

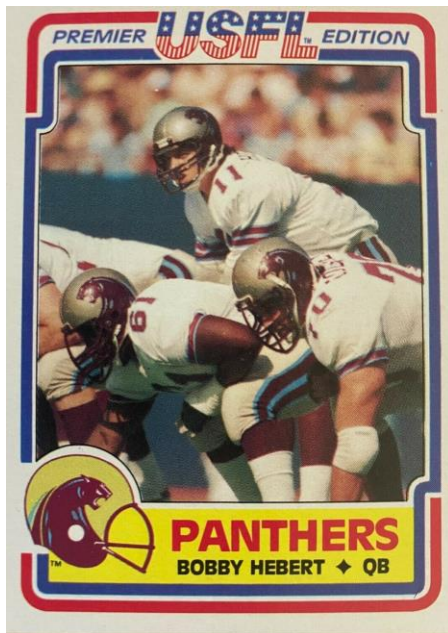


Bobby Hebert

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Gunslinger? Not a star like Joe Montana, Dan Marino or John Elway, among others during his time, but Bobby Hebert was a gunslinger. He fired the football all over the gridiron with his “cannon” of a right arm launching the ball into the arms of his receivers. No matter the level of competition he faced, Hebert found a way to catalyze his team to a win.

Hebert’s quarterbacking prowess was most renown during his years with the New Orleans Saints. As the full-time starter in 1987, Hebert went 10-2, leading New Orleans to the first playoff berth in franchise history. The Saints operated the second ranked offense, amassing 422 points, and rolled along on a nine-game win streak.¹ This was just one of the high points of his career. Hebert went by the nickname, “the Cajun Cannon.”



Throughout his football career, he earned the respect of his teammates. Former teammate in New Orleans, Pat Swilling said, “He’ll play his ass off for you, that is what I love about Bobby Hebert. ...”² In 1990, he sat out the season due to a contract dispute, which caused a divide among him, management, and the fans. All the while, Bobby’s teammates had his back. They could not have been more pleased when he finally returned. Swilling went on to say, “There isn’t a man in this locker room who was upset with Bobby. When Bobby came back to the team, I went over and we had a little hug.”³ Talk about having his back.



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In return, Hebert always gave his all to his teammates. He was best at focusing on the now. Whatever needed to be done in the next moment, he excelled in accomplishing. Hebert learned such qualities from his upbringing, the Cajun culture of his ancestors who settled in south Louisiana, that immigrated from Nova Scotia.⁴

Bobby Joseph Hebert, Jr. (b. August 19, 1960) was a true athlete growing up. In his hometown of Cut Off, Louisiana, at South LaFourche High School, Hebert starred on the basketball and football teams.⁵ The decision to focus on football settled his curiosity on playing quarterback. The Tarpons football team enjoyed great success during the 1970s, winning two state championships. The 1977 squad was a memorable one. Hebert led the Tarpons to a 12-3 record, the second most wins in school history for a single-season, while setting the school passing record at 1,360 yards. The team featured six All-District players, including David Dillon, who was the State MVP.⁶ They were a bunch of bayou boys, raised in south Louisiana. What made them successful was playing together, united as a team. Hebert's closest teammate was Ed Orgeron, who were the closest of friends on and off the gridiron. The two have since formed a close, life-long friendship. Orgeron was an All-State player, and a two-time All-District player in those days.⁷ The two decided to attend Northwestern State together.

At the time, the Demons football program put together formidable teams, that produced NFL talent in Mark Duper, Gary Reasons, and Joe Delaney. Hebert started full-time in his second year at Northwestern State, guiding the team to an 8-3 mark, and a 6-5 record in his senior season.⁸ He finished his career passing for 3,798 yards, accounting for 34 total touchdowns. Playing under pass-heavy offenses in both high school and college readied Hebert for professional football. He was a physical NFL specimen, standing at 6' 4" and 215 pounds.¹⁰ Despite wanting to play in the NFL, he quickly turned his attention to the USFL, where he was selected with the 34th pick, in the third round of the 1983 USFL draft.¹¹

The Michigan Panthers signed him for an astounding \$150,000 guaranteed.¹² The signing turned out to benefit both parties. In the two seasons Hebert played with the Panthers, his maturation transformed him into one of the league's best players. As a rookie, he threw for over 3,500 yards to go with 27 touchdown passes.¹³ Hebert was voted as the USFL Player of the Year by the *Sporting News* and the USFL's Outstanding Quarterback.¹⁴ He connected often with his favorite target, receiver Anthony Carter, who made big play after big play. Carter amassed over 1,000 yards receiving and nine touchdowns.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Panthers finished the year with a 12-6 record, capturing the Central Division.

In the first round of the playoffs, Michigan upended the Oakland Invaders, 37-21 with Hebert passing for one touchdown and running for another while throwing for 295 yards.



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The Panthers then edged the Philadelphia Stars, 24-22, for the championship. Hebert found Anthony Carter on a 48-yard connection late in the fourth quarter, which stood up as the winning score.¹⁶ Hebert passed for 314 yards and was named the game MVP in the Panthers upset win.

Hebert powered the Panthers again in 1984 as one of the best passers, as he compiled 3,758 yards passing, and the team finished 10-8 while netting a playoff berth. The season ended against Los Angeles, in a triple-overtime thriller with Michigan falling 27-21.¹⁷ The 1985 season saw Michigan merge with Oakland, and Hebert led his team to the playoffs for a third-consecutive season, finishing at 13-4-1. Hebert threw for 3,811 yards (a career high) and 30 touchdown passes (also a career high). Oakland played Baltimore for the championship, with the Invaders losing a narrow, 28-24 defeat.¹⁸ That put a cap on quite a career, putting Hebert as the USFL's all-time leading passer, with 81 touchdown passes, and greater than 11,000 passing yards.¹⁹

When the USFL folded, Hebert quickly turned his attention back to the NFL, signing with the Saints prior to the 1985 season. Hebert saw limited playing time in his first two NFL seasons due to injury, making just nine starts.²⁰ Head coach Jim Mora split time between him and John Fourcade at quarterback until 1987, when Hebert became the full-time starter. Hebert started 12 games and the Saints were 10-2 in his starts as he catapulted the franchise to a 12-3-0 record to its first ever playoff berth.

In 1988, Hebert connected with Pro-Bowl receiver Eric Martin, 85 times, a franchise record.²¹ The Week 12 game against Denver saw Hebert earn the NFC Offensive Player of the Week award, which he won on four other occasions throughout his career.²² New Orleans went on a seven game winning streak and stood at 7-1 through their first eight games. Not only was the offense in sync, but the defense was also among the league's stingiest. Jim Mora's 3-4 system was highly successful. The unit's linebacking corps, known as the "Dome Patrol" of Sam Mills, Rickey Jackson, Pat Swilling, and Vaughan Johnson, was relentless at attacking the opposing quarterbacks and ball carriers.²³ However, the Saints lost three of their last four and missed the playoffs with a 10-6 record.

In each of Hebert's seasons with the team, the defense allowed under an average of 20 points per game, routinely ranking in the top 10. The 1991 season was monumental for the Saints as they won their first ever West division title with an 11-5 mark.²⁴ Hebert furnished with an 8-1 record as the starter, but missed games due to injury. New Orleans lost 27-20 in a Wild Card playoff game to Atlanta.

With Hebert starting all 16 games in 1992, the Saints repeated as division championship with a 12-4 record. Hebert displayed his personal best statistical NFL season that year. He



tossed 19 touchdown passes and threw for 3,287 yards, shades of his USFL days.²⁵ The Saints lost to the Philadelphia Eagles in a Wild Card playoff game 36-20. Hebert threw for 291 yards but was intercepted three times in the loss. It would be Hebert's last game as a Saint. New Orleans decided not to renew Hebert's contract following the season. As a result, he signed with the Atlanta Falcons.

Hebert was a Pro Bowl player with the Falcons in 1993, increasing his productivity with 24 touchdown passes, completing over 61% of his passes. He spent two of his final three NFL seasons as a backup to Jeff George. He retired following the 1996 campaign that saw him start 13 contests, with a 3-10 record.²⁶ Hebert's four year run in Atlanta was overshadowed by the lackluster talent around him. In his Pro Bowl season, the team went 4-8 in his starts, and just one other Falcons offensive player joined him with Pro Bowl honors, receiver Andre Rison.²⁷

Three years after retiring, he was inducted into the New Orleans Saints Hall-of-Fame in 1999, then into the Louisiana Sports Hall-of-Fame in 2000. Hebert shares a unique distinction as one of just 64 NFL quarterbacks to play a game with a perfect passer rating. Hebert's Falcons lost to the Saints, 34-31, as Hebert completed 14 of 18 passes for 243 yards and three touchdowns with a 158.3 passer rating.²⁸

Hebert currently works as a sportscaster for his hometown New Orleans Saints on WWL, local 870 AM/105.3 FM, hosting his own sports talk show titled, "Sports Talk with Bobby Hebert & Kristian Garic." He opened a restaurant and sports bar in Metairie, LA, named Bobby Hebert's Cajun Cannon Restaurant and Bar. He is the father to four children: T-Bob, Beaux, Cammy, and Ryan, and married to Joan Hebert since 2009.²⁹

End Notes:

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