

# RATING PASSERS

By Ralph Horton

The National Football League list of the top twenty lifetime passers as of the end of the 1997 season included Neil Lomax (8), Dave Krieg (15), Boomer Esiason (17), Jeff Hostetler (18) and Neil O'Donnell (19), but did not include Hall of Famers Fran Tarkenton, Dan Fouts, Johnny Unitas, Y.A. Tittle, Sammy Baugh and others.

The NFL rating system is based on a formula which incorporates four statistical categories -- per cent of passes completed, average gain per pass attempt, per cent of TD passes, and per cent of interceptions. A minimum of 1500 career passing attempts is required to qualify.

There appear to be several reasons why the NFL system favors current passers over the stars of yesteryear:

1. No credit is given for longevity. A passer with 1500 attempts who has the same ratios in the four measured categories as a passer with 5000 attempts, receives the same rating.
2. No credit is given for quantity -- all of the numbers used are qualitative.
3. No allowance is made for the fact that ratios have improved over the years because of rules changes, two platoon football, increased use of position coaches, etc.
4. No credit is given for running ability, despite the fact that passers are often required to run with the ball.

The Relative Performance System (RPS) attempts to correct some of these shortcomings. This system uses eleven statistical categories and they do not all have the same weight. Included are pass completions (10), touchdown passes (10), completion percentage (20), passing yards (20), average gain per attempt (20), per cent of touchdown passes (20), per cent of interceptions (20), rushing yards (15), average gain per attempt (10), rushing touchdowns (10), and fumbles as a per cent of passing attempts plus rushing attempts (15).

A player who leads in all eleven categories in a particular season would score 170 points for that year. This, of course, has never happened, although Steve Young reached 154 in 1994. The final RPS rating is the cumulative score of each year the passer throws enough passes to qualify. The minimum for consideration in any given year is 40% of the average attempts by the three most prolific throwers in that year. From 1932 through 1969, prior to the merger of the AFL and NFL, a figure of 30% was used.

RPS measures a passer's performance against his peers. Sammy Baugh's numbers, for example, are compared with those who played in his era, and not with Steve Young or Brett Favre.

Under the Relative Performance System, a passer who performs at a high level over fifteen years will, of course, have a better rating than one who performs at the same level for only ten years.

Following is a list of the top thirty lifetime passers, based on RPS.

No.	Player	*Yrs	RPS Points	NFL Rank
1	Fran Tarkenton	18	1904	22
2	Y.A. Tittle	17	1540	57
3	Johnny Unitas	15	1462	35
4	Sammy Baugh	15	1410	71
5	Bobby Layne	14	1253	99
6	Joe Montana	13	1251	2
7	#Dan Marino	14	1231	4

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No.	Player	*Yrs	RPS Points	NFL Rank
8	Len Dawson	12	1193	10
9	Otto Graham	10	1187	5
10	John Brodie	13	1153	69
11	Ken Anderson	13	1146	12
12	Bart Starr	14	1116	20
13	John Hadl	13	1110	92
14	Sonny Jurgensen	11	1073	9
15	#John Elway	15	1032	29
16	Charlie Conerly	13	1012	86
17	Norm Van Brocklin	11	1002	51
18	Tobin Rote	12	997	111
19	Dan Fouts	14	946	24
20	Babe Parilli	12	940	108
21	Roman Gabriel	13	920	58
22	#Warren Moon	14	919	16
23	#Steve Young	8	914	1
24	Bob Griese	12	907	42
25	Norm Snead	14	899	96
26	Sid Luckman	9	876	52
27	Roger Staubach	8	874	7
28	George Blanda	11	862	107
29	Arnie Herber	11	854	NR
30	Terry Bradshaw	13	820	78

\* Number of years in which enough passes were thrown to qualify.

# Still active in 1998. Other active passers and their RPS rank through 1997 include Dave Krieg (43), Brett Favre (51), Troy Aikman (62) and Randall Cunningham (64).

### BEST AVERAGES

The careers of some passers were shortened by military service, injuries, early retirement or other reasons, thereby reducing their lifetime RPS points. Listed below are the 22 passers who have averaged at least 90 RPS points per year (minimum of five qualifying years).

No.	Player	Yrs	RPS Points	Ave	Lifetime Rank	
					RPS	NFL
1	Otto Graham	10	1187	118.7	9	5
2	Steve Young	8	914	114.3	23	1
3	Cecil Isbell	5	547	109.4	63	NR
4	Roger Staubach	8	874	109.3	27	5
5	Fran Tarkenton	18	1904	105.8	1	22
6	Daryle Lamonica	6	601	100.2	50	64
7	Brett Favre	6	598	99.7	51	3
8	Len Dawson	12	1193	99.4	8	10
9	Frank Albert	7	688	98.3	37	NR
10	Sonny Jurgensen	11	1073	97.5	14	9
11	John Unitas	15	1462	97.5	3	35
12	Sid Luckman	9	876	97.3	26	52
13	Joe Montana	13	1251	96.2	6	2
14	Bob Monnett	6	572	95.3	56	NR
15	Sammy Baugh	15	1410	94.0	4	71
16	Ed Danowski	6	561	93.5	58	NR
17	Tom Flores	6	558	93.0	59	89
18	Bert Jones	6	556	92.7	60	34
19	Billy Wade	8	739	92.4	34	72
20	Tommy Thompson	7	644	92.0	45	NR
21	Norm Van Brocklin	11	1002	91.1	17	51
22	Y.A. Tittle	17	1540	90.6	2	57

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### BEST SEASONS

There have been only 30 RPS scores of 130 points or more in a single season, with Steve Young having the two highest and a total of three. Len Dawson had four such years, Fran Tarkenton and Ken Anderson, three each, and Otto Graham, Y.A. Tittle, Daryle Lamonica and Bert Jones, two each.

Player	RPS Points	Year
Steve Young	154	1994
Steve Young	149	1992
Ken Anderson	146	1974
Daryle Lamonica	144	1967 (AFL)
Len Dawson	143	1962 (AFL)
Y.A. Tittle	141	1963
Fran Tarkenton	139	1968
John Unitas	138	1959
Fran Tarkenton	138	1967
Bert Jones	138	1976
Ken Anderson	138	1981
Bert Jones	137	1975
Joe Montana	136	1985
Johnny Lujack	135	1949
Y.A. Tittle	135	1957
Fran Tarkenton	135	1975
Otto Graham	134	1947 (AAFC)
Len Dawson	134	1966 (AFL)
John Brodie	134	1970
Tommy Thompson	133	1948
Otto Graham	132	1953
Len Dawson	132	1965 (AFL)
Sonny Jurgensen	132	1969
Ken Anderson	132	1975
Cecil Isbell	131	1941
Daryle Lamonica	131	1968 (AFL)
Don Meredith	131	1968
Steve Young	131	1993
Sammy Baugh	130	1949
Len Dawson	130	1963 (AFL)