

RANKING THE QUARTERBACKS
The best of Stanford and Cal
A great debate
Schools' all-time lists filled with quality

- David Bush, Chronicle Staff Writer
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Disproportionate to their football success, or lack of same, Cal and Stanford consistently have produced outstanding quarterbacks.

The sport's tradition at both schools is characterized by flashes of glory interrupted by decades of frustration. Still, the QBs keep coming: Plunkett, Morton, Albert, Kapp, Elway, Pawlawski. For followers of local college football, first names are not necessary when it comes to the men who have, ahem, passed through the local scene.

Going into this year, when Aaron Rodgers at Cal and Trent Edwards at Stanford seem poised to add their surnames to the ledger, The Chronicle thought it would be fun to rate the top 10 QBs at each school.

These rankings basically were compiled by one who has watched the local football scene closely for 50 years and researched back beyond. Experts at each school were consulted and their opinions taken into account. This still is pretty much one man's doing, so if you don't agree, you know where to bring your beef.

There certainly is no debate about the quality. Of the 20 names, nine were first-round NFL draft choices, four going as the top pick overall. Six are in the College Football Foundation Hall of Fame and, though this list is about only college achievements, four have started Super Bowls.

Pitfalls await any attempt at all-time rankings. Comparing eras is a chancy proposition, but I suspect that especially the names at the top of each list would have been able to succeed in anybody's time.

The lists were not integrated, picking the order for each school was hard enough, but it is hard to argue against Jim Plunkett for No. 1 overall. His biggest piece of evidence is the Heisman Trophy on his mantel, but he also engineered an upset Rose Bowl victory that in retrospect should not have been a surprise.

That said, it would have been fun to watch Craig Morton or Joe Kapp operate with the kind of surrounding talent Plunkett had. His Stanford team sent 10 players to the NFL. Kapp and Morton went into the pros alone.

Here are the rankings from each school:

STANFORD

The first five separate themselves from the pack. Plunkett clearly is No. 1. Even Stanford thinks so, at its football centennial a few years ago, he was the all-time top player. No. 2 wasn't so easy. Elway can make a great case, especially when you add those two Super Bowl victories as a pro, but Albert was the country's first T-formation quarterback, and his brilliance led to an undefeated team in 1940.

John Brodie gets the nod for fourth, although Bobby Garrett makes it close. Brodie's team was 4-6 his senior season, but he was outstanding. Garrett was probably as good a defensive back as he was a passer, and he had nine interceptions as a senior. The Cleveland Browns took him No. 1 in 1954, but he lasted only one year in the NFL.

The rest are all good enough to be ranked in almost any order. The late Don Bunce replaced Plunkett and led Stanford to a second straight Rose Bowl in the 1971 season. "That winning drive against Michigan was one of the greatest I've ever seen," said John Ralston, who coached both title teams. "He completed every pass."

Mike Boryla had the toughest act to follow (those Rose Bowls) and made himself an All-American.

Steve Stenstrom had four years to pile up stats, and he made the most of them. He not only is the school's all-time leader in attempts, completions and yards, he also is the best of the top 10 passers in percentage. He threw often and effectively.

Gary Kerkorian does not have the stats of Stenstrom, or any of the other top Stanford QBs, but he also was the leader of a Rose Bowl representative.

There probably could be a 20-way tie for 10th, but Steve Dils' one year was outstanding.

This list by no means exhausts the reservoir of Stanford QBs, and we offer our apologies to Guy Benjamin, Dick Norman, Mark Butterfield, John Paye, Turk Schonert and Todd Husak.

CAL

Across the bay, Morton edges Kapp for the top ranking. Morton's career did not begin until the sixth game of his sophomore year. Injured returning kicks in training camp (that's right, returning kicks) he missed the first 5 1/2 games. With Cal trailing Penn State badly, he left the bench in the second quarter and nearly rallied the Bears to victory. A perfectly thrown pass went through a receiver's hands in the fourth quarter, otherwise the Bears might have had better than a 23-21 defeat.

Close losses were the story of Morton's career. As a senior, the Bears were 3-7, but three conference losses were by a total of 14 points, and all the games turned late.

Former Stanford coach and Cal grad Ralston often has said that Kapp could have started at all 22 positions on the '58 Pacific Coast Conference champs. Still, Kapp was born to play quarterback, and he led Cal's last trip to the Rose Bowl.

Mike Pawlawski showed much of the Kapp spirit in leading Cal's 1991 Citrus Bowl champs to a No. 7 national ranking.

As a junior-college transfer, Joe Roth did not become the starter until a few games into his junior year. And as a senior, he already was showing some effects of the cancer that would take his life within the year. Courageous on and off the field, he earned the unique distinction of having his number retired despite a relatively brief career. As a junior, his team led the nation in total offense, and although he had Chuck Muncie and Wesley Walker to help, Roth was brilliant.

Although Bob Celeri passed for 1,081 yards in 1949, Paul Larson really was Cal's first great T-formation quarterback. He showed Berkeley how the modern offense could work as he led the nation in passing yardage (1,537) as a senior.

Steve Bartkowski might be higher, but he had only the one great season, and nearly gave up football entirely for baseball.

The other four -- Kyle Boller, Dave Barr, Troy Taylor and Rich Campbell -- are bunched pretty closely, and some of those who didn't make the list, such as Gale Gilbert and Pat Barnes, can present strong arguments for their inclusion.

So that's what Edwards and Rodgers are facing, and it's an impressive history. Both quarterbacks might be good enough to make the list, and the computer keyboard does come with a delete button.

Top 10 Stanford quarterbacks

1. Jim Plunkett (1968-70) Bay Area's only Heisman winner. Could make a case he is the best college quarterback of all time.

2. Frankie Albert (1939-41) Without this first key practitioner of the T-formation, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

3. John Elway (1979-82) Nobody had more talent.

4. John Brodie (1954-56) Was consensus All-American in '56, but Notre Dame's quarterback won the Heisman.

5. Bobby Garrett (1951-53) Two-way star who threw 17 touchdown passes and had nine interceptions as a DB.

6. Don Bunce (1969-71) If for nothing else, winning drive in Rose Bowl.
7. Mike Boryla (1971-73) Followed two Rose Bowls and barely missed one himself.
8. Steve Stenstrom (1991-94) Has the numbers to back his case.
9. Gary Kerkorian (1949-51) Another from the two-way era. He led the only bowl team between Albert and Plunkett.
10. Steve Dils (1977-78) Started only one year ('78), but what a year it was.

Also considered: Guy Benjamin, Todd Husak, John Paye, Dick Norman, Turk Schonert, Chad Hutchinson, Mark Butterfield..

Top 10 Cal quarterbacks

1. Craig Morton (1962-64) His teams won eight games in three years and he's in the College Hall of Fame. 'Nuff said.
2. Joe Kapp (1956-58) Took a team to a Rose Bowl virtually by himself.
3. Mike Pawlawski (1988-91) The physical and spiritual leader of the best team ('91) in the past 25 years, led the Bears to two bowl victories.
- 4. Joe Roth (1975-76) Life tragically cut short by cancer. Led possibly the best-ever Cal offense ('75).**
5. Paul Larson (1952-54) Threw for 1,537 yards in 1954, unheard of 50 years ago.
6. Steve Bartkowski (1972-74) One great year and he was the first pick in the '75 NFL Draft.
7. Kyle Boller (1999-2002) Blossomed as a senior when he finally got some coaching.
8. Dave Barr (1992-94) Injury might have cost Cal a high national ranking and even a Rose Bowl in the 1993 season.
9. Troy Taylor (1986-89) Set a ton of records that lasted a decade.
10. Rich Campbell (1978-80) Would be higher but declined between junior and senior seasons.

Also considered: Bob Celeri, Gale Gilbert, Pat Barnes, Dave Penhall..

Bay Area QB breakdown

Nine NFL first-round draft choices: Morton, Bartkowski, Campbell, Plunkett, Brodie, Garrett, Albert, Elway, Boller.

Four No. 1 overall NFL draft choices: Bartkowski, Plunkett, Elway, Garrett.

Four Super Bowl starters: Elway, Plunkett, Morton, Kapp.

Six College Hall of Famers: Albert, Brodie, Plunkett, Elway, Morton, Kapp.

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