



NFL BETTER THAN EVER

A sculpture that stretches high and far, the NFL can be likened to a never-ending work of art. Entering its 86th season, its design is continually refined and improved. With each innovation and every game's emotional twists and turns, the work is sanded and chiseled into something greater than the week before.

With September approaching, the sculptor's tools are again in the hands of the game's players, coaches, and fans.

"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 who is now the NFL director of football operations.

Says Pro Football Hall of Fame coach **BILL WALSH**, "Quarterbacks and offensive lineman, especially, are much, much further along than they were years ago when college football programs were all running the wishbone. Now, every school throws it as much as they run it. Because of that, you also have far better defensive backs than you did in previous eras."

"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."

A look at just a sampling of what 2004 added to the NFL with 2005 action on the horizon:

In 2004...

- A record 732 touchdown passes were thrown.
- Scoring was up and averaged more than 40.0 points per game (43.0) for the 11th consecutive season.
- The league-wide season passer rating was 82.8 – the highest in history. And the league-wide completion percentage was another all-time high (59.8).
- Twenty-four players scored at least 10 touchdowns, tying 1985 and 1995 for the most in history.
- There were 788 points scored in Week 13, tying Week 1 of 2002 for the most ever in a weekend.
- There were a record number of 100-yard rushing (179) and 300-yard passing games (81).
- Four quarterbacks – **DREW BREES**, **DAUNTE CULPEPPER**, **PEYTON MANNING** and **DONOVAN MC NABB** – had passer ratings better than 100.0, tying 1998 for the most in a season.
- There were five 4,000-yard passing seasons – by Culpepper, **BRETT FAVRE**, **TRENT GREEN**, Manning and **JAKE PLUMMER** – tying 1999 for the most in a season.
- Two teams – Kansas City (418.4) and Indianapolis (404.7) -- averaged 400.0 yards of offense, tying 2000 for the most such clubs in a season.
- For the third time since 2000, two teams – Atlanta and San Diego -- went from "worst to first" in their divisions, finishing last in 2003 and first in 2004.
- Nearly half of all NFL games were decided by one score:

POINTS	GAMES	PCT.
8 or Less	121 of 256	47%
7 or Less	116 of 256	45%
3 or Less	61 of 256	24%

- For the second year in a row, the NFL set a paid attendance record. Games averaged 66,409 fans, topping the record 66,328 of 2003. The league reached 17 million paid attendance for the first time in its history (17,000,811), filling stadiums to 90 percent of capacity.

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At the end of the 2004 NFL season, 34 active players stood on the league's all-time top 20 lists in scoring, rushing, passing, and receiving to mark the most active players on those lists since 1970.

Below is a look at the 10 highest-rated passers of all-time with at least 1,500 attempts. Seven of the 10 are active quarterbacks while the other three are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

TOP-RATED PASSERS WITH AT LEAST 1,500 CAREER ATTEMPTS

QB	YEARS	ATT.	COMP.	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
Steve Young	15	4,149	2,667	33,124	232	107	96.8
Kurt Warner*	7	1,965	1,295	16,501	108	69	95.7
Daunte Culpepper*	6	2,391	1,539	18,598	129	74	93.2
Peyton Manning*	7	3,880	2,464	29,442	216	120	92.29
Joe Montana	15	5,391	3,409	40,551	273	139	92.26
Trent Green*	7	2,822	1,705	21,607	133	82	87.9
Tom Brady*	5	2,018	1,243	13,925	97	52	87.5
Brett Favre*	14	7,003	4,306	49,734	376	226	87.4
Jeff Garcia*	6	2,612	1,593	18,139	123	65	87.2
Otto Graham	10	2,626	1,464	23,584	174	135	86.6

*Active

