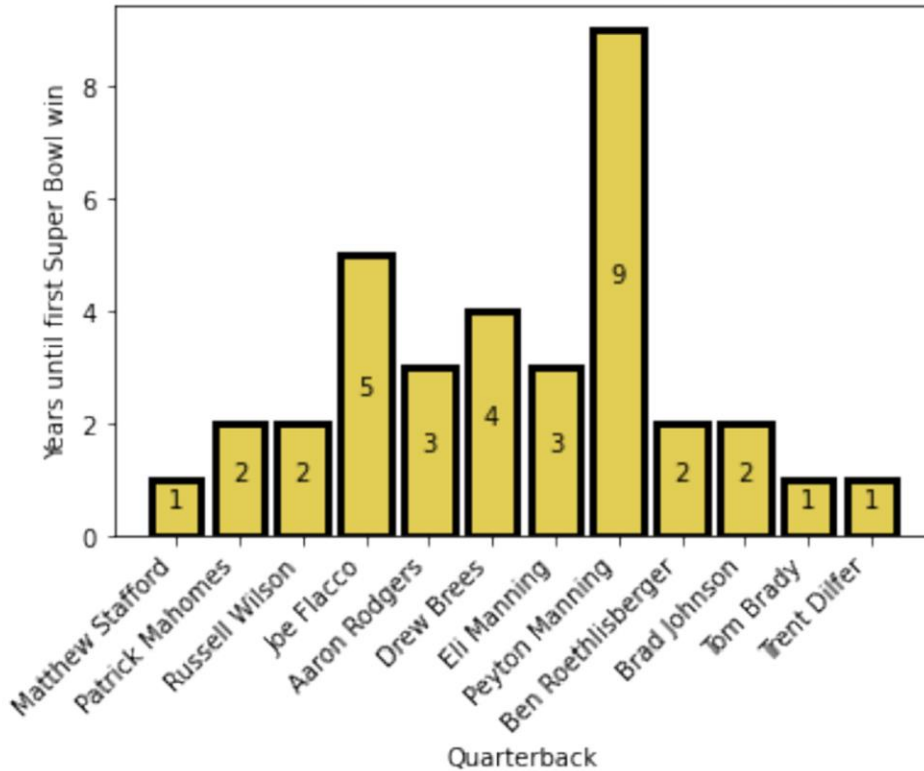


# **When Should You Move On From a Quarterback?**

Many in the media argue and debate over which quarterback should be drafted by which team. You will often hear broadcasters discuss which players have the most potential, who is the most pro-ready, or which quarterback fits which scheme the best. However, half a decade after each draft, when said quarterbacks are ready to get their second NFL deals, the media always seems to agree on who should be resigned and who shouldn't. The general consensus always seems to be that if a quarterback was able to show any semblance of success during their rookie deal, they should be brought back at any cost as the position is viewed as incredibly difficult to draft. It is this way of thinking that sees both Super Bowl winner Patrick Mahomes and yet-to-be-a-playoff-winner Kyler Murray receive mega deals just a few years into their rookie deals. As this study sheds further insight and clarity into the quarterback drafting process, it is also time to rid the NFL of this archaic resigning practice, increase the turnover of quarterbacks, and play to win Super Bowls, not playoff games.

Year of First Super Bowl Win by QB (Adjusted)



The above graph shows how many years it took a quarterback to win a Super Bowl (1-indexed), adjusted via two considerations:

- 1) A player's year count is reset back to 1 when they switch teams.
- 2) A player's year count only begins upon their first year of starting; years where a quarterback was not their team's primary starter do not count towards the players total.

One of the immediate observations you will make about this graph is that half of the quarterbacks who have won a Super Bowl since 2000 have done so in their first two years as a starter for their team. Perhaps more important, every one of these quarterbacks won a Super Bowl in their first five years of starting, which is also, coincidentally, the length of a first-round rookie's contract. The only exception to that rule is Peyton Manning, and thus such an exception

should be aptly named the ‘Peyton Manning exception’. Let’s explore this finding, as well as the exception, using a real-world example in Kyler Murray.

Murray is an incredibly intriguing quarterback. His raw athleticism and flashes of greatness make him a fan favorite and a long-term contract allows managers and coaches alike to score brownie points in the media and fanbase, particularly when he is playing well.

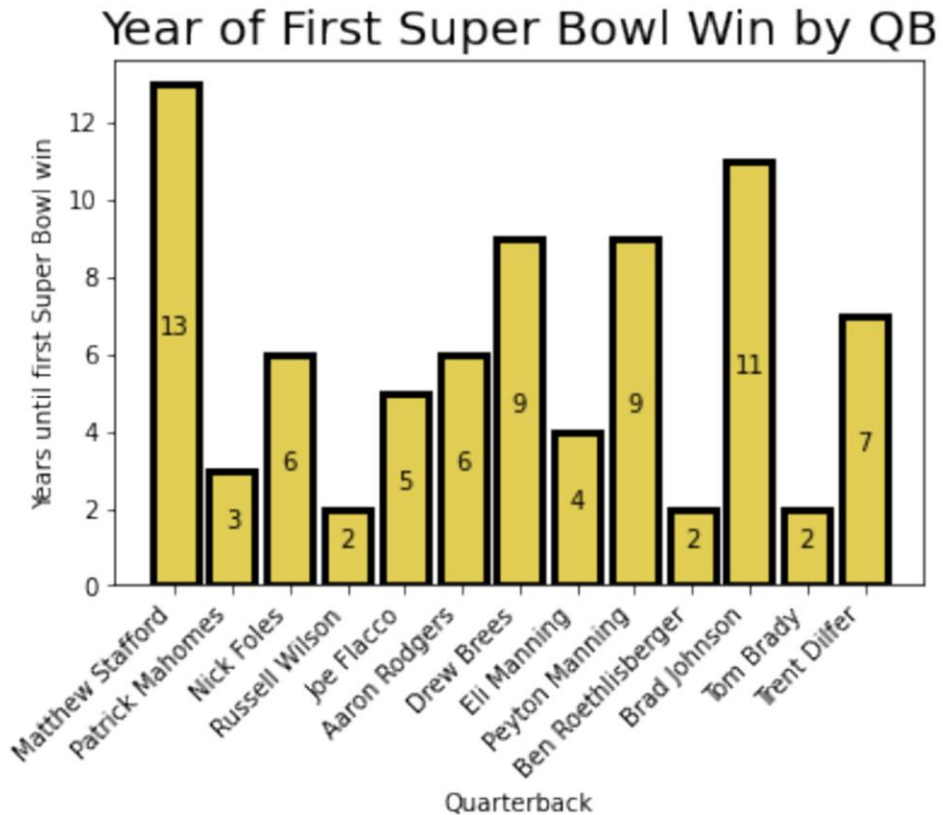
Concurrently, and much less discussed, those same two traits also make him an easy scapegoat when he and his team aren’t playing well, taking much of the pressure off of those same managers and coaches in that tough position. That being said, his lack of overall success should not be ignored by those in the Cardinals front office. Regardless of many flashes of greatness Murray has had, he still has zero playoff wins on just one appearance in three whole years of playing. Many are quick to blame other factors for Murray’s lack of playoff success, however, regardless of how many excuses there are and their varying validity, Murray still has zero playoff wins.

The Cardinals are correct in their decision not to move off of Murray immediately. As aforementioned, he is only three years into his career. The previously mentioned data suggests that he still has two more years to achieve success in Arizona before the verdict on his career there can be made. However, his recently signed five-year extension keeps Murray in Arizona for an extra half-decade *after* this period expires. Assuming Super Bowls is the priority, such an extension so early into his career should worry the Cardinals, their fans, front office, coaching staff, players, and most importantly, Murray himself.

So where did it go wrong for Kyler? Kyler Murray was drafted on a team with a first-year coach, which means he was dropped into an experimental system with no proof of success on the professional level. Furthermore, following his rookie year, Murray had a complete

overhaul of his wide receiver room. While the players Arizona added (namely DeAndre Hopkins) were undoubtedly more talented than his previous wide receiver core, Murray still had to spend an entire second year developing chemistry with new wide receivers, when that same chemistry should have been developed in his rookie season. In fact, while most young quarterbacks are offered some stability, Murray's top targets have consistently changed throughout his time in Arizona. For example, Patrick Mahomes could consistently rely on Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce during his first five years in Kansas City. In part to such great stability, Mahomes won a Super Bowl. Meanwhile, Murray is projected to have a fourth most-targeted-receiver in his fourth season due to the loss of Christian Kirk (2021 Cardinals most targeted receiver), suspension of DeAndre Hopkins (2020), and retirement of Larry Fitzgerald (2019). A third reason for Murray's Arizona short comings could be his 2021 injury, which sidelined him for three games and seemingly ended an impressive stretch of his.

While none of the aforementioned problems are Murray's fault, it simply does not matter. The Cardinals have mismanaged the Kyler Murray era in Arizona and have cost him a great deal of success in his career. While his extension will allow him to make the money he deserves, it will not grant him the success he deserves unless he achieves it first in the next two seasons before his \$40 million contract extension kicks in. Assuming Murray could have gotten the money he deserves elsewhere, the following chart suggests that he also could have won immediately elsewhere.



Above, you will see the same chart as before, this time with no adjustments. That is, just a pure count of the number of years in the NFL that it took each championship winning quarterback of this century to win their first Super Bowl. What this perception of the data suggests is that older quarterbacks still have value. When used in tandem with the first chart presented in this section, it is made apparent that it took Matthew Stafford, for example, 13 years in the league to win his first Super Bowl, but just one year after changing teams. Similar examples can be seen in the cases of Drew Brees, Trent Dilfer, and Brad Johnson, who all had Super Bowl success only after changing squads. Another peculiar case, that of Aaron Rodgers, suggests that it is also ok to reward extra years for players who do not start within the first few years of their careers.

Ultimately, the combination of these two charts suggest that it would have been entirely possible for Kyler Murray to have success both financially and in the Super Bowl had he switched teams. While there would almost certainly be widespread backlash against the Cardinals if they were to let Kyler go, they could have traded him just this offseason, acquired multiple first round picks in exchange, and actually built a core team worthy of a young super star quarterback rather than panicking and cobbling together aging stars such as JJ Watt, AJ Green and Zach Ertz, all while trading draft capital for ‘proven’ talent like Hollywood Brown (who has surpassed 60 receptions just once in his 3 year career despite being a first round pick and playing with a former MVP quarterback), and faking a being championship level team despite not once proving that they are even capable competitors. From a winning games perspective, it makes little sense for the Cardinals to have resigned Kyler Murray unless they truly view him as similarly skilled to Peyton Manning.

The Kyler Murray experiment, as well as many more that will soon see come to pass, will stand as perfect examples as to why teams should have a high turnover rate at quarterback. We all know that the quarterback position is the most difficult to draft in all of sports. That is exactly why teams should be absolutely certain that they are in a Super Bowl winning position before signing a quarterback to a massive new deal and losing a large chunk of their available salary for the following half decade.

Ultimately, a few key takeaways can be made from the two charts presented in this section.

- 1) Half of all Super Bowl winning quarterbacks will win their first Super Bowl for their team within their first two years of starting.

- 2) All Super Bowl winning quarterbacks will win their first Super Bowl for their team within their first five years of starting.
- 3) Experienced quarterbacks should be recycled, but not necessarily reduced or reused. While it may not make sense for a team to resign a quarterback who has not won a Super Bowl for them, that same quarterback can be of tremendous value to a different team.
- 4) The Peyton Manning Exception should be observed only when a quarterback is viewed as similarly talented to Peyton Manning.

Ultimately, the movement of quarterbacks across the NFL should be much more fluent than it currently is. The difficulty of finding a franchise quarterback should encourage teams to have high turnover at the position, not discourage it. Teams that do not have Super Bowl caliber rosters should worry more about creating those rosters than finding a superstar quarterback (Kyler Murray Cardinals), while teams with Super Bowl caliber rosters should do the opposite and immediately focus on finding that last piece at quarterback (Matt Stafford Rams).