

JOHN HALL

The QB Game

"I really had the crowd on a string. It was yea, boo, yea, boo. But if I let that bother me, I'd have to go back to pressing pants with my old man."

—BILL KILMER, Redskin quarterback, Nov. 2, 1975.

Joe Roth is one. Cal Bear from El Cajon. No. 12. He's 20, a junior, 6-4, 205 pounds. He wants to be a coach some day. He has completed 75 of 142 passes for 1,089 yards in eight games. He'll be on television again Saturday against Washington.

Craig Penrose is one. San Diego State Aztec from Woodland. No. 13. He's 22, a senior, 6-3, 213. He's a sociologist. Outside of San Diego, not many can identify him. But pro scouts know him.

James Harris is another. Ram from Grambling. No. 12. He's 28, 6-4, 210. He was MVP of the last Pro Bowl. He has led his club to a 6-1 record. Yet, there are those who still wonder.

Norm Snead is another. San Francisco 49er out of Wake Forest and everywhere. No. 16. He's 36, 6-4, 215. He has



James Harris Mike Cordova Joe Roth

been a Redskin, Eagle, Viking and Giant—15 NFL seasons of jeers and cheers.

John Sciarra. UCLA Bruin from Alhambra. No. 15. He's 21, a senior, 5-10, 178. The veer offense and the option rollout have turned his legs to raw meat. A 5-10, 178-pound quarterback? Pro scouts don't even bother to clock him in the 40.

With Stanford arriving to play USC Saturday, the names float back. Frankie Albert . . . Gary Kerkorian . . . Dick Norman . . . John Brodie . . . Bobby Garrett . . . Jim Plunkett . . . Don Bunce . . . Mike Boryla. Stanford always seems to have a great passing quarterback. This year is an exception. Stanford doesn't have a great quarterback. It's got two—Mike Cordova, 6-3 and 215, and Guy Benjamin, 6-3 and 200. Sometimes it's worse to have two than none.

All the above have one thing in common. They have nothing in common. They are quarterbacks, last of the individualists escaping the computer, the most watched and most misunderstood animal in the kingdom. Nobody has yet been able to define what really makes a good one tick. Still, they try. But there's really no perfect size ("6-4, 215 pounds," says the NFL computer), no way to measure that brain.

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The quarterback gets too much credit when his club is successful, too much blame when it isn't. "One Sunday you're in the penthouse, the next in the outhouse," Bobby Layne once said. Bill Kilmer got the message again last Sunday. One interception and the home fans wanted to lynch him. Moments later, they were kissing him and wanted to carry him out of the stadium on their shoulders.

What makes a Joe Kapp? He couldn't pass; he just kept winning games. From what special place do you find a Johnny Unitas, a Fran Tarkenton?

Houston's Dan Pastorini has one of the hottest hands in the NFL this season. In 1973, he also had a banner year. He was sacked a record 53 times.

Pastorini: "Talk about getting knocked dinky. Two years ago in San Diego I got carried off the field twice. At the end of the game, I just collapsed from sheer exhaustion. It was the worst beating I've ever taken. I got sacked something like 15 times that day. I'd lost count of how many times I got hit after I threw the ball. I just couldn't get up. My brain kept telling my body to get up, but my body wouldn't respond."

One of the most popular personalities ever, Don Meredith quit football when they began to boo him in Dallas restaurants. "That's nothing," recalled Layne. "Once, I got booed in the men's room."

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Joe Kapp, remembering his first season with the Vikings who later wound up in the Super Bowl: "I had a poor first season and they booed me out of the park. They said my long ball fluttered, that I was bowlegged, a dipsomaniac, a mental case and that I didn't have enough teeth. The fact is, I have all my teeth. As for the rest, who's perfect anyway?"

Brodie, who performed a thousand years for the 49ers: "I never tried to figure out the fans. Rather than look for reasons for their booing, I just went out and played my game. I have no animosity toward the fans." Yeah, and John was never ever sacked, either.

Penrose on the turning point of his career: "It was more mental than physical. I finally realized it was just a matter of relaxing and throwing the football. When I got to the point I felt comfortable I quit pressing and things worked out a lot better."

Unitas on how to attack a zone defense: "I don't know" . . . Unitas on the plank he still sleeps on to soothe his aching spine: "This damn thing is pretty comfortable. But it makes too much noise. It's supposed to help my back, but it wakes me up every time I roll over in the night. I might have to go back to a regular mattress."

Len Dawson, Super Bowl champ in 1970, 19-year pro with Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Dallas and Kansas City: "I've never lost confidence in myself. Any time you're booed it's hard to take. It irritates the hell out of me. There are days you don't do as well as others, but I'm not afraid like I was in the beginning."

Layne, Babe Parilli, Bart Starr and Y.A. Tittle once got together as a panel and picked the perfect composite QB. First requisite: the same basic requirement Abraham Lincoln set for the perfect soldier. His legs must be long enough to reach from his hips to the ground.

The perfect quarterback: Leadership—Joe Namath . . . Arm—Sonny Jurgensen . . . Legs—Greg Landry . . . Head—Johnny Unitas . . . Heart—Bob Berry . . . Body—Roman Gabriel.

There is, of course, no such thing.