STAT STUFF

By Bob Carroll

A while ago I was reading Bill James' *Baseball Abstract* and feeling inferior. Bill makes me feel less ferior than any James since Henry. He's broken down baseball stats into fascinating minutia and made just about everybody re-examine all those baseball things that people always preface with "Everybody sez." I mean, he'll tell you how many times Steve Kemp beat out a high chop to a lefthanded pitcher on natural grass with a slow runner on third, two out, a cool breeze from the south, and a first baseman who's planning to eat Chinese after the game. Then James takes that stat and a couple of others, projects Kemp's whole career, the first baseman's chances of being named to the Hall of Fame, and the lefthander's winter residence. I may not have James' system down pat. but it's something like that.

Shucks, by the seventh inning I always have trouble remembering the score.

So, while James is doing all this brilliant statistical STUFF for baseball, there I am frittering away my time on pastimes to pay the rent, instead of doing some equally brilliant football STUFF. I blushed, considered how much work was involved, and decided the hell with it. But I DID feel bad.

Well, just as my ego limboed under the coffee table, along came John Thorn and Pete Palmer with *The Hidden Game of Baseball* which is a whole book carefully crafted to make me feel like a wastrel. I'll bet even Bill James liked it!

Okay. I know when a gauntlet has been flung down (though I'm not sure what a gauntlet is – some kind of cup?). I took out my trusty pocket calculator, wiped off the lint, and went after something I always wondered about.

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Everybody alwayz sez that a lot of those big passing stats are racked up in losing games. The quarterback is throwing almost every down to catch up, while the defense "buys time" by giving up yards. The results are great stats and few wins. A friend of mine even refers to "300-yard losers."

To really look into this, you'd need to know the field situation for every pass. That would take more time than I care to give, more space than we have, and more information than anyone wants to send me.

However, it seems to me that by simply checking a passer's marks in the games his team won, against those in the games his team lost, we should come up with an indication.

The results were interesting, but – I hasten to add – based on a very small sample. I used the starting quarterbacks for the AFC in 1979. I used 1979 because it was the most recent season for which I had game-by-game stats, and <u>not</u> – as some might say – because that was the last time the Steelers won the Super Bowl. (Actually, I consider any season the Steelers do not win the Super Bowl as "exhibition games".)

If you'll check CHART I, you'll see the raw data I started with – the attempts, completions, yards, TDs, and interceptions for the starting quarterbacks of the 14 AFC teams. The first group of stats give the QB's season record, the second gives the totals for the games his team won, and the third for the team losses. Because of injuries and such, every QB did not play in every game, but I decided for the sake of simplicity to ignore cases where a QB threw only one or two passes in a game. Anyone wanting a more exact breakdown should send $237.46 in check or money order to *The Coffin Corner*. Be sure to add $50 to cover postage.

I think CHART I is hard to read.

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CHART II is more like it. Here we can see the per game averages for the season, wins, and losses. Eight of the QBs gained more when they lost than when they won, a couple by quite a bit.

The big problem with this chart is that I rounded the numbers off to make them more intelligible. But I may have obscured the most significant stats – the TDS and interceptions. Example, Fuller threw three touchdowns in six wins but that's .5 or a rounded “one". His three interceptions in the six wins give him another "one", but his eleven interceptions in eight losses also round to one. The true difference is between .5 and 1.38.

On the other hand, despite the occasional blurring, the real difference in winning and losing is obvious. Speaking generally, a field general throws two touchdown passes and one interception in a win but only one TD and two interceptions in a loss.

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CHART III proves the case. The completion percentages all went down but often very slightly. The average gains per pass varied widely but in two cases actually went up. But every TD percentage went way down. Every interception percentage went up and some more than doubled.

Zorn must have been two guys. The winning Zorn could have beaten anybody. The losing Zorn would have had trouble against James Buchanan Junior High.

About this time I realized that I'd come up with something I hadn't expected. Without trying, I'd convinced myself the NFL Passer Rating System works pretty well.

As you know, the NFLPRS is critcized as being complicated. Well, of course it is! The simplest system is to rank the passers alphabetically. Guess which Cincinnati QB would like that. But whether the NFLPRS is cimplicated doesn't matter. The question is does it work?

I always thought the NFLPRS penalized the passer who threw a lot of passes. That does not seem to be true in this study. Of the four passers who threw the least often per game, none finished better than fifth from the bottom. Of the most prolific, three are in the top four spots. Additionally, we can see that everyone threw more in losses, just not as well.

And, I always thought the NFLPRS put too much emphasis on touchdowns and interceptions. Well, that shows what I know! The study seems to indicate TDs and interceptions are just about directly proportional to wins and losses.

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CHART I: 1979 Passing Stats - AFC

		--- Season -----------						--- Wins -----------						--- Losses ----------					
Quarterback	Team	*G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	IN	G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	IN	G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	TN
Fouts	SD	16	530	332	4082	24	24	12	376	236	2836	20	16	4	154	96	1246	4	8
Stabler	Oak	16	498	304	3615	26	22	9	235	144	1761	16	5	7	263	160	1854	10	17
Anderson	Cin	14	339	189	2340	16	10	4	68	40	417	6	2	10	271	149	1923	10	8
Zorn	Sea	16	505	285	3661	20	18	9	256	166	2428	18	4	7	249	119	1233	2	14
Grogan	NE	16	423	206	3286	28	20	9	208	116	1811	18	7	7	215	go	1475	10	13
Bradshaw	Pit	16	472	259	3724	26	25	12	341	194	2883	23	14	4	131	65	841	3	11
Landry	Bal	14	457	270	2932	15	15	3	81	55	589	4	2	11	376	215	2343	12	13
Ferguson	Buf	16	458	238	3572	14	15	7	187	111	1898	11	5	9	271	127	1674	3	10
SiDe	Cle	16	535	286	3793	28	26	9	296	163	2159	19	14	7	239	123	1634	9	12
Griese	Via	14	310	176	2160	14	16	9	181	110	1428	10	7	5	129	66	732	4	9
Morton	Den	14	370	204	2626	16	19	8	182	108	1463	14	7	6	188	96	1163	2	12
Todd	NYJ	15	334	171	2660	16	22	8	145	75	1352	10	7	7	189	96	1308	6	15
Pastorini	Hou	15	324	163	2090	14	18	10	196	101	1485	10	9	5	128	62	605	4	9
Fuller	KC	14	270	146	1484	6	14	6	100	56	601	3	3	8	170	90	883	3	11

*-Games in which QB did not play or threw fewer than 3 passes not counted.

CHART II: 1979 Passing Stats Per Game - AFC

		--- Season Per Game --						--- Wins Per Game ----						--- Losses Per Game --					
Quarterback	Team	*G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	IN	G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	IN	G	Att	Com	Yds	TD	IN
Fouts	SD	16	33	21	255	2	2	12	31	20	236	2	1	4	39	24	312	1	2
Stabler	Oak	16	31	19	226	2	1	9	26	16	196	2	1	7	38	23	265	1	2
Anderson	Cin	14	24	14	167	1	1	4	17	10	104	2	1	10	27	15	192	1	1
Zorn	Sea	16	32	18	229	1	1	9	28	18	270	2	0	7	36	17	176	0	2
Grogan	NE	16	26	13	205	2	1	7	23	13	201	2	1	7	31	13	211	1	2
Bradshaw	Pit	16	30	16	233	2	2	12	28	16	240	2	1	4	33	16	210	1	2
Landry	Bal	14	33	19	209	1	1	3	27	18	196	1	1	11	34	20	213	1	1
Ferguson	Buf	16	29	15	223	1	1	7	27	16	271	2	1	9	30	14	186	0	1
Sipe	Cle	16	33	18	237	2	2	9	33	18	240	2	2	7	34	18	233	1	2
Griese	Mia	14	22	13	154	1	1	9	20	12	159	1	1	5	25	13	146	1	2
Morton	Den	14	26	15	188	1	1	8	23	14	182	2	1	6	31	16	194	0	2
Todd	NYJ	15	22	11	177	1	1	8	18	9	169	1	1	7	27	14	187	1	2
Pastorini	Hou	15	22	11	139	1	1	10	20	10	149	1	1	5	26	12	121	1	2
Fuller	KC	14	19	10	106	0	1	6	16	9	100	1	1	8	21	11	110	0	1

*-Games in which QB did not play or threw fewer than 3 passes not counted.