

# Mississippi State Quarterbacks History



Mississippi State quarterbacks history is a story of evolution, resilience, and the quest for excellence in college football. As a program that has seen its fair share of ups and downs, Mississippi State has produced a variety of talented quarterbacks who have each left their mark on the school's athletic legacy. From the early days of the program to the modern era, these players have contributed to the development of the Bulldogs' football identity and have played pivotal roles in some of the team's most significant achievements.

## Early Years: The Foundations of Mississippi State Football

The history of Mississippi State football dates back to the late 19th century, but it wasn't until the mid-20th century that the quarterback position began to emerge as a crucial element of the team's success.

## Pre-1960s: The Ground Game Dominates

In its early years, Mississippi State predominantly relied on a run-heavy offensive scheme, which limited the impact of quarterbacks. Most players who took snaps were more like game managers than standout stars. Notable figures during this period included:

1. Hugh "Hound Dog" Smith (1939-1941) - One of the first recognized quarterbacks at Mississippi State, Smith led the team during a time when passing was rarely utilized.
2. Jackie Parker (1948-1950) - A versatile athlete who excelled not only at quarterback but also as a running back and defensive back. Parker's contributions helped establish the program's identity.

3. Don Smith (1958-1960) - Known for his leadership, Smith helped guide the Bulldogs to competitive seasons in the late 1950s.

## **The 1960s: The Rise of the Passing Game**

As the game evolved, so did Mississippi State's offensive strategies. The 1960s marked the transition from a predominantly run-based approach to a more balanced offense that featured passing plays.

- Wade Walker (1966-1968) - Known for his strong arm and accuracy, Walker was instrumental in the Bulldogs' offensive transformation, setting the stage for future quarterbacks.
- John Bond (1976-1978) - A dual-threat quarterback, Bond not only led the team in passing but also made significant contributions with his legs, making him a dynamic force on the field.

## **The 1980s and 1990s: A New Era of Quarterback Talent**

The late 20th century saw Mississippi State begin to establish itself as a competitive program in the Southeastern Conference. Quarterbacks from this era became more prominent figures, leading the team to significant victories and bowl appearances.

### **Standout Performers**

1. John Bond (continued impact) - After his playing days, Bond's influence on Mississippi State football continued, as he was later involved in coaching and mentoring future quarterbacks.
2. Scott McCarron (1982-1984) - A reliable passer who contributed to several successful seasons.
3. Derek Tate (1986-1989) - An athletic quarterback noted for his ability to make plays outside the pocket and lead the team to bowl games.

## **The 1990s: The Comeback of the Bulldogs**

The 1990s were a pivotal decade for Mississippi State football, highlighted by the arrival of head coach Jackie Sherrill. This period saw the emergence of several talented quarterbacks who helped elevate the program to new heights.

- Jackie Sherrill's Impact: Under Sherrill's leadership, the Bulldogs became a formidable force in the SEC.
- K.J. Wright (1998-2000) - Though better known as an NFL linebacker, Wright's time as a quarterback in high school showcased his athleticism and versatility.

## **2000s: Quarterbacks and Record Breakers**

The 2000s ushered in a new generation of Mississippi State quarterbacks, with many of them

achieving significant personal and team milestones.

## **Notable Quarterbacks**

1. Drew Hollingshead (2002-2005) - A workhorse for the Bulldogs, Hollingshead's leadership on and off the field was crucial during a transitional period for the program.
2. Michael Henig (2005-2008) - Known for his ability to elevate the play of his teammates, Henig set several school records for passing yards and touchdowns.
3. Tyler Russell (2010-2013) - Russell had a standout career, becoming one of the most productive quarterbacks in Mississippi State history. He holds multiple records, including career passing yards and touchdowns.

## **Coaching Changes and Their Impact**

The coaching carousel in the 2000s affected the quarterback position significantly. With each new regime, offensive philosophies would shift, leading to varying levels of success.

- Dan Mullen's Arrival: In 2009, Dan Mullen took over as head coach, emphasizing a spread offense that allowed for greater quarterback involvement in both the passing and running game.

## **2010s: The Golden Era of Mississippi State Quarterbacks**

The 2010s represented a golden era for Mississippi State quarterbacks, with several players achieving remarkable success and recognition.

### **Standout Quarterbacks of the 2010s**

1. Dak Prescott (2013-2015) - Perhaps the most recognized figure in Mississippi State's quarterback history, Prescott led the Bulldogs to their first-ever No. 1 ranking in the AP Poll during the 2014 season. His dual-threat capabilities and leadership on the field made him a beloved figure among fans.
2. Nick Fitzgerald (2015-2018) - Following Prescott, Fitzgerald continued the tradition of dual-threat quarterbacks at Mississippi State. He became the school's all-time leading rusher for quarterbacks and set numerous records, including career touchdowns.
3. Tommy Stevens (2019) - A transfer from Penn State, Stevens brought experience and leadership to the Bulldogs, helping to maintain the program's competitive edge.

# **The 2020s: Current Trends and Future Prospects**

As Mississippi State enters the 2020s, the quarterback position remains a focal point of the program. New head coach Mike Leach introduced a pass-heavy offense that emphasizes aerial attacks, which may redefine the role of quarterbacks in Starkville.

## **Current Quarterbacks and Emerging Talent**

- Will Rogers (2020-present) - Rogers has quickly become a standout under Leach, setting multiple passing records and establishing himself as one of the top quarterbacks in the SEC.
- Future Prospects: With a focus on developing young talent, Mississippi State continues to recruit quarterbacks who fit the modern style of play, potentially leading to another era of success.

## **Conclusion: The Legacy of Mississippi State Quarterbacks**

The history of Mississippi State quarterbacks is a rich tapestry woven with stories of triumph, challenges, and evolution. Each quarterback has played a vital role in shaping the program's identity and success over the years. As the Bulldogs continue to adapt and grow, the legacy of their quarterbacks will undoubtedly influence future generations of players, coaches, and fans alike. With a solid foundation and a commitment to excellence, Mississippi State football is poised to continue its tradition of quarterbacking success in the years to come.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who is considered the greatest quarterback in Mississippi State history?**

Dak Prescott is often regarded as the greatest quarterback in Mississippi State history due to his record-setting performances and leadership during his tenure from 2011 to 2015.

### **What year did Dak Prescott lead Mississippi State to its highest-ever ranking?**

Dak Prescott led Mississippi State to its highest-ever ranking of No. 1 in the AP Poll during the 2014 season.

### **Which Mississippi State quarterback won the SEC Offensive Player of the Year?**

Dak Prescott won the SEC Offensive Player of the Year award in 2014.

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

John Bond served as the starting quarterback for Mississippi State during the late 1980s and early 1990s, known for his dual-threat capabilities.

## **Which Mississippi State quarterback set the school record for career touchdown passes?**

Dak Prescott holds the school record for career touchdown passes with 70 touchdowns.

## **What notable achievement did Mississippi State quarterback Tyler Russell accomplish in 2012?**

Tyler Russell became the first Mississippi State quarterback to throw for over 2,800 yards in a single season in 2012.

## **Which Mississippi State quarterback had a significant impact in the 2016 season?**

Nick Fitzgerald had a significant impact in the 2016 season, setting multiple school records and showcasing his dual-threat capabilities.

## **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.

## **What milestone did Mississippi State quarterbacks achieve in the 2018 season?**

In the 2018 season, Mississippi State quarterbacks combined for over 2,000 passing yards, marking a significant milestone in the program's offensive development.

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