

January 12, 2009

Making Warner's case for Canton

Last week I said that if Kurt Warner takes the Cards to the NFC title game, he would be a lock for the Hall of Fame. I'll admit lock is a bit strong, but I'm here, as a Rams schill, to make the case for Warner. I'm doing it now, because if he wins Sunday and leads the Cards to the Super Bowl, he's in anyway.

But if he loses Sunday and then retires, I still think he should go. Here are the facts:

Warner's resume:

- Two-time league MVP
- Super Bowl champion
- Super Bowl MVP
- Played in two Super Bowls
- 7-2 record in the postseason
- In 101 career starts in the regular season, he has thrown 181 touchdowns and 114 interceptions. In those 101 starts, his teams have a record of 57-44.
- In 10 seasons (he appeared in just one game in 1998), he's thrown over 30 TD passes three times, including throwing 41 in 1999. He's also gone over 4,000 yards three times, falling 170 yards short of 5,000 in 2001.
- In the three seasons he has started all 16 games, his team has at least made it to the NFC championship game (2 Super Bowls and this year).
- In each of his playoff losses (2000 wild-card to Saints, 2001 Super Bowl to Pats), he threw for 365 yards.
- In the playoffs (including this year), he's 7-2, with 19 TDs, 12 INTs and 2,712 yards.
- He also has the third-best passer rating of all time, but I don't recognize passer rating as a stat, so I won't use it as an argument.

I'll admit, most of his numbers are skewed, since he was an incredible 35-8 in his first three seasons with the Rams, winning the two MVPs and the Super Bowl MVP while going to two Super Bowls. If you do the math, he's 22-36 over his other seven seasons, including a 0-7 mark his final two seasons in St. Louis and an 8-18 mark in his first three seasons in Arizona. In between those two places, he went 5-4 with the Giants before being replaced by Eli Manning. He went 9-7 this year with Arizona.

You can say, when he's on, he's great and when he's bad, he's bad.

Health has been an issue with Warner, as he has only started every game just three times, and only made over 10 starts just three other times. But in the three seasons he's been healthy, he's won the MVP twice and was in the running this year until the Cards stumbled down the stretch.

He is also very prone to fumbling the ball, as he has coughed it up 91 times in his career, losing 40 of them.

If you want to argue against him going into the Hall, you can easily point to a pretty much mediocre career after his first three years in St. Louis, and you can point to the fact that he's only been able to play every game just three times. You could also say the fumble/interception numbers are too high as well. You could also say most



of his big numbers are a product of a gimmick offense in St. Louis, and I think all of those arguments would be fair. You could also say his wife has wacky hair and that alone should keep him out. That would also be fair, although any woman who isn't afraid to take on Mike Martz's ego is OK with me.

Here are my rebuttals:

Only six other players (Peyton Manning, Brett Favre, Steve Young, Joe Montana, Johnny Unitas and Jim Brown) have won multiple MVPs, and they are all in the Hall of Fame

Warner played well enough to be a two-time Super Bowl MVP, which would've put him in right there.

Many of Warner's injuries were a product of his toughness. Like the Super Bowl-winning pass to Ike Bruce (another Hall of Famer, if you ask me), Warner hung in to the last second, got clocked by Jevon Kearse, but got the pass off. I've watched the tape of that win a few times over the years, and he gets absolutely hammered throughout that game. Over his NFL career, he has taken a beating. Yes, he hangs on to the ball way too long, but he's not afraid to take a hit or wait an extra second for a receiver to get open.

He has revived two franchises. When he came to the Rams, they were the laughingstock of the league. In three seasons, he won a Super Bowl and two NFC titles and made them the most dominant team in the NFL. When he came to the Cards, they also were a doormat, and now he has taken them further than any other Cardinal team in history.

As for the gimmick offense: Yes, Martz's system allowed him to put up big numbers, but Marc Bulger, whom the Rams chose over Warner after the 2005 season, has struggled after a fast start. Just know this: In 2003, the Rams went 13-3 with Bulger, but lost in the first round of the playoffs to Jake Delhomme and the Panthers with pretty much the same offense Warner took to two Super Bowls. Bulger did win a playoff game the following year, but got crushed by the Falcons in the divisional round.

Warner also had a stellar Arena career before coming to the Rams. It is, after all, the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Warren Moon's Canadian stats counted, eh?

Finally, Warner is a solid citizen. He's never been in trouble and his grocery-boy-to-Super-Bowl-MVP story should be an inspiration to anyone. Now I know some may be turned off by his constant references to God and Jesus, but you know what, the guy is genuine. He has never wavered from his religious beliefs and has never proven to be a phony.

I think his three seasons alone in St. Louis are enough to get him in, but I understand arguments against him going to Canton. But if he takes the Cards to the Super Bowl, he's in, no questions asked.
