

TERRY BRADSHAW

By Don Smith

Possibly no pro football superstar ever experienced more absolute highs and lows, more criticism and applause, more disdain and adulation than Terry Bradshaw did during his 14 years with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Bradshaw's career began on the highest possible plane when he was selected as the first player in the entire NFL draft in 1970. When the 6-3, 210 pound quarterback from Louisiana Tech failed to attain immediate stardom, he suffered the consequences of an impatient fan and media corps. His confidence was shattered and sometimes he didn't know what to do next.

Finally, midway into his fifth season in 1974, Bradshaw was given complete control of the Steelers offense for the first time. Almost immediately, Terry developed into an overpowering dynamo who was at his best in the most crucial games, of which there were many. During the Bradshaw reign, Pittsburgh won eight AFC Central Division championships and four Super Bowls.

Bradshaw's achievements at the height of his career made him one of the most respected players of his time. That universal acclaim reached its zenith this year with his election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

Bradshaw's career statistics are impressive but his performances in 19 post-season playoff games are awesome. His career records show that he completed 2025 passes for 27,989 yards, 212 touchdowns and a solid 70.7 passing rating, which improves to 78.2 if you delete his five "learning seasons." He also rushed 444 times for 2257 yards and 32 touchdowns.

In six AFC title games, Bradshaw recorded seven touchdown passes. He threw go-ahead scoring passes to defeat Oakland in both 1974 and 1975. In championships wins over Houston in 1978 and 1979, Terry contributed two touchdown passes each year.

In Super Bowl IX, Bradshaw's fourth-quarter pass to Larry Brown clinched a 16-6 victory over Minnesota. Against Dallas in Super Bowl X, Terry threw to Randy Grossman to gain a tie and then won the game with a spectacular 64 yard pass to Lynn Swann. Bradshaw, who was knocked unconscious just as he released the ball, did not know what happened until after the game.

The Pittsburgh field general was at his absolute best in Super Bowl XIII. He almost single-handedly did in the Dallas cowboys with a 318 yard, four touchdown passing explosion. In Super Bowl XIV against the Los Angeles Rams, Bradshaw was almost as spectacular with 308 aerial yards, a 47 yard scoring shot to Swann and a 73 yard bomb to John Stallworth to clinch the history-making fourth Super Bowl championship for the Steelers. Bradshaw was named the Most Valuable Player in both XIII and XIV.

He holds numerous Super Bowl career marks including most yards passing (932) and most touchdown passes (9). His 3,833 yards and 30 touchdowns passing are both records for all post-season games.

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana, September 2, 1948, the second of three sons of Bill and Novis Bradshaw, Terry lived in Clinton, Iowa, for several years before his family returned to Shreveport when he was a teen-ager. He played junior varsity high school football for two years but showed his tremendous potential when he led the Woodlawn High varsity to the state finals in his senior season. He also proved the strength of his arm by throwing the javelin farther than any prep athlete in history.

When it came to college, Bradshaw chose Louisiana Tech in Reston, 65 miles from home. He also decided he had a better future in football than in track. Terry played briefly as a freshman, shared a starting role as a sophomore and then blossomed into a star of unusual proportions his last two years. He wound up with 7149 yards and 42 touchdowns passing and became the hottest pro prospect in the college ranks in 1969. He was named on several all-American selections.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 11, No. 2 (1989)

Since the Chicago Bears and Steelers each finished 1-13 in 1969, they had to flip a coin for the drafting rights to Bradshaw. "I can laugh now, but back then I had no idea what it meant to be the No.1 draft choice in the NFL," Terry remembers.

For the first few years, Bradshaw had to fight off the challenges of Terry Hanratty, a former Notre Dame star, and later Joe Gilliam. Bradshaw started eight games as a rookie and the Steelers' record improved to 5-9 but his performances fell far below expectations. He completed only 38.1% of his passes and had 24 interceptions, the highest total in pro football.

"My rookie year was a disaster," Bradshaw agrees. "I was totally unprepared for pro football. I had had no schooling on reading defenses. I had never studied the game films the way a quarterback should. I was an outsider who didn't mingle well. The other players looked on me as a Bible-toting Li'l Abner."

Bradshaw was discouraged, but not defeated, and he spent his first off-season plotting his plans for improvement. Fortunately, Steelers coach Chuck Noll still felt Terry was a diamond in the rough. "Terry was always the guy with the talent," Noll said. "There never was a question about that."

Both the Steelers and Bradshaw improved their 1970 records in 1971. Terry started all but one game and, in 1972, paced the Steelers to their first divisional championship in 40 years of NFL competition. In the first-round playoff game against Oakland, Bradshaw etched his name in pro football lore when he launched the "Immaculate Reception" pass to Frenchy Fuqua that caromed to Franco Harris for a last-second 13-7 victory.

"I have had three years now," Bradshaw said in assessing his progress after the season. "One year of frustration, one where I've learned to pass and one of learning how to run. Maybe next year I can learn to do them all together. Then maybe I'll be able to drive them all crazy."

Eventually, "driving them crazy" is just what Bradshaw did but that would have to wait a while longer. A separated shoulder cut into his playing time in 1973. In 1974, Noll started the season with Gilliam as his No.1 quarterback. Bradshaw stewed on the bench for six games. Suddenly, even though the Steelers were 4-1-1 under Gilliam, Noll changed signals and thrust Bradshaw back into the starting lineup, where he could call his own signals and take complete charge of the offense on the field. Except when he was injured, he never had to worry about sitting on the bench again.

"When I got the confidence from that man (Noll) was when I became a pro quarterback," Bradshaw said. "Prior to that, I wasn't making any progress. I knew that when I made mistakes, I was going to be benched. But when he said 'go make your mistakes, we're going to win with you,' that's when I became a quarterback."

Although Bradshaw led Pittsburgh to two straight Super Bowl championships after he received Noll's vote of confidence, he received very little respect or recognition for his increasingly outstanding contributions. That situation, however, began to change in 1978, when Bradshaw led the AFC with an 84.6 passing rating and was a runaway winner in the AFC Player of the Year derby. He led the Steelers to a third Super Bowl victory with an MVP performance. He was named all-pro and selected for the Pro Bowl for the first time, honors that were repeated in 1979.

Suddenly, after nine years, Bradshaw was big news. Overnight, his image had changed -- the Steelers were winners, in everyone's mind, because of Bradshaw. Part of the change was brought about by Noll, who decided to put the forward pass more and more into his game plan. Previously, the Steelers were known as a ball-control team with running back Franco Harris being the principal weapon. But in 1978, it became Bradshaw's kind of game and he delivered.

He even got help from the NFL rules committee which passed new legislation prohibiting defensive backs from employing the "bump and run" tactic on receivers more than five yards past the scrimmage line. The rules were specifically designed to put more scoring into pro football. Since Bradshaw was blessed with two superior receivers in Swann and Stallworth as his principal targets, he was a prime beneficiary of the new guidelines.

There was perhaps one other reason. "I was more relaxed," Bradshaw reflects. "I decided to just have fun, just go out and play football without putting all of those pressures on myself."

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 11, No. 2 (1989)

Bradshaw continued to excel in the early 1980s but the Steelers, decimated by the retirement or aging of many of its finest players from the Super Bowl years, fell out of contention in 1980 and 1981. In the strike-shortened 1982 season, Pittsburgh entered the AFC playoff tournament with a 6-3 record but lost to the San Diego Chargers, 31-28, in the first round. Terry, however, was still up to his old tricks. He passed for 335 yards and two touchdowns and added a third score on a 1-yard run.

In March, 1983, Bradshaw underwent elbow surgery. When he returned to camp in July, he found the zip was gone from his passing arm. Terry did not play until the next-to-last game of the season when he started against the New York Jets in a must-win situation for the Steelers. He carefully pieced together two long drives, both of them culminated by his touchdown passes. But after the first 16 minutes, the elbow flared up again and Terry took himself out of the game for the last time. He waited until summer camp began in 1984 to be sure he couldn't play but it was evident he had no choice but to retire.

Throughout his career, Bradshaw, a born-again Christian and active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, became involved in a number of off-the-field pursuits such as country singing, the movies and network television. Today, he serves as a CBS network analyst on its NFL game telecasts. His broadcast partner, Vern Lundquist, will serve as Terry's presenter when he is enshrined in August.

In the seasons while Bradshaw was struggling to survive in the NFL, he had to endure the bum rap of being a "dumb" quarterback. Of all the various indignities Terry had to endure, those charges irritated him the most.

"Sure, I made some mistakes, particularly when I was a rookie," he said. "Like scrambling all around the field and then throwing an interception. So some guy wrote about me being dumb. When things didn't go right for me, it was because I was 'dumb.' I had nobody defend me either. Any time I'd come out and defend myself, I'd just dig my hole deeper, so I finally just said to heck with it."

Even after Bradshaw had become an acknowledged superstar and a quarterback who called his own plays in a highly-effective offense, the "dumb" image lingered in some minds. During the pre-game hoopla before Super Bowl XIII, Dallas Cowboys' linebacker Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson chortled: "We're going to play against a quarterback who can't even spell c-a-t."

When Bradshaw shredded the Dallas defenses with his four-touchdown outburst, it was obvious to all who saw him that day that Terry knew better than anyone how to produce results that spelled v-i-c-t-o-r-y.

TERRY BRADSHAW

Hgt: 6-3 Wgt: 215

School: Louisiana Tech

Born: September 2, 1948, Shreveport, LA

PASSING

YEAR	TEAM	LG	GM	ATT	COM	PCT	YARD	AvgG	TD	IN	RATE
1970	Pitt	N	13	218	83	38.1	1410	6.47	6	24	30.2
1971	Pitt	N	14	373	203	54.4	2259	6.06	13	22	59.6
1972	Pitt	N	14	308	147	47.7	1887	6.13	12	12	64.1
1973	Pitt	N	10	180	89	49.4	1183	6.57	10	15	54.7
1974	Pitt	N	8	148	67	45.3	785	5.30	7	8	55.1
1975	Pitt	N	14	286	165	57.7	2055	7.19	18	9	88.2
1976	Pitt	N	10	192	92	47.9	1177	6.13	10	9	65.3
1977	Pitt	N	14	314	162	51.6	2523	*8.04	17	19	71.2
1978	Pitt	N	16	368	207	56.3	2915	*7.92	*28	20	*84.8
1979	Pitt	N	16	472	259	54.9	3724	7.89	26	25	77.0
1980	Pitt	N	15	424	218	51.4	3339	7.88	24	22	75.1
1981	Pitt	N	14	370	201	54.3	2887	7.80	22	14	83.7
1982	Pitt	N	9	240	127	52.9	1768	7.37	*17	11	81.4
1983	Pitt	N	1	8	5	62.5	77	9.63	2	0	--
14 years			168	3901	2025	51.9	27989	7.17	212	210	70.9