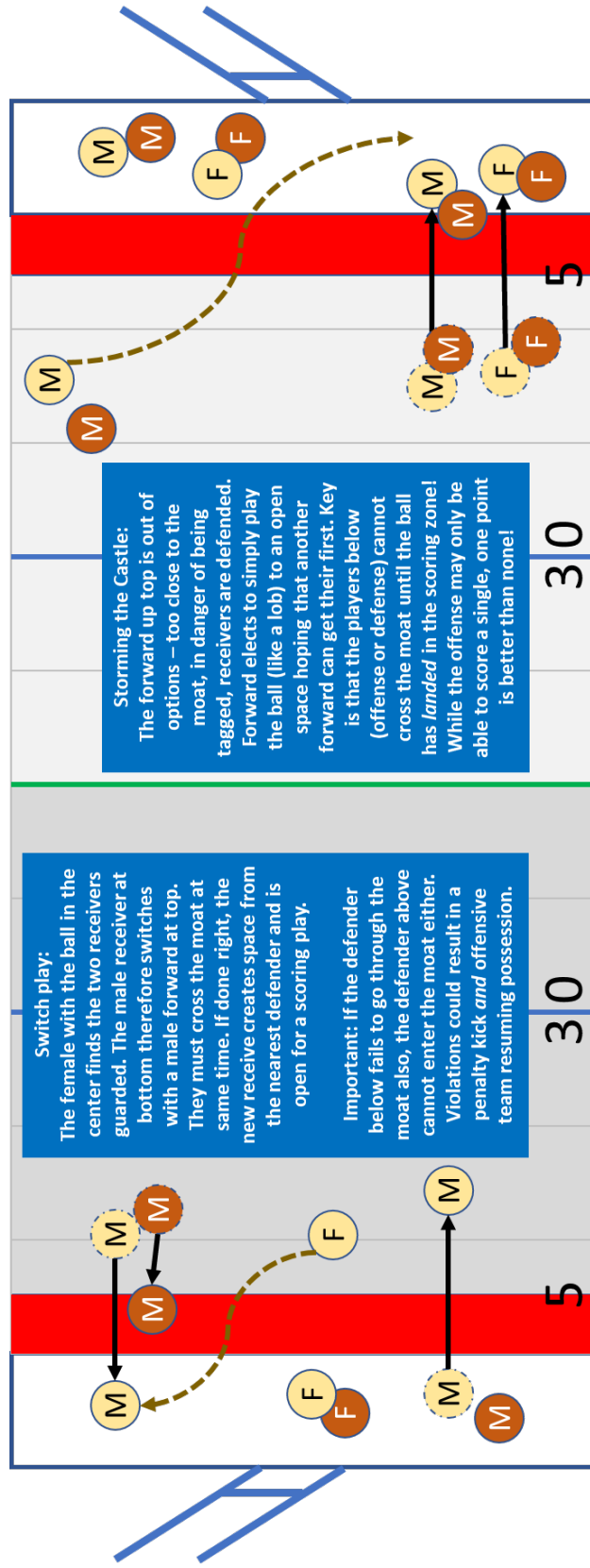


Figure 3. Tactics -- Switch Plays and Storming the Castle

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Roster Size. With 14 players on the field, one would anticipate a roster of 30-40 players, of which there should be at least 14 of each gender (two per position). Fast pace and free substitution should ensure each team members gets an opportunity to play in the game.

Junior Variants

Because the sport described above utilizes an American football field, junior variants would have to use a modified field as fields with goal posts may not be generally available. The main scoring plays would therefore be fives and singles. Although the game play is relatively simple, the skill levels of children may require accommodation to allow skills to develop.

Field size would follow the standard progression of field sizes for youth soccer (e.g., under-8 at 40x30 yards, under-10 at 60x40 yards, etc.). Similarly, the size of the teams would be proportional as well.

Zones would be proportioned according to the field size. At U-8, the scoring zones may only be a couple yards deep and moat a mere single line. The presence of an actual moat may begin at higher levels such as under-12. Blue lines and substitution lines would be added at under-12 or under-14. If the moat is a line or is very narrow, the ball must travel across it at waist height or higher, otherwise it would be considered as having landed inside the moat.

Other accommodations would include relaxing rules on throwing the ball, picking it off the ground, tagging, and movement. Junior levels may eschew rovers and require no movement across zones.

This proposal is dated 9 August 2020 and may be frequently updated.