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RECENT SEASONS SHOW NFL RUSHERS RACKING UP YARDS

They're called running backs, but they're running forward like never before. We are witnessing a Golden Era for NFL rushers.

Consider the following:

- Since the advent of the 16-game schedule in 1978, five of the past six years register in the eight highest yards-per-carry season averages.
- NFL rushers have recorded 32 200-yard rushing games since 2000 (1,520 games played) compared to 39 such single-game outbursts from 1980-99 (4,456 games).
- Since 2000, there has been an average of .56 1,000-yard rushers per NFL team compared to .44 from 1980-99, excluding the shortened seasons of 1982 and 1987.
- Since 2000, running backs have rushed for 1,500 yards in a season 25 times compared to 33 such performances in the previous 18 full seasons.

Below is a look at the top 10 rushing seasons in the NFL since 1978 (28 years) from a yard-per-carry perspective. Five of the past six seasons reside in the top eight while 2005 (4.01) posted the 12th-best figure during this span:

Season	Rushing Yards	Attempts	Yds/Carry
2002	59,459	14,102	4.22
2003	60,341	14,508	4.16
2004	59,709	14,428	4.14
1985	55,969	13,636	4.10
1990	51,012	12,442	4.10
1983	58,122	14,211	4.09
2000	55,829	13,677	4.08
2001	55,440	13,666	4.06
1992	49,509	12,291	4.03
1984	55,503	13,811	4.02

"Running backs are bigger, stronger, and faster," says Pro Football Hall of Fame coach **BILL WALSH**, who had three 1,000-yard rushing seasons from his 49ers backs from 1979-88. "I connect (the league-wide rushing yard increase) to the talent and power of the running backs and to more blitzes in the game, which can open more running lanes.

"You can't expect one man to take down a ball carrier today," adds Walsh. "And it hasn't always been that way."

In addition to the effort brought forth by today's rushers, New England Patriots head coach **BILL BELICHICK** notes the group aspect needed to run the ball effectively.

"The running game is a team game -- everyone contributes," says Belichick, whose Patriots currently stand with the league's sixth-best rushing-yard total per game (139.0). New England's attack is led by rookie rusher **LAURENCE MARONEY**, who tops the team and all NFL rookies with 332 yards on the ground. "That's what a good running game is and what a good running team does -- you execute the play in its entirety," says Belichick.

"It extends to all 11 guys on the field. The running game is a team play."

CHUCK KNOX, who won 193 games during his 22-year NFL head-coaching career, earned the nickname "Ground Chuck" by emphasizing the run in his game plans. "It's very demoralizing when your opponent can just run right down the field," says Knox. "You can get some big gains passing, but the game is going to be decided by the turnover ratio and the more you throw the ball around, the more you'll turn the ball over."