

# Ranking the Blockers

By Bob Carroll

Football fans love to argue.

Rule of thumb:

Once-a-year-if-someone-gives-them-the-ticket fans argue about teams.

I-never-miss-'em-on-TV-if-my-mother-in-law-doesn't-come-over fans argue about quarterbacks.

Rabid-but-unsophisticated ("When do the Dolphins play Notre Dame?) fans argue about running backs.

Literate ("Pro football is REALLY a microcosm!") fans argue about receivers.

Beer drinkers argue about defenses. Unless you are buying.

And, if you ever hear two guys argue about the best blocking lineman, you can bet your autographed photo of Russ Letlow that you're listening to a couple of Pat-Dyed-in-the-wool, get-down-in-the-Dirt-Winston, do-or-die-for-fear-Joe-Rutgens FOOTBALL FANS. That, of course, won't negate the fact that neither of them knows what he's talking about.

The warts-and-all-truth is that no one knows who the very best blocking lineman is – or was – or will be. How could they? What can such a thing be based on? At least passers and runners and catchers and even defenders have statistics to support their I-am-the-greatest claims. Blockers not only lack stats, they also lack visibility. No one – and I mean NO ONE – watches a guard through one entire game. Not a fan! Not a zebra! Not even a defender on the other side of the line! Oh, a defensive tackle will watch that guard as long as he's being blocked by him, but let the guard pull out and the fickle tackle starts seeking cheap thrills with the opposing quarterback. If a guard were a TV show, his Nielson would get him cancelled.

But wait, you say! Doesn't the line coach grade the films? Then HE sees our guard. Well, yes, if he doesn't take the first quarter and multiply by four, he will indeed see film of our man through a whole game-times-16.

So, you say, why don't we just get hold of all the grades of all the linemen by all the line coaches in the league? Because, if we could, we still wouldn't know any more than we would if we merely asked the line coaches to name the best blockers.

Let's face it, grading blockers is as subjective as grading ice skaters. One man's six is another man's four-point-five.

So what you end up with is an opinion.

Which brings me to All-Pro selecting. I always have to laugh (well, at least, I smile) when I hear someone pooh-pooh All-Pro teams as "just someone's opinion." What kind of a put-down is that? Oh yeah, I say. Well, that's just YOUR opinion!

Allow me to point out that it is because of someone's opinion that a player is drafted. It depends on someone's opinion whether he will be cut in training camp or make the team. Or start. Or be offered a contract for next season.

There are opinions and then there are opinions. Some count and some don't.

Ask your paper boy, or two drunks in a bar, or me who the best blocking guard is and you'll get an opinion. One that is worth as much as what's left after the bull leaves the meadow.

But, ask a pro coach, or pro player, or writer (who listens to coaches and players) and you get a much higher grade of ore. You get (dare I say it?) EXPERT OPINION.

Yeah, I know experts can disagree – it's an imperfect world. But, even when experts are on two different planets, they have some good reasons for being there. The other kind of opinion can be almost as consistent as it is worthless. If you don't believe me, the next time you feel poorly, don't go to a doctor; ask some guy in a bar. Then tell us where to send the flowers.

So, if you take a whole load of expert opinions (which is how these things are done), you'll have a reasonably sound All-Pro team. Okay, so if we then take the best of the All-Pro teams and put them together, we can improve the picture even more.

But, be careful. Understand what the picture represents. Our consensus All-Pro team does not tell us who is the best; it tells us who is RATED the best. That, of course, is a horse of a different water.

On the other hand, when we're talking about offensive linemen, the best and the rated-best are pretty much the same.

I mean, no matter who is All-Pro quarterback, there will be arguments reinforced with stats and clutch plays and intangibles. Likewise with the running backs. And the receivers. And the ...

But who argues about guards? If a guy is on the All-Pro squads, he's one of the best guards, right? The proof is that he's on the All-Pro squads. Period.

A couple of years ago, PFRA-member Paul Bennett rated the players in the old AAFC by using several criteria, including All-Pro teams. I may not be remembering this exactly, but I think he said Mac Speedie came out on top. I thought it was an idea worth pursuing at the time, so naturally I got busy with other things and didn't pursue it. However, of late I've been enjoying the PFRA search for All-Pro teams. (Didn't you notice? You haven't been reading your CC.) And, I got to thinking that Paul's idea might be put to good use.

In point of fact, we can find out how any player at any position was rated by All-Pro selectors, but there is particular relevance with blocking linemen because there is precious little else to go on.

What the heck! I might as well release to a breathlessly waiting world my system, based on an idea by Paul Bennett, using material supplied by various sources. (This sounds like a movie credit!)

Okay, first a player gets 60 points for being on a major league pro team. As a point of reference, draftees who didn't make the squad get 140 points, guys who were "pretty good in high school" get ten, and CC editors get put into a remedial program.

Next, if the guy was a regular (a term to be interpreted loosely) add ten.

So, any regular starts at 70.

Then, if his team finished first in its division, add two; if it finished second, add one. I admit this is terribly imprecise, but some provision must be made for the odd fact that teams with winning records tend to have better players than teams with losing records.

Now we turn to All-Pro teams, and things get a little dicey.

Despite all the efforts we've made in the last few months, there are still some gaps here. Under ideal circumstances, we would have at least five respectable All-Pro teams for each season. My personal favorites for the last thirty years are AP, UPI, NEA, The Sporting News, and The New York News. You may have a slightly different list, but the point is that at present we do not have in our possession all first, second, and third teams for each of these. (Third teams or honorable mentions are rare and probably have no real effect.) Until we have all the teams, these ratings can only be tentative.

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1st Team 2nd Team 3rd or Hon.

5 teams =	+6 each	+3 each	+1 each
4 teams =	7.5	3.8	2
3 teams =	10	5	2.5
2 teams =	15	7.5	3.75
1 team =	30	15	7.5

Add one point if a player is named to a team not included in our "Top Five."

A Pro Bowl selection gets five points.

We should also subtract points for games missed either through injuries or whatever. If a player misses 1 to 3 of his team's games, subtract one point for each absence; 4-9 misses, subtract two for each miss; ten or more misses, subtract three per miss.

If you can rate a player during a season, you can even get his career rate. Simply add the season totals and divide by the seasons played. I make an injury adjustment here by counting a year in which a player missed two or fewer games as a full season. Any more misses and he gets the percentage of the season he played.

Now, the way I see it, a player just on a team for a whole season should rank about 60; a starter should rate a 70. A good player who occasionally makes an All-Pro team gets an 80. A rating of 90 means a player is probably a consensus All-Pro. A real superstar can break a hundred.

Let's look at the system in action with two great blockers: Jim Parker and Jerry Kramer. Take a minute and read the next page before you go on.

Why are you reading this? I told you to read the next page FIRST! What if there was a quiz?

That's better. Now that you've read the next page, we can talk about it. So, for starters, all the Jerry Kramer fans are mad as hell. Honest, guys, I'm not saying Parker was better than Kramer, only that he was rated as better.

And for those of you who think I'm just piddling around, remember the proof is in the piddling! The real worth of any statistical system is how close it comes to proving what we already think we know. (Pete Palmer will hate me for that one.) If a stat does not verify something we average folks already believe to be true, we ordinary guys will reject it no matter how many times the statisticians shove it at us. I won't talk about the NFL's system for rating passers here, but you know how popular that is.

How close does this system come to approximating the reality of the Parker-Kramer situation? Well, in simple terms, as a blocker Parker is a 10 and Kramer is a 9. Is that right? If the average lineman is a C, Kramer gets an A, but Parker is Phi Beta Great! Well, Parker was the first pure blocker to make the Pro Football Hall of Fame; Kramer, despite playing for a better team, hasn't made it yet. Perhaps he was underrated.

But any other real proofs that we could present all go back to All-Pro teams and Bro Bowls and opinions, the very things we just weighed to give Parker his 10 and Kramer his 9. Catch 22.

Actually, Kramer fans, you could start counting the "9" guards at five to twelve and finish in time for lunch. I don't know if there are any others.

Which brings me to a problem. Some players can't be rated because it's hard as hell to find out how many games they played in. Somebody had better start keeping this rather elusive stat. If it's not factored in, Parker drops to a 93 rating and Kramer to an 83. The gap between them stays about the same, but a lot of ordinary blockers are going to look a whole lot better.

In conclusion, let me try to deflect some of those pointed barbs you're aiming in my direction. If you can come up with a rating system for linemen that is NOT based in some way on opinions, I'll be happy to listen. If you want to weight this system differently, say, give more points for the Pro Bowl, be my guest. If you think I've skipped some important rating factor, be my mentor.

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Honest, I'm just looking for answers. If you build me a better mousetrap, I'll beat a path to your door.

So, go ahead and write. But remember, I rate all letters to the editor. Those that begin "Dear Wonderful" get a ten-point bonus.

Maybe next issue, you'd like to hear how I rate cheerleaders.

### JIM PARKER

Year	Roster Pts	Reg. Pts	Team Pts	All-Pro Pts	Pro Bowl	Miss (-)	RATE
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1957 Bal	60	10	0	6	0	0	76.0
1958 Bal	60	10	2	23.5	5	0	100.5
1959 Bal	60	10	2	23.5	5	0	100.5
1960 Bal	60	10	0	30.0	5	0	105.0
1961 Bal	60	10	0	26.3	5	0	101.3
1962 Bal	60	10	0	27.3	5	0	102.3
1963 Bal	60	10	0	18.8	5	0	93.8
1964 Bal	60	10	2	30	5	0	107.0
1965 Bal	60	10	2	30	5	0	107.0
1966 Bal	60	10	1	0	0	0	71.0
1967 Bal	60	0	1	0	0	-33	28.0

10.21 seasons Total points 992.4

Career rating = 97.2

### JERRY KRAMER

Year	Roster Pts	Reg. Pts	Team Pts	All-Pro Pts	Pro Bowl	Miss (-)	RATE
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1958 GB	60	10	0	0	0	0	70.0
1959 GB	60	10	0	0	0	0	70.0
1960 GB	60	10	2	15	0	0	87.0
1961 GB	60	10	2	0	0	0	72.0
1962 GB	60	10	2	23.5	5	0	100.5
1963 GB	60	10	1	30	5	0	106.0
1964 GB	60	0	1	0	0	-36	25.0
1965 GB	60	10	2	0	0	0	72.0
1966 GB	60	10	2	30	0	0	102.0
1967 GB	60	10	2	28	5	0	105.0
1968 GB	60	10	0	3.8	0	0	73.8

10.14 seasons Total points 883.3

Career rating = 87.1