

You Don't Have a Clue When to Draft a Quarterback



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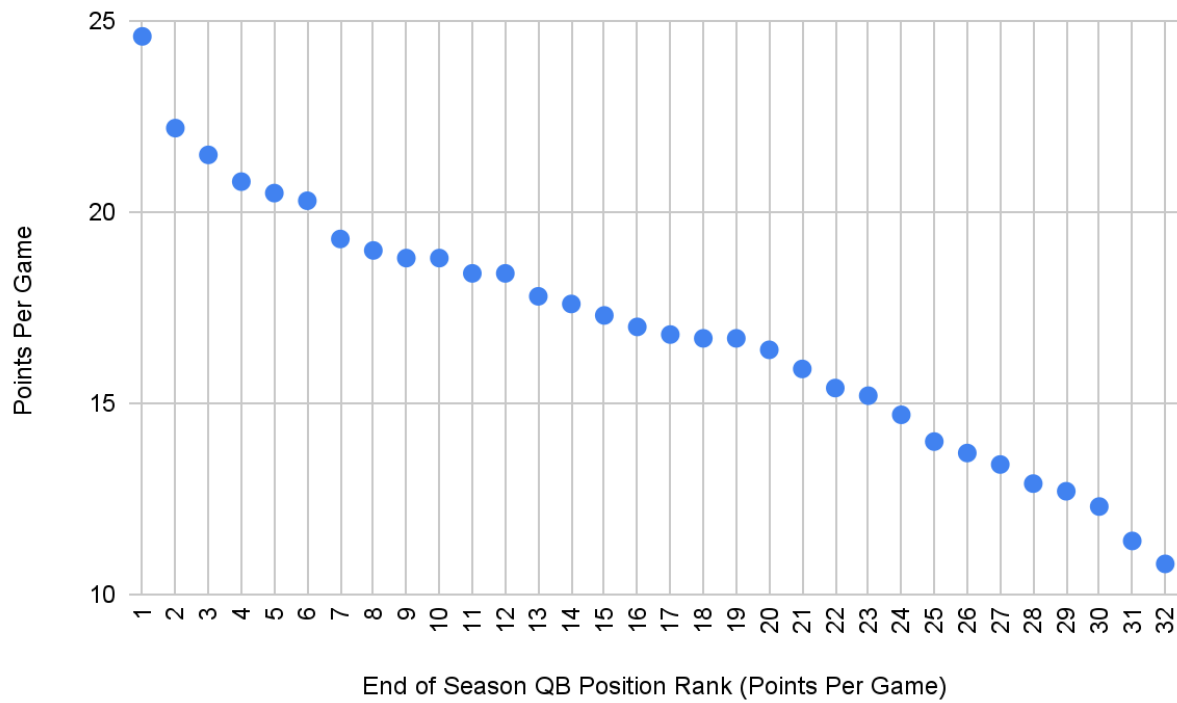
I like to think about my draft picks as lottery tickets, each with a probability to hit or miss. The earlier a pick is in the draft, generally speaking, the better chance you have of picking a winning lottery ticket. Each draft pick, however, involves considerations of positional supply and demand, roster constraints, and the opportunity cost of taking one position over another.

There are 32 starting quarterbacks in the NFL each week, but your league will only start 12. That's a pretty big disparity. I see two advantageous strategies for how you allocate your draft resources for this position:

1. Spend an early draft pick on a “stud” quarterback with the idea of gaining a positional advantage at quarterback over your opponent
2. Punt the position until the late rounds and search for upside

Note: This article uses 1.0 PPR scoring data from 2015-2023 and is intended for use with 12 team 1QB redraft formats. Team composition is 1QB/2RB/2WR/1TE/2Flex/1K/1DEF with 5 bench slots.

Data is pulled from FantasyPros, with quarterbacks ranked on a points per game basis. Player seasons require 8+ games played in a given year to be included in the data set. With these conditions in mind, let's take a look at historical data for how quarterbacks score on a per game basis.



(Above) Median quarterback points per game, grouped by quarterback finish

Rank	Median Points Per Game	% of QB1 Points	% of QB6 Points
1	24.6	100%	121%
2	22.2	90%	109%
3	21.5	87%	106%
4	20.8	85%	102%
5	20.5	83%	101%
6	20.3	83%	100%
7	19.3	78%	95%
8	19	77%	94%
9	18.8	76%	93%
10	18.8	76%	93%
11	18.4	75%	91%
12	18.4	75%	91%
13	17.8	72%	88%
14	17.6	72%	87%
15	17.3	70%	85%
16	17	69%	84%
17	16.8	68%	83%
18	16.7	68%	82%

When I look at this data, I think a couple things:

1. The top ~six quarterbacks score a decent amount more per game than the rest
2. Once you get to about the seventh ranked quarterback, there's not that much of a difference in scoring per game compared to the eighteenth quarterback.
 - a. The delta between QB1-QB6 is 4.3 points per game, with QB6 scoring 83% of QB1s points per game.
 - b. The delta between QB7-QB18 is 2.6 points per game, with QB18 scoring 82% of QB7s points per game.

Often missing from a fantasy managers' analysis is the opportunity cost of the pick itself as they fail to understand what they give up at other positions when they make their selections. Consider spending a 5th round pick on a quarterback and the quality of the running backs, wide receivers, or tight ends that were available at that selection. As the draft goes along picks generally return less value (worse lottery tickets), but due to inter-positional differences in supply and demand, it is easier to find starting quality quarterbacks later on than starting wide receivers or running backs (tight end is a whole other can of worms that I'm not going into today).

If that 5th round pick eventually finishes the season as the QB7, you have invested a significant amount more of your draft capital than if you had spent an 11th round pick on the QB7. This introduces the concept of a relative ADP bust, or a player that may not have had a *bad* statistical year, but you gave up a significant draft resource to get them and they did not deliver the value you were hoping for.

You might be worried that it's difficult to find a quarterback who scores enough points at a bargain bin price, but I assure you, we see quarterbacks finish in the top 12 each year that are drafted in the later rounds.

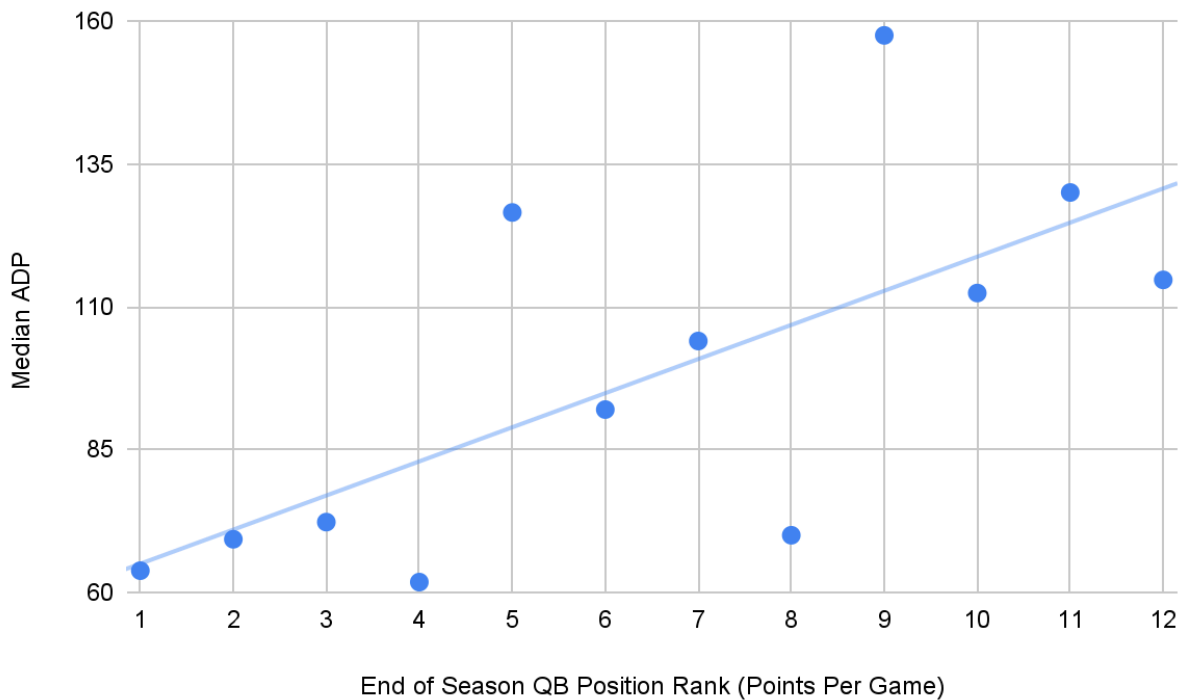
Rank	Count
1	3
2	2
3	2
4	1
5	5
6	2
7	4
8	3
9	6
10	6
11	6
12	6
Grand Total	46

Year	Count
2015	6
2016	7
2017	6
2018	4
2019	7
2020	4
2021	2
2022	6
2023	4
Grand Total	46

Count of QBs drafted 2015-2023 in round 10 or later that finished in the top 12 by (left image) rank finished or (right image) year

Even if you elect to spend fewer of your draft resources on a quarterback and take one late, that doesn't exclude you from having a top 6 quarterback. Let's remember that while Patrick Mahomes is almost always a top scoring QB, his first full year starting was when he absolutely crushed leagues because the managers who got him either spent a late round pick on him or grabbed him off the waiver wire. This opened up their draft to spend their earlier higher value lottery tickets on those other positions. Another advantage to using a late round pick on a quarterback is that if they aren't performing well, you don't have any guilt in cutting them from your roster that you otherwise may have if you used a valuable draft pick on them.

Now, you won't always land yourself a top six quarterback with a late round dart throw, so if that is important to your team-building strategy, what draft capital will it cost you?



Median ADP vs. End of Season QB Rank (Points Per Game)

Generally, the top quarterback finishes required an investment of a draft pick in the first ~70 picks. This does not mean if you pick a quarterback in the first seventy picks that they are guaranteed a finish in the top six, but generally speaking that is where those top end finishes come from. I'm also not saying that taking Josh Allen in the 2nd round is a good pick even though you're likely getting a top two quarterback. Don't forget to factor in opportunity cost at other positions when you're investing an early pick on a quarterback.

Our goal should be to avoid landing in what I'll refer to as "quarterback hell", or using a middle round pick on a quarterback who falls into that QB7-QB18 range but since you spent a 7th round pick on them you feel obligated to start them for the entire year even though they are wholly mediocre. I urge you to either invest in the early quarterback pick aiming for a difference making top six quarterback or wait until the later rounds of your draft and take the highest upside quarterback you can. It can be difficult to wait it out in

the heat of the moment when quarterbacks start flying off the board in those middle draft rounds, but know that the math is on your side. At the end of the day, “Go big, or go home [league].”