



NFL AT THE TOP OF ITS GAME!

Like many finer things in life, the NFL has gotten better with time. The level of excitement and quality of play has never been greater, according to players and coaches past and present. A record number of active players stand on the Pro Football Hall of Fame’s all-time Top 20 lists.

“The overall quality of the athletes in the NFL today is far superior to what it was when I played,” says **GENE WASHINGTON**, the former NFL wide receiver (1969-79) who is now the NFL’s director of football operations.

“Quarterbacks and offensive lineman especially are much, much further along than they were years ago when college football programs were all running the wishbone,” says Pro Football Hall of Fame coach **BILL WALSH**. “The game is more entertaining than it once was.”

Thirty-one players who were active in 2003 were ranked among the top 20 career leaders in passer rating, rushing yards, receptions, and points scored. Only one other time (1993) has the Top 20 lists included as many active players.

“The quality of the game is at a very high level,” says Green Bay quarterback **BRETT FAVRE**. “You don’t see too many dominant teams like you used to because every team has good players.”

Consider that last season, 13 teams won at least 10 games – the most to do so in league history. There was at least one overtime game in a record 11-consecutive weeks in 2003 (Weeks 2-12). Nearly one-quarter of games in 2003 were decided in the last two minutes or in overtime, leaving players, coaches and fans holding their breath and challenging their pacemakers.

“Don’t listen to that garbage about the game not being as good today,” says **PHIL SIMMS**, the Super Bowl XXI MVP quarterback who is now a CBS-TV analyst. “There are more talented players across the board now than I’ve ever seen. And the coaching and overall year-round training and preparation is so much better today.”

“I like the young quarterbacks,” says **JIM BROWN**, the former Cleveland Browns running back and member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. “They’re accurate and stand in there. You look at (New England’s) **TOM BRADY** and those types of guys – they are kind of like phenoms.

“The linebackers today are exceptional because they weigh about 250 or 260 and they’re fast and can jump. They’re great athletes. I also think there are a lot of real fine running backs now.”

Brown marvels aloud about today’s top NFL rushers, specifically Baltimore’s **JAMAL LEWIS**, Washington’s **CLINTON PORTIS**, Jacksonville’s **FRED TAYLOR**, and San Diego’s **LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON**. “It’s really nice to see because they all have a different talent,” he says.

2003 ACTIVES IN ALL-TIME TOP 20 IN PASSER RATING (MINIMUM 1,500 ATTEMPTS)

RANK	QUARTERBACK	TEAM	RATING
1	Kurt Warner	NY Giants	97.2
4	Jeff Garcia	Cleveland	88.3
5	Peyton Manning	Indianapolis	88.1
6	Daunte Culpepper	Minnesota	88.0
7	Brett Favre	Green Bay	86.9
10	Trent Green	Kansas City	86.1
11	Tom Brady	New England	85.9
12	Mark Brunell	Washington	85.2
13	Rich Gannon	Oakland	84.7
15	Brad Johnson	Tampa Bay	84.117
16	Steve McNair	Tennessee	84.076
18	Brian Griese	Tampa Bay	83.0

2003 ACTIVES IN ALL-TIME TOP 20 RECEPTIONS

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	REC.
1	Jerry Rice	Oakland	1,519
3	Tim Brown	Oakland	1,070
7	Larry Centers	New England	827
9	Shannon Sharpe	Denver	815
12	Marvin Harrison	Indianapolis	759
16	Keenan McCardell	Tampa Bay	724
17	Jimmy Smith	Jacksonville	718
20	Isaac Bruce	St. Louis	688

2003 ACTIVES IN ALL-TIME TOP 20 RUSHING

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	YARDS
1	Emmitt Smith	Arizona	17,418
6	Jerome Bettis	Pittsburgh	12,353
11	Curtis Martin	NY Jets	11,669
14	Marshall Faulk	St. Louis	11,213
17	Eddie George	Tennessee	10,009

2003 ACTIVES IN ALL-TIME TOP 20 COMBINED NET YARDS

RANK	PLAYER	TEAM	RUSH	REC.	INT	PR	KOR	FR	TOTAL
1	Brian Mitchell	NY Giants	1,967	2,336	--	4,999	14,014	14	23,330
2	Jerry Rice	Oakland	645	22,466	--	--	6	--	23,117
4	Emmitt Smith	Arizona	17,418	3,110	--	--	--	--	20,537
5	Tim Brown	Oakland	190	14,734	--	3,272	1,235	3	19,434
9	Marshall Faulk	St. Louis	11,213	6,274	--	--	18	18	17,523
20	Curtis Martin	NY Jets	11,669	2,966	--	--	--	--	14,635