Scenes from the Past

Football uniforms have changed greatly since the early 1900s. Because of the number of injuries, many innovations and improvements have been made to the equipment that football players wear.

In the early 1900s the players' uniforms, pictured to the top right, were very primitive compared to today's standards. They were pants similar to the ones worn today, a heavy wool sweater, and leather boots with removable metal cleats. The only padding was a double-layered leather piece that was strapped across the shoulders. Leather blocking pads were optional and some players chose to wear them under the shoulder pads to help protect their ribs. Because of the number of injuries to the nose, some players chose to wear a steel nose guard. Several players who played football for NMSU in 1901, in the photo to the far right, have their nose guards hanging around their necks.

Not until the World War II era were major improvements made to the players' uniforms through advancements in technology. Hard plastic shoulder pads, similar to but much more primitive than today's, were commonly used. The helmet was simply a leather cup with a small amount of padding to protect the ears and head as shown in the bottom left photo. The jersey was no longer made of wool but had been changed to a cotton material, and numbers were added to identify the players. Pads were added to the pants to protect the thighs and knee areas. The heavy boots were replaced with lightweight leather gym shoes.

Improvements to meet today's safety regulations have been made. The helmet is the most improved article worn by the football player of today. In the 1950s hard plastic headgear was introduced and it was not until the latter part of that decade that the face mask came into use. More padding was added to the shoulder pads for comfort and protection. The jersey and pants are now made of nylon which allows the air to circulate to keep the player cooler. Removable hip and tailbone pads protect the hip area. The shoes are still a gym shoe, but most have plastic cleats that are not removable. In the photo to the bottom right, players who currently play football for NMSU show the many improvements made to the uniform.

Throughout the years, the football uniform has undergone many changes. With the latest technology and interest in safe sports, future developments will continue to be made.