



THE QUARTERBACKS: EXCITING EXPECTATIONS

It has become a staple of the National Football League – greatness at perhaps the most challenging position in all of sports, NFL quarterback.

From established veteran superstars such as **BRETT FAVRE** and **PEYTON MANNING**, to the brilliance of consistently excellent performers like **TOM BRADY**, **DAUNTE CULPEPPER** and **DONOVAN MC NABB**, to those talents who burst on the scene and surpass all expectations, such as 2004 standouts **DREW BREES** and **BEN ROETHLISBERGER**, NFL quarterbacks are sure to provide fans with more thrilling moments in 2005.

“I think that the league is probably at one of its richest times as far as the quarterback position is concerned,” says Houston Texans offensive coordinator **CHRIS PALMER**. “You look from top to bottom and you have the veterans, and then all of a sudden you have a bunch of young guys coming up. This has probably been one of the richest times in NFL history for quarterbacks.”

The epitome of that quarterbacking excellence in 2004 was Manning, who enjoyed what four-time Pro Bowl quarterback **BOOMER ESIASON**, currently a studio analyst for *The NFL Today* on CBS, called “the greatest single season by any quarterback in the history of the NFL.”

Manning’s many milestones from a year ago include the NFL record for most touchdown passes in a single season (49), the highest single-season passer rating in history (121.1), the most consecutive multiple-touchdown games in a season (13), and becoming the first player to pass for 4,000 yards in six consecutive seasons.

“I’ve never played any position other than quarterback,” Manning says. “Growing up, I never played defense and I never played special teams. People ask me, if I wasn’t a quarterback, what position would I play. My answer is always the same – coach.”

Many other veterans continue to provide thrilling moments, such as the ultra-clutch Brady, who attempts to become the first quarterback in NFL history to lead his team to three consecutive Super Bowl victories...the incomparable Favre, who needs 14 wins to become the winningest quarterback of all-time (149 victories)...and McNabb, who looks to build on a 2004 campaign that saw him lead Philadelphia to the Super Bowl while achieving career bests in virtually all major passing categories.

Meanwhile in Atlanta, **MICHAEL VICK** hopes to help the Falcons soar one step further than last season’s NFC Championship Game appearance, while Minnesota’s Culpepper has firmly established himself as one of the NFL’s premier passers.

What will they do for an encore in 2005?

Following is a look at how the 2004 season ranked in several key passing categories:

Year	TD Passes	Year	Passer Rating	Year	Passing Yards	Year	Comp. Pct.	Year	Comp.
2004	732	2004	82.8	2002	108,661	2004	59.8	2002	10,314
2002	694	2002	80.4	2004	107,797	2002	59.6	2004	9,772
1999	665	1995	79.2	1995	105,976	2001	59.0	1995	9,717
1995	663	2001	78.5	1999	105,289	2003	58.8	2003	9,695
1998	658	1994	78.4	2003	102,628	1995	58.2	1999	9,567

In addition to the rock-solid efforts of the established quarterbacks, the NFL, where the unpredictable is commonplace, has often seen a signal-caller from seemingly “out of the blue” take the league by storm – from **KURT WARNER**’s march to a championship with the 1999 St. Louis Rams, to **JAKE DELHOMME** and the Panthers’ run to an NFC Championship in 2003.

The San Diego Chargers’ Brees was one such success story in 2004, posting one of the most prolific passing seasons for a quarterback in franchise history, culminating with his first Pro Bowl selection. After tossing 29 touchdowns and 31 interceptions with a 73.7 passer rating in his first three years, Brees led San Diego to a 12-4 record and the AFC West championship last season, throwing 27 touchdowns and only seven interceptions, finishing with a superb 104.8 rating.

On the opposite coast, Pittsburgh rookie Roethlisberger wasted no time in establishing himself, enjoying the most productive rookie season for a quarterback in NFL history. The Findlay, Ohio native helped the Steelers to a 15-1 record and a berth in the AFC Championship Game, setting an NFL rookie record with 13 consecutive wins to start a career and posting an all-time rookie-best 98.1 passer rating.

“The quarterbacks today are terrific,” says four-time Super Bowl winner **TERRY BRADSHAW** of *FOX NFL Sunday*.

The question for 2005...who’s next?

A look at several quarterbacks on the horizon who may be poised to take the next step:

Quarterback	Team	Year	Outlook
David Carr	Houston	4	Passed for career-best 16 TDs and posted career-high 83.5 passer rating in ’04, helping club increase victory total in each of past two seasons.
Joey Harrington	Detroit	4	Tossed career-best 19 TDs and career-low 12 INTs in ’04, passing for career-high 3,047 yards.
Byron Leftwich	Jacksonville	3	Led club to 9-7 mark in ’04, its first winning season since ’99, passing for 15 TDs vs. 10 INTs and posting 82.2 passer rating.
Eli Manning	NY Giants	2	Started final seven games of ’04 rookie campaign, showing improvement throughout and posting 100.0+ passer rating in two of last three starts.
Carson Palmer	Cincinnati	3	Led club to 8-8 record in first season as a starter, completing 60.9 pct. of pass attempts with 18 TD passes.
Alex Smith	San Francisco	R	No. 1 pick of the 2005 NFL Draft, will compete for the starting quarterback job in training camp after successful collegiate career at Utah.

