June 23, 1970 W. H. WILLIAMS 3,516,667

KICKING TEE

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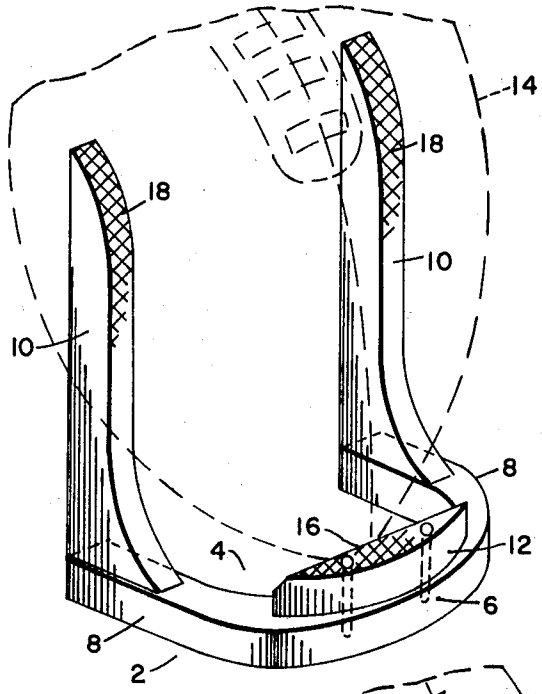


FIG. 1

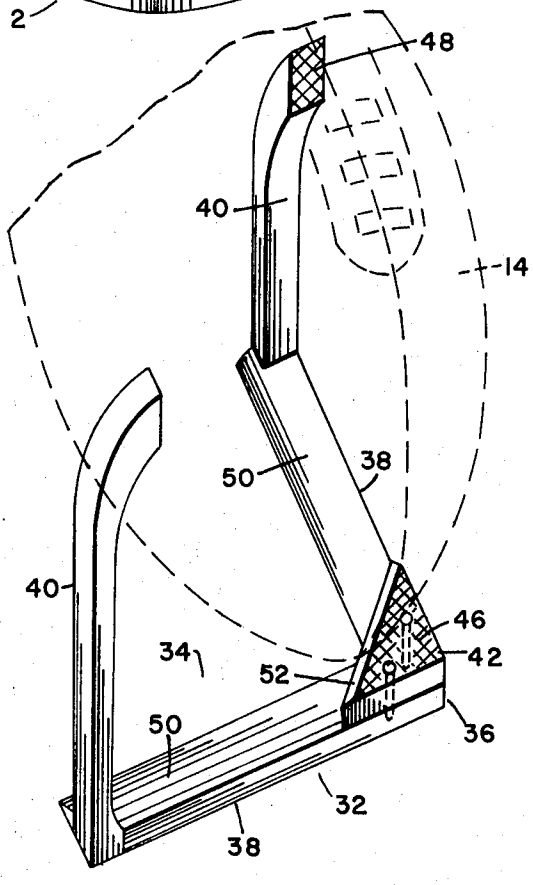


FIG. 2

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KICKING TEE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A support for a football which aids in kicking the ball comprising a base having an open end, a closed end, and sides, upstanding elements on each side adjacent said open end, and a raised portion at the closed end.

This invention broadly relates to a device used to support a game ball for kicking; more specifically, the invention relates to a kicking tee for a football.

The American game of football is growing each year in popularity, as measured by the numbers of spectators and participants. The game has, in its development, experienced vast changes in rules and techniques which have given rise to a high degree of competitiveness, thus bringing about specialized skills in performance. Recently, a greater emphasis has been placed on the kicking aspect of the game. Due to the large number of participants and the better equipment used in the modern game, the quality of the competing teams has increased at all levels both in strictly regulated football (school and professional teams) and in the less regulated football games (civic, intramural, and neighborhood teams). This increased quality of teams and the football "leagues" result in closer games which may often be decided by a few points. Thus, in the modern football game each point must be considered essential and kickers must be available which can produce these points by field goals and PAT (point after touchdown). Furthermore, on kick offs the "on-side" kick is often employed in an effort to regain the offensive after a score. All of these tactical plays, i.e. kick off, field goals, and PAT are performed by the "place kicker."

The place kicker uses a support for the ball called a tee. Although one tee is conventionally used for kick off and a second for PAT and field goal, i.e. scoring kicks, it is possible to use a single tee for both types of kicks. The different tees result from practical considerations in that the scoring kicks the ball is snapped and the defense rushes the kicker holder so they don't have time to receive the snap and place the ball on the tee in the proper position before the on-rushing defenders overwhelm them and prevent the kick. Therefore, the scoring kicks are snapped to a receiver who quickly places the ball on a flat supporting tee just as the kicker is ready to kick. In the non-scoring kick or kick-off, a holder places the ball on a tee and stays to support it. Generally, for all types of place kicks (scoring and non-scoring) the ball should be aligned with the kicker on a line bisecting the middle of the goal posts. The ball should be tilted toward the kicker at a varying angle with the field. At the moment of kicking, the foot should engage the ball at a point about five inches up the seam from that end of the ball which touches the tee. The placement of the ball, while being one important factor, must of course be complemented by the correct motions of the kicker.

The present invention is particularly directed to a tee used for the kick-off. This invention provides an improved tee which allows greater height and distance on the "long" kick, enables more effective use of the "on-side" kick, and gives greater control in a "lofted" kick. On the kick-off three possible tactics may be used. The ball may be kicked long to force the opponents as far back as possible and high to give the kicking team sufficient time to reach the receiver, i.e. to cover the ball. Alternatively, the "on-side" kick may be used.

Pursuant to football rules that provide for on-side kicks with the stipulation that once the ball has been kicked 10 yards, it becomes a free ball and the team that recovers it gains possession. This tactic has become a key method of attempting to gain control of the ball, most often employed when only a short period of time remains in the game. When attempting this style kick, the ball is dribbled or bounced along the ground toward the forward receivers stationed 10 yards distant, on the chance that it will take an unusual bounce away from them and not be recovered by a member of that team; or that one of the forward receivers (normally a lineman not accustomed to handling the ball) will fumble the ball into the hands of the kicking team. This attempt at gaining control of the ball is rarely successful since the ball is kicked at a fairly high rate of speed and reaches the receiving team considerably before the kicking team has a chance for recovery. Linemen generally are instructed not to attempt to recover on-side kicks unless they have an obvious chance for recovery; otherwise the ball is propelled into the mid area of the field to be handled by a player who is accustomed to ball handling. The instant invention provides a means of lofting the kicked ball to a sufficient height to permit the kicking team to get under it for possible recovery. Additionally, this employment permits the kicking team to loft the ball to a point on the field unknown to the receiver, thus gaining a tactical advantage.

The kick-off presents a third possible tactic. Besides the on-side (short) kick and the long kick, the ball may be dumped (lobbed) by an intermediate length kick so it lands just behind the forward line of receivers between the sidelines. This kick is used when the receiving team has vacated that area to reinforce the forward sector of the field.

In all of the above-noted kicks, normally used on kick-off, the ball must be positioned and kicked in a particular manner. The on-side kick is performed by striking the ball with the inside of the foot, using a soccer-type kick to engage the ball below an imaginary half-way line. The ball should be spinning counter-clockwise and should be kept to a height below the waist to give the required distance and favorable bounce. The long kick and the lobbed kick are performed in the conventional manner with the angle of support of the ball and point of foot engagement generally controlling the distance and height of the kick. For example, the ball should leave the tee at an angle of 45° for maximum distance and the lower the point of engagement, the higher the kick.

As can be seen from the discussion of the general principles of kicking, the point of engagement of the foot and the ball determines the type of kick which is achieved. Previously used kicking tees are inadequate since they limit the area available for such engagement. The area which must be engaged on the football may be called the "critical" area and comprises an area on the ball which may be defined by a contiguous sector comprising about one-third of the ball surface. The conventionally used kicking tees do not make this critical area available since they support the ball in a manner which precludes exposure of the lowest sector of the "critical" area without kicking the tee itself.

Briefly, this invention aids in the kicking of a football by providing a tee which leaves the critical portion of the football completely exposed to the kicker's foot. Thus, the point of engagement may be controlled, in order to give the kicker the opportunity to kick the ball in the conventional manner or with an extreme or moderate loft,

thus making it possible to perform a unique type of on-side kick. The tee, according to this invention, comprises a base which rests on the field having an open end, sides, and a closed end. Upstanding support elements are provided on each side adjacent the open end and a raised portion is provided at the closed end. In use, the foot of a kicker may pass through the open end and support elements, so that the critical area of the ball is completely exposed for foot engagement.

In view of the emphasis being placed on the kicking aspect of football, it is a primary object of this invention to provide a kicking tee for increasing the accuracy of kickers, both in scoring and non-scoring kicks.

Another object is to provide a tee which supports the ball in a position wherein the area of the ball available for foot engagement is increased.

A further object is to provide a tee which can be used to support a ball for place-kicks, wherein the base element does not block any of the surface facing the kicker.

Still another object is to provide a kicking tee which is safe to use and which conforms with the present rules of football.

The invention can best be understood by reference to the drawings wherein representative embodiments are illustrated and wherein the numerals designate like elements. In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a first embodiment of the novel kicking tee, and

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a second embodiment of the novel kicking tee.

In FIG. 1 a base **2** is shown as comprising a generally U-shaped element wherein an open end **4** is provided, a closed end **6**, and sides **8**. Support elements **10** are provided on each side **8** adjacent open end **4**, and a raised portion **12** is provided at the closed end **6**.

The entire tee may be an integral unit or the various components may be manufactured separately and joined by conventional techniques. The materials of construction include any relatively rigid material, but a plastic is preferred for reasons of safety. By way of specific example the unit may be molded as an integral unit by such processes as blow molding or injection molding, using a polyolefin or blend of polyolefins such as polyethylene, polypropylene, or a polyethylene-polypropylene blend. In addition to synthetic plastics, natural materials such as rubbers may be used. Although metal and wood can be used, these are obviously less desirable for use on a football field where players often fall, and injury may result.

Returning to FIG. 1, the advantages of the invention may be seen by noting that the football **14**, shown in dotted lines, as supported at one end by raised portion **12**. It is noted that the presently used regulations require that the supported end of the ball be not more than one inch above the field so that the combined height of base **2** and raised portion **12** must be not more than one inch. In anticipation of regulation changes, the tee may be provided with a raised portion **12**, which is adjustable in height. For this last mentioned purpose, it is possible to provide a separate element **12**, having pins which are received in holes in base **2** at closed end **6**. The engagement of the pins in the holes can be adjusted, for example, by having a notched pin and a matchingly notched hole, to the desired height. Other devices for adjusting the height when desired will be obvious to those skilled in the art and any suitable device is contemplated for use with the novel tee of this invention. To aid in keeping the ball on the tee, the upper surface **16** of raised portion **12** may be roughened by incorporating granular material therein or it may be grooved to increase the frictional forces between the football and said raised portion **12**, thereby preventing the ball from falling off the tee prior to the kick, as often happens in a strong wind.

The football **14** is also engaged by the tee at roughened areas **18** of supporting elements **10**; these areas may be roughened in the manner described for upper surface **16**.

The spacing of the two supporting elements **10** must be sufficient to allow free passage of a kicker's shoed foot and ankle. Accordingly, a width of about 4–6 inches is inventionally used, but no specific width is critical to this invention since it is obvious that the width of the kicker's food depends on the particular kicker. By spacing the supporting elements **10** at the described width, the open end **4** is also spaced sufficiently to allow a free passage of the kicker's shoed foot and ankle. Thus, the entire surface of the football defined by the unsupported sector facing the kicker is available for foot engagement thus increasing the control of the kicker over his kick. This feature is to be distinguished from conventional tees which provide no open end **4** and thereby eliminate the lower portion of the football surface sector facing the kicker. Also, those tees which support the football by supports spaced at a distance less than the width of the kicker's shoed foot and ankle eliminate an additional portion of the football surface sector facing the kicker. It may be desirable, to ensure free passage of the kicker's foot, that the inner portion of the side walls and of the raised portion be beveled as at surface **50** and **52**, of FIG. 2, thus reducing the obstruction to the cleats of the kicker's shoe. As can be seen from FIG. 1, the relation of the raised portion **12** and the supporting elements **10** is such that a ball resting on its point on portion **12** is in substantially its maximum vertical position.

Turning to FIG. 2, a second embodiment of a football tee according to the present invention is illustrated. In this embodiment a V-shaped base **32** is used which comprises an open end **34**, a closed end **36**, and sides **38**. Support elements **40** are provided on each side **38** adjacent open end **34** and a raised portion **42** is provided at closed end **36**. The materials of construction and methods of formation may be the same as those described with reference to FIG. 1. Again, the combined height of base **32** and raised portion **42** must presently be limited to not more than one inch, 2 inches by some rules, but adjustment devices are contemplated. The upper surface **46** of raised portion **42** is roughened as before mentioned, as are the areas **48** of supporting elements **40**. The supporting elements **40** and the open end **34** are spaced to allow free passage of the kicker's foot. Surfaces **50** and **52** of the side walls **38** and raised portion **42** respectively are beveled.

By way of specific example, which should not be interpreted as limiting the invention, the following suitable dimensions are mentioned:

The supporting elements height may be approximately 4–6 inches, the length of the open end may be about 4–6 inches. The width of all elements may be about ½ inch. The specific shape of the base is in no way limiting so long as the required open end is provided. Similarly, the shape of the supporting elements is in no way limiting so long as the proper spacing is provided; for example, FIG. 1 shows a straight-backed element with a curved edge while FIG. 2 shows a curved element. Any design is suitable and all obvious modifications are contemplated herein.

It may be appreciated from the above description that the present invention provides a tee adapted to increase the efficiency of the kicking aspect of football and such other games which involve place kicking a ball. By supporting the ball in the manner described herein, a greater portion of the "critical area" is available for foot engagement thereby increasing the kicker's control over the disposition of his kick.

Having described the invention in full, clear and complete terms and having given specific non-limiting examples what is desired to be protected by Letters Patent is:

1. A tee for supporting a ball for a place kick which comprises a base having a flat planar bottom surface, a front end, two sides connected to said front end and extending rearwardly therefrom, the sides being spaced

from one another along the entirety of their rearward extension to provide an open space between said sides to freely pass a kicker's foot, an upstanding supporting element provided on each of said sides at a point adjacent the rear end of each side, only a single raised portion provided on the upper surface of said front end, said raised portion having a top surface of a shape to provide substantially a point contact with a ball resting thereon, said raised portion and said upstanding elements being so related that a ball resting in said tee with its point on said raised portion is in substantially its maximum vertical position.

2. The tee of claim 1 wherein the inner surface of said base is beveled.

3. The tee of claim 1 wherein the base is generally U-shaped.

4. The tee of claim 1 wherein the base is generally V-shaped.

5. The tee of claim 1 wherein the raised portion and supporting elements are provided with roughened areas.

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