

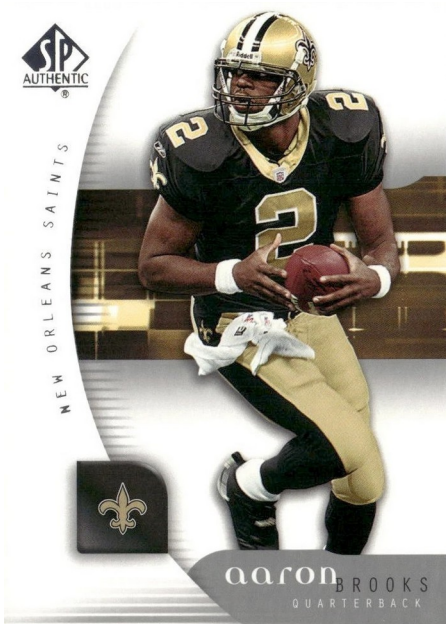
Aaron Brooks

This article was written by Matthew Keddie.

Aaron Brooks is often mentioned among the greatest quarterbacks in New Orleans Saints team history. He may not have won a Super Bowl like Drew Brees, led the team to its first ever playoff contest like Bobby Hebert or garnered the fame like Archie Manning, but Brooks wrote his own story.

On December 30, 2000, he etched his name into Saints' lore, driving the team to its first ever playoff win in franchise history, a 31-28 win over the defending-champion St. Louis Rams.¹ Brooks accounted for all four Saints' touchdowns, throwing one to Robert Wilson in the second quarter, then three to wide receiver Willie Jackson in the second half. The scoring propelled the Saints to a 31-7 lead and they never looked back.² For the game, Brooks completed 16 of 29 passes for 266 yards, the four scores and one interception.³

Following the victory, team owner Tom Benson said, "I feel the same as every other fan out there. It's so exciting, so different than we've been accustomed to. I know a lot of people out there were saying, 'Same old Saints.' But we did it."⁴ The win was New Orleans' first, after losing their first five postseason contests.⁵ Brooks added, "Football is football. When you know the game, you go out and play it. It doesn't matter what field you're on. Your goals are the same. What you're doing is the same. That's how I feel about it."⁶





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That 2000 season was memorable. The Saints finished at 10-6, winning double-digit games for the first time since 1992. In the off-season prior, the team underwent a serious overhaul under first year head coach Jim Haslett.⁷ The new faces included new players in quarterback Jeff Blake, wide receiver Joe Horn and safety Chris Oldham. Additionally, the aforementioned Brooks was acquired from the Green Bay Packers in a trade.⁸ Brooks and tight end Lamont Hall were exchanged for linebacker K. D. Williams and a 2001 third-round draft choice.⁹

Brooks took reign of the offense midway through the season, when Jeff Blake went down with an injury. He made his first career start with the team in Week 13 against the Rams. He scored the game-winning touchdown with less than four minutes remaining to seal the 31-24 victory. Brooks led New Orleans to wins in three of its five final games to clinch the NFC West Division title.¹⁰ After a win over the Rams in the Wild Card round of the playoffs, the Saints fell to the Minnesota Vikings, 34-16 in the Divisional Round. Minnesota scored 17 unanswered points in the second and third quarters to pull away to a 24-3 lead and never looked back. Brooks threw for two touchdowns and 295 passing yards, but was outdueled by Daunte Culpepper who played turnover free football, throwing for 302 yards and three scores.¹¹

- 1 "Wild Card – St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints – December 30th, 2000," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Wild Card - St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints - December 30th, 2000 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#)
- 2 "Wild Card – St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints – December 30th, 2000," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Wild Card - St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints - December 30th, 2000 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#)
- 3 "Wild Card – St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints – December 30th, 2000," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Wild Card - St. Louis Rams at New Orleans Saints - December 30th, 2000 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#)
- 4 Fleming, David. "Second Act," ESPN.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [ESPNMAG.com - Second Act](#).
- 5 "New Orleans Saints Playoff History," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints Playoff History | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 6 Fleming, David. "Second Act," ESPN.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [ESPNMAG.com - Second Act](#).
- 7 "2000 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [2000 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 8 "Aaron Brooks," ProSportstransactions.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Football Transactions Search Results](#).
- 9 "Aaron Brooks," ProSportstransactions.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Football Transactions Search Results](#).
- 10 "New Orleans Saints at St. Louis Rams – November 26th, 2000," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at St. Louis Rams - November 26th, 2000 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
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The following season, Brooks became the full-time starter at quarterback. He set career highs in pass completions (312), pass attempts (558) and passing yards (3,832). However, he was sacked 50 times in a 7-9 season.¹² New Orleans featured a top 10 passing offense and recorded the fourth most passing touchdowns (27). Unfortunately, they were off-set by a poor defense that allowed the fifth most points (409) at 25.9 points per game. The Saints won four of their first six games, then lost seven of its final 10 contests, en route to a streaky 7-9 record.¹³ Down the stretch, the defense faltered, allowing greater than 30 points in the final five to close-out the season, all losses. Brooks achieved a season best passer rating of 144.1 on November 18 against the Indianapolis Colts, a 34-20 win. He had five games where he threw at least one touchdown pass and committed zero turnovers. The Saints went 4-1 in those contests.¹⁴

New Orleans flipped the script in 2002, turning their 7-9 record into 9-7. Brooks played a significant role in the offense, tossing a career high 27 touchdowns on the NFL's third ranked scoring offense.¹⁵ The Saints set what was then franchise record of 432 points scored, for an average of 27 points per game. The year turned out to be a tale of two halves. In the first half of the season, New Orleans won six of its first eight contests. They appeared to be a near lock to make the playoffs.¹⁶ They proceeded to win three of their next five games that included a season sweep of the eventual Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Heading into the final three weeks of the regular season at 9-4, the Saints needed just one win in their final three games to clinch a postseason berth.¹⁷

After a rare win in Baltimore against the Ravens, the unthinkable happened. The Saints proceeded to lose their final three games, that included a defeat to the Cincinnati Bengals, who would finish 2-14, the worst record in the NFL. In the contest at Cincinnati, the Saints lost a 13-7 fourth quarter lead that included two pivotal three-and-out series that

1 2 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 3 “2001 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [2001 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 4 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks 2001 Game Log | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 5 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 6 “2002 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [2002 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 7 “2002 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [2002 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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enabled the Bengals to mount the game-winning touchdown drive. Brooks threw for 203 yards and a touchdown, but the Saints' offense was held scoreless in the second half.¹⁸

Brooks turned in another career year in 2003. He threw 24 touchdowns and a career best eight interceptions. His interception rate of 1.5% led the NFL.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Saints continued to try and breakthrough for a playoff berth. The team started off a middling 4-5.²⁰ The first half was highlighted by a 45-17 win over the Atlanta Falcons. Brooks went off for 352 passing yards and three passing touchdowns. Deuce McAllister added 116 yards rushing and two rushing scores to the win.²¹ New Orleans also won a hard-fought, dramatic, 17-14, game at the Buccaneers. The Saints' defense held them to just 56 yards rushing on 18 attempts. Michael Lewis caught a 38-yard score to set the tone for a 7-0 New Orleans lead, then the defense stepped up on a 73-yard interception return for a score to increase the lead to 14 points.²² John Carney won the game for the Saints with eight seconds left on a 47-yard field goal.

After alternating wins and losses in their next five games, the Saints faced the Jacksonville Jaguars for what would be a season-defining contest on December 21 in Jacksonville.²³ New Orleans was 7-7 and needed a win to keep its hope for the playoffs on. With less than 10 seconds remaining in the game, New Orleans had the ball on its own 25 yard-line, trailing 20-13.²⁴ Then, the “River City Relay” play occurred. Brooks completed the pass to Donte Stallworth for a 42-yard gain. He immediately lateraled the ball to Michael Lewis for a seven-yard gain. Lewis lateraled to Deuce McAllister for five yards, who lateraled the ball to Jerome Pathon. Pathon took the lateral 21-yards for the touchdown.²⁵ The play brought the Saints to within one point at 20-19. John Carney came

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- 1 8 “New Orleans Saints at Cincinnati Bengals – December 22nd, 2002,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at Cincinnati Bengals - December 22nd, 2002 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 1 9 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 0 “2003 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [2003 New Orleans Saints Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 1 “New Orleans Saints at Atlanta Falcons – October 19th, 2003,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at Atlanta Falcons - October 19th, 2003 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 2 “New Orleans Saints at Tampa Bay Buccaneers – November 2nd, 2003,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at Tampa Bay Buccaneers - November 2nd, 2003 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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on to attempt the extra point. For the first attempt in nearly a decade, he missed the kick wide to the right. On the call, Saints broadcaster Jim Henderson stated, “NOOOO! He missed the extra point wide right! Oh my God! How could he do that?”²⁶ The Saints ended up losing, 20-19. The loss cost them a playoff berth.

The 2005 season marked Brooks' final in New Orleans. As a result of Hurricane Katrina, the team was forced to play its home games at either the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas or at Louisiana State University's Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge.²⁷ This included their home opening game against the New York Giants to be played as a “home” game for New York at Giants Stadium. Brooks endured his worst season as a starter, posting a 3-10 mark.²⁸ He never seemed to get into a groove, committing 19 total turnovers on the season. It was also the first season as a starter where he threw more interceptions (17) than touchdowns (13).²⁹ The Saints finished at 3-13, tied for the second worst record in franchise history – only their 1-15 record in 1980 was worse. Following the season, head coach Jim Haslett was fired. Sean Payton was hired as the new head coach for the 2006 season and the team decided to move on from Brooks by signing quarterback Drew Brees to a \$60 million contract.^{30 31}

In March 2006, Brooks was released by the Saints. Shortly thereafter, he signed a two-year contract with the Oakland Raiders.³² He was the starter entering the season, which started with a series of misfortune. In the first game against the San Diego Chargers,

- 2 3 “New Orleans Saints at Jacksonville Jaguars – December 21st, 2003,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at Jacksonville Jaguars - December 21st, 2003 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 4 “New Orleans Saints at Jacksonville Jaguars – December 21st, 2003,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints at Jacksonville Jaguars - December 21st, 2003 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 5 Brett R. “The 'River City Relay' is Still One of the NFL's Craziest Endings,” Fanbuzz.com, November 21, 2021, accessed June 1, 2025, [The "River City Relay" is Still One of the NFL's Craziest Endings – FanBuzz](#).
- 2 6 Brett R. “The 'River City Relay' is Still One of the NFL's Craziest Endings,” Fanbuzz.com, November 21, 2021, accessed June 1, 2025, [The "River City Relay" is Still One of the NFL's Craziest Endings – FanBuzz](#).
- 2 7 “2005 New Orleans Saints Game Log,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [New Orleans Saints 2005 Games and Schedule | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 8 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 9 “Aaron Brooks,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 3 0 “Sources: Saints hire Cowboys' Payton as head coach,” ESPN.com, January 17, 2006, accessed June 1, 2025, [Sources: Saints hire Cowboys' Payton as head coach – ESPN](#).
- 3 1 Clayton, John. “Brees agrees to six-year deal with Saints,” ESPN.com, March 14, 2006, accessed June 1, 2025, [Brees agrees to six-year deal with Saints – ESPN](#).
- 3 2 “Aaron Brooks,” ProSportstransactions.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Football Transactions Search Results](#).



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Brooks was sacked nine times in a 27-0 defeat. The next week against the Baltimore Ravens, he suffered a shoulder injury that caused him to miss the next seven games.³³ He returned to action on November 19 against the Kansas City Chiefs, throwing for 179 yards and a touchdown and an interception. The Raiders lost the lead in the second half and fell, 17-13.³⁴ Brooks would go on to lose his next four starts. In Week 16, he was benched, but ended up starting the regular season finale against the New York Jets. Following the season, he was released by the Raiders. In 2007, he announced his retirement from professional football.³⁵

Overall, Brooks finished his NFL career with 90 career starts and a 38-52 record over seven seasons. He threw for 20,261 yards and 123 touchdowns against 92 interceptions. In 2014, he was inducted into the New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame.³⁶

Following his days in football, Brooks ventured into property development, mostly in southeastern Virginia. In 2011, he signed a joint venture with developer Armada Hoffler to develop 14 acres in the Newport News area, that included retail space, offices and housing.³⁷ The project was completed in 2019 and renamed Brooks Crossing. It focuses on a Workforce Development and instructional STEM lab for educational opportunities.³⁸

Born Aaron Lafette Brooks on March 24, 1976 in Newport News, Virginia, he attended Ferguson High School. Prior to his professional exploits Brooks began his football journey at Ferguson, where he was the premier quarterback on the football team. There, he developed a strong rapport with head coach Tommy Reamon (Reamon was a former NFL player, WFL MVP, actor in North Dallas Forty, and he coached Michael and Marcus Vick).

Brooks was the youngest of three children raised by his mother, Catherine.³⁹ The family was a recipient of public assistance, which he used as motivation for success, particularly on the gridiron. On the matter he said, "I was never very fortunate as a kid. But to have to

3 3 "Aaron Brooks," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks 2006 Game Log | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

3 4 "Oakland Raiders at Kansas City Chiefs – November 19th, 2006," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Oakland Raiders at Kansas City Chiefs - November 19th, 2006 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

3 5 "Aaron Brooks," ProSportstransactions.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Football Transactions Search Results](#).

3 6 "Aaron Brooks," ProFootballReference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

3 7 Busbee, Jay. "Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name," sports.yahoo.com, October 28, 2016, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name - Yahoo Sports](#).

3 8 "Brooks Crossing," nnva.gov, accessed June 1, 2025, [Brooks Crossing | Newport News, VA - Official Website](#).



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keep taking that kind of stuff as a grown man, that's what was so painful.”⁴⁰ His patience and perseverance paid off as he enrolled at the University of Virginia.

At UVA, he played with a number of players who went on to successful careers in the NFL, namely linebacker James Farrior, running back Tiki Barber and future Hall of Famer Ronde Barber. The Cavaliers were led by head coach George Welsh, the most decorated coach in school history, who won two Atlantic Coast Conference championships (1989, 1995) and 189 games.⁴¹ After serving as the backup quarterback for two seasons, Brooks earned the starting role as a junior in 1997. The Cavaliers stumbled out to a 4-3 record that included losses to rivals Florida State University and to the University of North Carolina.⁴² However, they rebounded to win three of their final four games to finish at 7-4. Brooks threw for over 2,200 yards through the air, including 20 touchdown passes.⁴³

Unsatisfied with the team's lack of a bowl bid, he returned for his senior season in 1998. The stage was set as the Cavaliers were ranked #16 in the pre-season polls.⁴⁴ After a dominating defensive performance in a 19-0 win at Auburn University, the offense came alive in a 31-point output against the University of Maryland. Brooks threw for two touchdowns, including a key 80-yard drive in the fourth quarter to seal the 31-19 victory.⁴⁵ After a narrow 20-18 win over the Clemson Tigers, Virginia dispatched Duke, 24-0, in Durham, North Carolina. It was the first time the Blue Devils had been shutout at home since 1990.⁴⁶ On November 14, Senior Day against the North Carolina Tar Heels, Brooks mustered just 10 completions, but six went for over 20 yards each in the Cavaliers 30-13 victory. For UVA, receiver Terrence Wilkins hauled in four passes for 167 yards. On the performance Brooks said, “I told the guys we just had to be patient. We weren't clicking like we should have been, but we were always one play away. We had to make

3 9 Busbee, Jay. “Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name,” sports.yahoo.com, October 28, 2016, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name - Yahoo Sports](#).

4 0 Busbee, Jay. “Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name,” sports.yahoo.com, October 28, 2016, accessed June 1, 2025, [Aaron Brooks brings life back to his hometown with development bearing his name - Yahoo Sports](#).

4 1 “Virginia Cavaliers Sports History,” sports-reference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [Virginia Cavaliers College Football History, Stats, Records | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).

4 2 “1997 Virginia Cavaliers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [1997 Virginia Cavaliers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).

4 3 “1997 Virginia Cavaliers Stats,” sports-reference.com, accessed June 1, 2025, [1997 Virginia Cavaliers Stats | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).



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big plays whenever possible.”⁴⁷ Heading into the game, Brooks had been sacked 21 times, but managed to avoid hitting the ground in the contest. UNC coach Carl Torbush remarked, “We threw our whole game plan at him. But we never once got him on the ground.”⁴⁸

After a week off, the Cavaliers ended the regular season on a high note, in a thrilling rivalry game at the Virginia Tech Hokies in Lane Stadium. The Hokies led 29-7 at halftime in what looked like a one-sided contest. However, UVA battled back, courtesy of timely turnovers by the defense, and Brooks leading the offense.⁴⁹ The Cavaliers overcame the 22-point deficit on a touchdown pass from Brooks to receiver Ahmad Hawkins, holding on for the 36-32 win. On the win Brooks recalled, “The first thing that comes to mind is that finally the tables have turned. In the past, we’ve been the ones who lost in the final seconds or the last play.”⁵⁰ To date, this remains the most recent win at Lane Stadium in Blacksburg for the Cavaliers.

End Notes:

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 - 4 5 “No. 12 Virginia holds on,” accessed June 1, 2025, *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 13, 1998, 100.
 - 4 6 “Duke shut out at home for first time since 1990,” accessed June 1, 2025, *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 27, 1998, 9.
 - 4 7 “U.Va. sticks it to Tar Heels,” accessed June 1, 2025, *Daily Press*, November 15, 1998, 38.
 - 4 8 “U.Va. sticks it to Tar Heels,” accessed June 1, 2025, *Daily Press*, November 15, 1998, 38.
 - 4 9 “A reversal of fortunes,” accessed June 1, 2025, *The Roanoke Times*, November 29, 1998, 33.
 - 5 0 “A reversal of fortunes,” accessed June 1, 2025, *The Roanoke Times*, November 29, 1998, 33.