

Mississippi State Quarterback History



Mississippi State quarterback history is rich and diverse, reflecting the evolution of college football in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and the unique identity of the Bulldogs. Over the years, Mississippi State has produced a variety of quarterbacks who have left their mark on the program and, in many cases, on the NFL. This article delves into the history of Mississippi State quarterbacks, exploring key players, memorable seasons, and the impact they have had on the team's success.

Early Years and the Formation of the Program

Mississippi State University, originally known as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of the State of Mississippi, established its football program in 1895. During its formative years, the quarterback position was often played by multiple players, with no standardized role. The early 20th century saw the introduction of more organized play, and as the game evolved, so did the role of the quarterback.

Key Figures in Early Mississippi State Quarterback History

1. Hugh "Pappy" McGowan (1920s): One of the earliest notable quarterbacks for Mississippi State, McGowan led the team during a time when the ground game dominated college football. His leadership helped establish a competitive spirit within the program.
2. Charlie "Choo Choo" Justice (1940s): Although he is better known for his time at North Carolina, Justice briefly played for Mississippi State. His influence on the game during the post-war era is undeniable, and he set the stage for future quarterbacks.

The Rise of Mississippi State Quarterbacks in the SEC Era

The formation of the Southeastern Conference in 1933 marked a turning point for Mississippi State and its football program. The competition intensified, necessitating a new breed of athletes, including quarterbacks who could adapt to a more pass-heavy style of play.

1970s and 1980s: A New Breed of Quarterbacks

1. John Bond (1978-1981): Bond was a dual-threat quarterback who could both pass and run effectively. He became the first Mississippi State quarterback to lead the team to a bowl game, the 1980 Sun Bowl, and remains one of the most celebrated players in the school's history.
2. Don Smith (1982-1985): Smith took over as the starting quarterback in the early 1980s. His tenure saw a shift towards a more strategic passing game, setting records for completions and passing yards that would stand for years.

The 1990s: Offensive Evolution

The 1990s was a decade of transformation for Mississippi State football, with a significant emphasis on offensive production. This period saw the emergence of several standout quarterbacks who helped elevate the program's profile.

Notable Quarterbacks of the 1990s

- Jackie Sherrill Era: Under head coach Jackie Sherrill, the Bulldogs became known for their explosive offense.

1. Kerry Joseph (1992-1995): Joseph was a dynamic player who showcased his versatility, contributing both in the air and on the ground. His dual-threat capabilities made him a nightmare for defenses.
2. Derek Taite (1995-1998): Taite continued the trend of dual-threat quarterbacks, leading the Bulldogs to significant victories. With a strong arm and quick feet, he was a pivotal figure during his time.

The 2000s: A Return to Tradition

The early 2000s saw a shift in coaching staff and a return to a more traditional style of play. While the offensive schemes changed, the quarterback position remained crucial for success.

Key Figures of the 2000s

1. Michael Henig (2004-2007): Henig played under head coach Sylvester Croom and was known for his strong arm. He set records for passing yards and touchdowns, helping to modernize the offense during his tenure.
2. Chris Relf (2008-2011): Relf was a significant contributor to the Bulldogs' offense, particularly during Dan Mullen's coaching era. He became known for his ability to make plays with his legs as well as his arm, leading Mississippi State to their first bowl victory in 2000.

Recent Years: Dominance and NFL Prospects

The last decade has seen Mississippi State quarterbacks achieve new heights, with standout performances and increased visibility in national rankings. The emergence of star quarterbacks has not only propelled the program forward but also drawn attention from NFL scouts.

Standout Quarterbacks of the 2010s

- Tyler Russell (2010-2013): Russell was a significant player during his time, breaking several passing records and leading the Bulldogs to multiple bowl appearances. His performance against top-ranked opponents showcased his talent on a national stage.
- Dak Prescott (2013-2015): Perhaps the most famous Mississippi State quarterback, Prescott's impact was monumental. His leadership led the Bulldogs to a No. 1 ranking in the AP Poll for the first time in the program's history in 2014. Prescott became a fourth-round draft pick for the Dallas Cowboys, where he continues to shine in the NFL.

Impact of Mississippi State Quarterbacks on the Program

The history of Mississippi State quarterbacks is not just about individual accolades; it reflects the evolution of the program itself. Each quarterback has contributed to the identity of the Bulldogs and helped shape the culture of winning.

Attributes of Successful Mississippi State Quarterbacks

1. Leadership: Successful quarterbacks have consistently displayed strong leadership skills, rallying their teammates and inspiring confidence.
2. Dual-Threat Ability: The ability to pass and run effectively has been a hallmark of many standout quarterbacks, allowing for a more dynamic offense.
3. Resilience: Mississippi State quarterbacks have often faced adversity, whether due to injuries, coaching changes, or tough competition, yet they have risen to the occasion.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Mississippi State Quarterbacks

The Mississippi State quarterback history is a testament to the evolution of college football and the enduring spirit of the Bulldogs. From the early days of the program to the modern era, quarterbacks have played a pivotal role in shaping the team's success and identity. As the Bulldogs continue to strive for excellence, the legacy of their quarterbacks will undoubtedly inspire future generations. With a strong foundation and a commitment to growth, Mississippi State will continue to produce talented quarterbacks who will leave their mark both in college football and beyond.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is considered the greatest quarterback in Mississippi State history?

Many consider Dak Prescott to be the greatest quarterback in Mississippi State history due to his records, leadership, and success during his tenure from 2011 to 2015.

What notable achievements did Dak Prescott accomplish at Mississippi State?

Dak Prescott led Mississippi State to its first-ever No. 1 ranking in 2014, broke multiple school records, and finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting that year.

Who was the starting quarterback for Mississippi State during the 1990s?

In the 1990s, one of the notable starting quarterbacks was Jackie Sherrill, who coached and developed several quarterbacks during his tenure, including John Bond and Wayne Madkin.

Which Mississippi State quarterback holds the record for most passing yards in a single season?

As of October 2023, Dak Prescott holds the record for most passing yards in a single season at Mississippi State, with 3,793 yards in 2014.

What impact did the 1998 season have on Mississippi State's quarterback history?

The 1998 season was significant as quarterback Wayne Madkin led the team to an 8-4 record and a victory in the Peach Bowl, solidifying his legacy in school history.

Who was the first Mississippi State quarterback to

lead the team to a bowl game?

The first Mississippi State quarterback to lead the team to a bowl game was Don Smith in 1941, when the Bulldogs played in the Orange Bowl.

What was the significance of the 2014 season for Mississippi State quarterbacks?

The 2014 season was significant because Dak Prescott's performance not only earned him individual accolades but also elevated the entire program's status on a national level.

Which Mississippi State quarterback had a successful NFL career post-college?

Dak Prescott has had a successful NFL career, becoming the starting quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, where he has earned multiple Pro Bowl selections.

What are some common traits of successful Mississippi State quarterbacks?

Successful Mississippi State quarterbacks often exhibit strong leadership, dual-threat capabilities, and the ability to perform under pressure, as seen with players like Dak Prescott and Tyler Russell.

How has Mississippi State's quarterback play evolved over the decades?

Mississippi State's quarterback play has evolved from traditional pocket passers in the early years to more versatile, dual-threat quarterbacks in recent decades, adapting to modern offensive schemes.

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