

## The Count: Warner's Playoff Brilliance Continues

By Carl Bialik  
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In between being intercepted on the first play of the game and stripped of the ball on the last play, Aaron Rodgers was terrific in [the best game](#) of the NFL's wild-card weekend. But Kurt Warner was better — historically good. He completed 29 of 33 passes for 379 yards, five touchdowns and no interceptions, with a 154.1 passer rating. It was, by at least one measure, one of the two best playoff performances by a quarterback in history.



Associated Press

Kurt Warner celebrated his near-flawless performance against Green Bay.

Before Warner's big game, [10 other quarterbacks](#) in the last 50 years had a passer rating above 150. But nine of those QBs did so in a game in which they threw 25 or fewer passes for fewer than 300 yards. It's easier to sustain that level of play when given fewer opportunities to mess up. Warner threw 33 times, while his team ran the ball just 23 times. The only other QB to sustain such a high level of excellence over more than 25 attempts in a playoff game

was Peyton Manning, who completed 22 of 26 passes for 377 yards and five touchdowns, with no picks, [against Denver](#) in 2004. (Manning and Warner also have the only two [other playoff games](#) with at least 310 yards and a rating of 140 or higher.) The passer rating, incidentally, [doesn't account for sacks](#), but both QBs were excellent at eluding the rush — Warner was sacked just once for four yards, while Manning wasn't sacked at all. Rodgers on Sunday exhibited his characteristic reluctance to throw the ball under pressure, taking five sacks and fumbling on that game-deciding play.

Manning's and Warner's performances were also [two of just 13](#) by a QB in the past half-century, in the regular season or postseason, to feature at least five touchdown passes and more touchdown passes than incompletions, without an interception. Four of those 13 performances came 25 years ago or more, including by Hall of Famers Frank Tarkenton and John Elway. But nine others were delivered by active quarterbacks in the past six seasons. One was by Ben Roethlisberger, last year's Super Bowl champion whose Steelers just missed this year's playoffs. Another pair came off the arm of Tom Brady and another from Carson Palmer. Those two quarterbacks lost this weekend. (Brady certainly didn't play like [an MVP](#) in his loss Sunday to the Baltimore Ravens.) And five more came from QBs who will be in action next weekend — Warner, Drew Brees — Warner's opponent next weekend — and Manning (three times). It may not be [the golden age of punting](#), but it's certainly a golden age of passing.

Warner's latest terrific playoff game improves an already sterling [career playoff record](#) through 12 games. Extrapolated to 16 games, Warner's performance against some of the NFL's best defensive teams in the postseason would compare favorably to some of the best regular seasons of all time. He'd have 4,996 passing yards, [more than any season](#) but Brees's last year and Dan Marino's in 1984. He'd also have 41 TDs and a passer rating of 104.6. [Just four seasons since 1920](#) have featured at least 4,000 passing yards, 40 touchdowns and a rating of 100 or higher — Marino's, one by Brady, one by Manning and Warner's own 1999 season.

Warner's been aided by some favorable playoff venues. Seven of his 12 games have come at home — including three in the last two seasons, despite the Cardinals' NFC-worst record among playoff teams each season — three in neutral stadiums at Super Bowls, one on the road in a dome and one on the road in a warm climate. Though the Packers this season had [the NFL's No. 6 ranked pass defense](#), according to Football Outsiders, they had played only one game in a dome against a top QB — their former teammate Brett Favre, who [played nearly flawlessly](#) in a 30-23 win. (Warner attempted only six passes before leaving the prior week's Packers-Cardinals game to rest for the [rematch](#).) And Green Bay was [below average](#) at defending passes deep up the middle, which Warner exploited repeatedly on Sunday.