

# Hall Pass

02-13-08 by MARK GREY

Going into this year's SuperBowl, there were many topics up for debate. The topic that divided the most people was whether Kurt Warner is a Hall of Famer. Many felt that in order for Warner to land a bust in Canton, he would need to add another SuperBowl to his resume. Well, the SuperBowl has come and gone and despite a record-breaking day from Warner, the Cardinals were unable to add that second SuperBowl ring to Warner's long list of accomplishments. While I agree that we still have to wait and see if Warner hangs around long enough to put the finishing touches on a Hall of Fame career, there is no doubt in my mind that he is a Hall of Fame player.

The biggest problem in identifying the clear-cut Hall of Famers is that there is no clear-cut measuring stick. The debate can generally be broken down into two different arguments: how great the player was in his prime and how great his final career numbers are. When you break down the Warner debate, there is no quarterback in history who was better in his prime; however, his career numbers fall short of Hall of Fame material.

The Hall of Fame claims to be the home of the greatest football players who ever played the game, but to me it appears to be the home of the greatest football careers. For example, there is no doubt that Curtis Martin and Jerome Bettis are assured slots in the Hall of Fame; after all, they rank fourth and fifth on the all-time list of rushing yards. But while I have the utmost respect for both players in the way they carried themselves on and off the field, I would not call either of them one of the greatest runningbacks to play the game. Between the two of them, they played a total of 24 seasons and won a grand total of one rushing title, with career averages of just 4 yards a carry. Yes, both were able to stay healthy enough to have long careers, but I will take a healthy Bo Jackson and his 5-yards-per-carry average over them any day. Unfortunately, Bo's career was cut short so he had nothing close to a Hall of Fame career. Likewise, Art Monk and James Lofton have both already been enshrined in the Hall Of Fame, but I grew up watching their careers and I can tell you that neither of them was as dominant a receiver as Herman Moore. However, they both played in 80 more games than him, therefore making them Hall of Famers and Moore nothing more than the answer to a sports trivia question. I don't bring up these points to discredit any members of the Hall, but rather to show that getting in has a lot more to do with your total career than how dominate you were.

If the idea of the Hall of Fame is to reward the best players of all time, then Warner is a no-brainer. At the top of his game, Warner is as good as any quarterback who ever played. Over a three-year period, Warner had a QB rating of 103. How good is that, you ask? Hall of Famers Warren Moon, Troy Aikman, John Elway, Joe Namath, Johnny Unitas, Bob Griese, and even the great Brett Favre have never even had one season with a quarterback rating over 100, let alone a three-year stretch. He is also one of only two quarterbacks in NFL history to lead two different teams to a SuperBowl. Despite playing in 30 less career games than Namath and 55 less than Aikman, Warner has more touchdown passes than both of these Hall of Famers...and while throwing fewer interceptions. Also, just how impressive is Warner's career completion percentage of 65%? Hall of famers Marino, Moon, Namath, Unitas, Griese, Bradshaw, Bart Star, and Fran Tarkenton played a combined 127 seasons and not one of them had a season in which he completed 65 percent of his passes. As great as Warner has been over his career during the regular seasons, he has been even better in the playoffs, posting an 8 -3 record. Although Warner played in 4 less playoff games than sure first-ballot Hall of Famer Peyton Manning, he not only has more wins, but also 4 more touchdown passes and 3 less interceptions. Therefore, when talking about players at the top of their games, it is clear that Warner is undoubtedly Hall of Fame worthy.

So what is it that keeps Warner from being a lock for the Hall? Once again it's not about the player, it's about the career. Thanks to a late start and injuries throughout his career, Warner doesn't even rank in the top 35 of all-time in major categories such as yards or touchdowns. Plus, many Warner critics like to point to his short stint on a bad New York Giants team as a huge stain on his resume. Yet, Warner already has a SuperBowl MVP, along with two NFL MVPs, on that same resume. Now, all he needs to do is hang on for another two seasons and pile on stats at the end of his career to make sure he passes the Mark Burnels, Brad Johnsons, Vinny Testaverdaes and Kerry Collinses of the world who fill up the history books with their 15-plus years of NFL experience. As far as off the field, Warner has that part locked down. He has been a model citizen, a true sportsman, and the poster boy for never giving up. His grocery-store-bag-boy-to-Super-Bowl-MVP story is straight off of a Disney movie set. To me, Warner is already a certified Hall of Fame quarterback. For those who want to wait and see how his career ends, I just hope you don't forget how great a career he has already had.