



THE QBs: THEIR ROOTS MAY BE DIFFERENT, THEIR PRODUCTION IS SUPERB

They come from many different backgrounds.

There's the highly coveted college superstar, the "second-day" draft pick and the "street" free agent who took the long road to making the roster. But whatever the pedigree, they all have one thing in common – successfully playing perhaps the most demanding positions in all of sports – NFL quarterback.

It's one of those "second-day" draftees, the New England Patriots' **TOM BRADY**, that can claim the title as the reigning Super Bowl Most Valuable Player. Entering his fifth season, the former sixth-rounder from Michigan has led the Patriots to two championships in the past three seasons, joining **JOE MONTANA** (3), **BART STARR** and **TERRY BRADSHAW** as the only QBs to win at least two Super Bowl MVP awards.

"Tom will be mentioned with the better quarterbacks playing now and in the past," says Patriots coach **BILL BELICHICK**. "You can't deny his production. He's a winner. He does what he needs to do to help the team win, and he does it as well as anybody."

Brady has plenty of company around the league as a quarterback who was hardly a "can't miss" prospect coming out of college. Look no further than the player who combined with him to produce one of the most memorable Super Bowls in NFL history, the Carolina Panthers' **JAKE DELHOMME**.

A college standout at Louisiana-Lafayette, Delhomme was signed by New Orleans in 1997 as an undrafted rookie free agent. He spent two seasons in the NFL Europe League, winning a championship with the Frankfurt Galaxy in 1999, before ultimately joining the Panthers prior to last season.

And what a season it was. He came on in relief to lead Carolina to a thrilling 24-23 win over Jacksonville in Week 1 and never looked back, starting the remainder of the season and leading the team to an 11-5 mark and the NFC South Division championship. His postseason was similarly impressive, sparking the Panthers to within a whisker of a title. This offseason, he was rewarded with a five-year contract extension.

"Everybody in the league tries to identify their quarterback," says Carolina head coach **JOHN FOX**. "Once you identify him, getting him locked up for the future is paramount to your success."

A look at a handful of quarterbacks who are expected to start in 2004 that weren't exactly household names on NFL Draft day:

QUARTERBACK	TEAM	NFL BEGINNING	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Tom Brady	NE	6th-round, 2000 (No. 199)	Led club to two Super Bowl wins in past three seasons.
Marc Bulger	StL	6th-round, 2000 (NO – No. 168)	Reigning Pro Bowl MVP, has 18-4 record as starter.
Jake Delhomme	Car	Rookie free agent, 1997 (NO)	Guided Panthers to Super Bowl in first season as starter.
Trent Green	KC	8th-round, 1993 (SD – No. 222)	Started 48 games in row, earning Pro Bowl honors last year.
Brad Johnson	TB	9th-round, 1992 (Min – No. 227)	Two-time All-Star, led Bucs to win in Super Bowl XXXVII.

ESPN's **SEAN SALISBURY** knows the obstacles these quarterbacks face, having earned his place in the league after starting his career as an undrafted rookie free agent from Southern California. Salisbury spent time with Indianapolis, Minnesota and San Diego, including 1992-94 as a teammate of Brad Johnson with the Vikings.

"When you're drafted in the low rounds or not drafted at all, you really have to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves," says Salisbury. "You have to seize the moment, because the tolerance for mistakes is not going to be high. One big challenge is simply getting a chance, but then when you do get that chance, make the most of it."

Just as prominent among today's gifted passers are those "can't miss" prospects who have lived up to the lofty expectations that accompanied their stature as high first-round draft picks. Perhaps foremost among this group is Indianapolis Colts' passer **PEYTON MANNING**, the first overall choice in 1998, and the co-NFL MVP last season with Tennessee Titans quarterback **STEVE MC NAIR**.

An All-Star mainstay, Manning has helped the Colts to four playoff appearances in his six seasons as a starter, leading the club to a 54-42 (.562) record in that span. In 2004, Manning will be aiming to take his club one game further than in 2003, when Indianapolis fell 24-14 to New England and Tom Brady in the AFC Championship game.

"You have to be ready to play when you face Peyton Manning," says defensive tackle **WARREN SAPP**, whose Oakland Raiders face the Colts on October 10. "He is one of the best signal-callers you'll find from now and 80 years behind us. He's special."

Another quarterback who has justified his draft status is Tennessee passer McNair, the No. 3 overall choice in 1995 who has used his big-play ability to help the Titans to the playoffs in four of the past five seasons. Similar excitement can be found in Atlanta, where **MICHAEL VICK** aims to rebound from an injury-plagued 2003 season in which he saw action in five games. In 2002, Vick started 15 games, helping the Falcons reach the divisional playoffs, generating excitement in the process.

Now, the next generation of top quarterbacks, including the New York Giants **ELI MANNING**, San Diego's **PHILIP RIVERS** and Pittsburgh's **BEN ROETHLISBERGER**, will attempt to make their mark, joining a lengthy list of current quarterbacks who are living up to – and exceeding – expectations.

A look at five "can't miss" QBs thriving in the NFL:

PLAYER	TEAM	NFL BEGINNING	ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Daunte Culpepper	Min	1st-round, 1999 (No. 11)	Gifted passer and rusher, has avgd. 22.5 TD passes per year as starter.
Peyton Manning	Ind	1st-round, 1998 (No. 1)	Started every game of NFL career, earning four trips to Pro Bowl.
Steve McNair	Ten	1st-round, 1995 (No. 3)	One of NFL's toughest players, led Titans to playoffs four times.
Donovan McNabb	Phi	1st-round, 1999 (No. 2)	Four-time All-Star has guided Eagles to three NFC title games in row.
Michael Vick	Atl	1st-round, 2001 (No. 1)	Dynamic playmaker, led club to divisional playoffs in 2002.