

West Virginia Quarterbacks History



West Virginia quarterbacks history is a rich tapestry woven with remarkable talent, memorable moments, and a legacy that has significantly contributed to college football. As one of the premier programs in the NCAA, the West Virginia Mountaineers have produced a myriad of quarterbacks who have not only excelled at the collegiate level but have also made their mark in the professional ranks. This article delves into the history of West Virginia quarterbacks, highlighting key players, milestones, and the evolution of the position within the program.

Early Years and Foundation

The history of West Virginia quarterbacks can be traced back to the early 1900s when the sport was still in its infancy. The Mountaineers began their football program in 1891, but it wasn't until the 1920s that the quarterback position began to gain prominence.

Pioneering Quarterbacks

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, several players laid the groundwork for future quarterbacks. Notable early quarterbacks include:

- Hugh "Red" Sanders (1930-1932): Sanders was one of the first notable quarterbacks for the Mountaineers, showing promise and setting benchmarks for future players.
- Paul "Bear" Bryant (1932-1935): Although better known as a coach, Bryant played quarterback at West Virginia and contributed to the development of the program.

These early figures established a foundation for the quarterback position, emphasizing leadership and tactical execution, qualities that would define West Virginia's offensive strategy in the years to come.

The Rise of the Mountaineers

The 1960s and 70s marked a significant era for West Virginia football, characterized by increased competitiveness and the emergence of standout quarterbacks.

Notable Quarterbacks of the 1960s and 70s

- Bobby Bowden (1958-1962): Before becoming a legendary coach at Florida State, Bowden was a talented quarterback at West Virginia. His leadership and passing skills were instrumental in several victories.
- Oliver Luck (1978-1981): A dual-threat quarterback, Luck's ability to pass and run made him a dynamic player. He would later gain fame as the athletic director at West Virginia and the father of NFL quarterback Andrew Luck.

Golden Era of the 1980s and 90s

The 1980s and 90s heralded a golden era for West Virginia quarterbacks. The program consistently produced high-caliber talent, leading to national recognition and competitive success.

Key Players of the 1980s and 90s

- Jeff Hostetler (1981-1983): Hostetler led the Mountaineers to the 1988 Sugar Bowl and later enjoyed success in the NFL, winning a Super Bowl with the New York Giants.
- Major Harris (1987-1989): Harris revolutionized the quarterback position with his electrifying play. He led West Virginia to the 1989 Fiesta Bowl and finished third in the Heisman Trophy voting that year.
- Dameon Hunter (1993-1995): Known for his strong arm and leadership, Hunter helped maintain West Virginia's competitive edge during the mid-90s.

This era was marked by offensive innovation, with quarterbacks showcasing their ability to pass effectively while also being mobile threats, paving the way for future dual-threat quarterbacks.

Recent Developments in the 21st Century

As college football evolved in the 21st century, so did the style of play at West Virginia. The Mountaineers adapted to the spread offense, which emphasized speed and precision.

Prominent 21st Century Quarterbacks

- Geno Smith (2009-2012): Smith is often regarded as one of the best quarterbacks in West Virginia

history. He set numerous passing records, including the single-season passing yardage record, and became the first Mountaineer quarterback to be selected in the second round of the NFL Draft, where he was picked by the New York Jets.

- Will Grier (2018-2019): Grier transferred from Florida and made an immediate impact, becoming a star in West Virginia's high-octane offense. He broke multiple records and was a finalist for the prestigious Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award.

- Jarret Doege (2020-2021): Doege continued the tradition of solid quarterback play, leading the team with poise and efficient passing, earning recognition for his contributions during his tenure.

Quarterback Development and Coaching Influence

The success of West Virginia quarterbacks can be attributed not only to the players themselves but also to the coaching staff that developed them.

Influential Coaches

- Don Nehlen (1980-2000): Nehlen was instrumental in shaping the Mountaineers' identity and fostering quarterback talent. His emphasis on a balanced offensive attack laid the groundwork for future successes.

- Rich Rodriguez (2001-2007): Under Rodriguez, West Virginia adopted a spread offense that highlighted the dual-threat capabilities of quarterbacks. This system allowed players like Pat White and Noel Devine to excel.

- Dana Holgorsen (2011-2018): Holgorsen continued the legacy of offensive innovation, further refining the passing game and helping quarterbacks reach their potential.

Legacy and Impact

The legacy of West Virginia quarterbacks is not just measured in statistics but also in the program's cultural impact. The Mountaineers have produced a significant number of NFL quarterbacks who have achieved success at the professional level.

Impact on the NFL

Several West Virginia quarterbacks have made a name for themselves in the NFL:

- Jeff Hostetler: A Super Bowl champion with the New York Giants, Hostetler's success in the NFL cemented his legacy as one of the program's greats.

- Geno Smith: Smith's rise to starting quarterback for the Jets showcased the talent that West Virginia quarterbacks could bring to the professional level.

- Will Grier: Grier's journey continues as he seeks to establish himself in the NFL after being drafted by the Carolina Panthers.

Conclusion

The history of West Virginia quarterbacks is a testament to the program's enduring legacy in college football. With a tradition of excellence and a commitment to developing talent, the Mountaineers have produced quarterbacks who have not only excelled in college but have also transitioned successfully to the professional ranks. As the program continues to evolve, the future remains bright for aspiring quarterbacks at West Virginia, ensuring that this rich history will only grow deeper in the years to come.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is considered the greatest quarterback in West Virginia history?

Many fans consider Major Harris, who played from 1987 to 1990, to be the greatest quarterback in West Virginia history due to his dynamic play and leading the team to the 1989 national championship game.

What significant achievement did Pat White accomplish during his time at West Virginia?

Pat White became the first quarterback in NCAA history to win four bowl games as a starter and is known for his dual-threat capability, leading the Mountaineers to a Sugar Bowl victory in 2008.

Which West Virginia quarterback set multiple school records for passing yards?

Geno Smith set numerous passing records during his time at West Virginia from 2009 to 2012, including the most career passing yards with over 11,000 yards.

What role did West Virginia quarterbacks play in the spread offense revolution?

West Virginia quarterbacks, particularly under coach Rich Rodriguez, were instrumental in popularizing the spread offense, showcasing their ability to run and pass effectively.

How did Marc Bulger's NFL career impact perceptions of West Virginia quarterbacks?

Marc Bulger's successful NFL career, highlighted by multiple Pro Bowl selections, helped elevate the perception of West Virginia quarterbacks as capable of succeeding at the professional level.

What was the significance of the 2005 Sugar Bowl for West

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