

PASSING THOUGHTS

by Bob Carroll

The Pro Football Hall of Fame Top Twenty Rankings are out and have been published in various newspapers and magazines, but in case you missed them, here are the Top 20 Passers.

PASSER	ATT	COM	YARDS	TD	IN	RATE
Otto Graham	2626	1464	23584	174	135	86.8
Roger Staubach	2958	1685	22700	153	109	83.5
Sonny Jurgensen	4262	2433	32224	255	189	82.8
Len Dawson	3741	2136	28711	239	183	82.6
Ken Anderson	3539	2036	25562	160	124	80.5
Fran Tarkenton	6467	3686	47003	342	266	80.5
Bart Starr	3149	1808	24718	152	138	80.3
Bert Jones	2464	1382	17663	122	97	79.1
Dan Fouts	3203	1849	24256	145	142	78.4
Johnny Unitas	5186	2830	40239	290	253	78.2
Frank Ryan	2133	1090	16042	149	111	77.7
Ken Stabler	3223	1944	24268	177	189	77.5
Bob Griese	3429	1926	25092	192	172	77.3
N. Van Brocklin	2895	1553	23611	173	178	75.3
Sid Luckman	1744	904	14686	137	132	75.0
Brian Sipe	2758	1552	19083	124	118	74.9
Don Meredith	2308	1170	17199	135	111	74.7
Roman Gabriel	4498	2366	29444	201	149	74.5
Y.A. Tittle	4395	2427	33070	242	248	74.4
Earl Morrall	2689	1379	20809	161	148	74.2

The NFL's way of rating passers shows their efficiency, but it's a little difficult to rate one passer against another (and, let's face it, that's what most of us try to do). The SHAPIRO, modestly named for himself by P.F.R.A.'s resident curmudgeon, gives us a reasonable idea of what a passer might do in a typical season. To arrive at the SHAPIRO, you divide a passer's stats by the number of scheduled games by his team during his career and then multiply by 16 (the present number of scheduled games).

Here are the SHAPIROs for the same tossers.

PASSER	ATT	COM	YARDS	TD	IN
Otto Graham	333	186	2995	22	17
Roger Staubach	300	171	2299	15	11
Sonny Jurgensen	279	160	2113	17	12
Len Dawson	232	132	1781	15	11
Ken Anderson	350	201	2525	16	12
Fran Tarkenton	407	232	2961	22	17
Bart Starr	235	135	1848	11	10
Bert Jones	294	165	2109	15	12
Dan Fouts	382	221	2896	17	17
Johnny Unitas	343	187	2660	19	17
Frank Ryan	194	99	1458	14	10
Ken Stabler	293	177	2206	16	17
Bob Griese	272	153	1987	15	14
Norm Van Brocklin	322	173	2623	19	20
Sid Luckman	210	109	1768	16	16
Brian Sipe	368	207	2544	17	16
Don Meredith	298	151	2219	17	14
Roman Gabriel	321	169	2103	14	11
Y.A. Tittle	329	181	2473	18	19
Earl Morrall	151	78	1172	9	8

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All of which is very interesting, but it doesn't really prove very much. It unduly penalizes a passer for spending any time as a backup or for being out with injuries. Worst of all, it does not make allowances for changes in throwing strategy (and, if you don't think they throw more than they used to, turn in your Air-Coryell card).

We wondered what might happen if every passer threw exactly the same number of passes. So here's what happened in that famous season (surely you remember it) when every one of the Top 20 threw exactly 25 passes in each of his team's 16 games.

PASSER	ATT	COM	YARDS	TD	IN
Otto Graham	400	222	3573	26	20
Roger Staubach	400	228	3068	21	15
Sonny Jurgensen	400	227	3012	24	18
Len Dawson	400	227	3054	25	19
Ken Anderson	400	231	2905	18	14
Fran Tarkenton	400	228	2901	21	16
Bart Starr	400	229	3129	19	17
Bert Jones	400	223	2849	20	16
Dan Fouts	400	231	3032	18	18
Johnny Unitas	400	218	3095	22	19
Frank Ryan	400	206	3027	28	21
Ken Stabler	400	240	2996	22	23
Bob Griese	400	224	2918	22	20
Norm Van Brocklin	400	216	3279	24	25
Sid Luckman	400	205	3338	31	30
Brian Sipe	400	225	2766	18	17
Don Meredith	400	202	2965	23	19
Roman Gabriel	400	211	2629	18	13
Y.A. Tittle	400	221	3006	22	23
Earl Morrall	400	206	3106	24	22

Of course, by now we're getting into the realm of tabletop games. It is unlikely that the NFL will ever see a season in which every quarterback throws the same number of passes. ("You say, Mr. Argovitz, that your client must receive time-and-a-half when he throws his 26th pass?")

But, while we're tossin' the pigskin around out there in never-never land, let's try a real esoteric rating system.

Remember the good old days when the NFL used the Average Gain per Pass as its sole rating device? A lot of people got nervous because there was no provision made for interceptions. We don't exactly believe it, but we heard once that every interception costs the offense 80 yards. How about subtracting 80 yards from the passer's total yardage for every interception he threw and THEN dividing by his pass attempts for a new Average Gain per Pass?

Otto Graham	4.87	Frank Ryan	3.36
Roger Staubach	4.73	Ken Stabler	2.84
Sonny Jurgensen	4.01	Bob Griese	3.30
Len Dawson	3.76	Norm Van Brocklin	3.24
Ken Anderson	4.42	Sid Luckman	2.36
Fran Tarkenton	3.98	Brian Sipe	3.50
Bart Starr	4.34	Don Meredith	3.60
Bert Jones	4.02	Roman Gabriel	3.90
Dan Fouts	4.03	Y.A. Tittle	3.12
Johnny Unitas	3.86	Earl Morrall	3.34

But, no matter what kind of rating system we might try, it's kind of interesting that of the Top 20 yardage makers (which means quarterbacks who lasted a long time as regulars), only ten of them appear on the Hall of Fame's Top 20. Or, to put it another way, stats are nice, but if you want to win, start Bobby Layne!