

Hildebrand's high school performances surpass Bradshaw's records

Written by Jerry Byrd

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Hayden Hildebrand has rewritten Airline High passing records in the last two seasons by completing 58.3 percent of his passes for more than 5,700 yards and 45 touchdowns. Those aren't state records, but the numbers are more impressive than Terry Bradshaw's statistics for his last two years at Shreveport's Woodlawn High.

Bradshaw went on to an outstanding college football career at Louisiana Tech, and was inducted into the pro football Hall of Fame following a 14-year career with the Pittsburgh Steelers in which he led them to four Super Bowl titles.

What Hildebrand does at the college and pro levels remains to be seen, but he has left his mark on the Airline record book.

All of Bradshaw's Woodlawn records were quickly broken by Joe Ferguson, who followed him at the Shreveport school and rewrote national passing records in his senior season (1968). Since then, Ferguson's high school records have been surpassed by a parade of Evangel quarterbacks that included Josh Booty, Phillip Deas and Brock Berlin.

But most of the Evangel quarterbacks threw a lot more passes than Ferguson, and Ferguson threw a lot more than Bradshaw or any other quarterback before him.

The Bossier Parish record for passing yardage in one season is 3,052 yards by Sammy Johnson of Plain Dealing in 1996. Hildebrand was only 57 yards short of that record this year. In "Louisiana's Best in High School Football," a book I wrote 10 years ago, all of the seven players listed under Louisiana one season total offense leaders are Evangel quarterbacks. They aren't necessarily the best seven in the state's history, but they are the ones who threw enough passes to pile up that much yardage.

Bradshaw and Ferguson, who went on to college and National Football League stardom, aren't on that list.

Of course, the best football players at any position aren't necessarily the ones who had the most impressive statistics in their high school careers.

John David Crow of Springhill and Billy Cannon of Istrouma (Baton Rouge) won the Heisman Trophy, but they don't rank among the state's career rushing leaders in high school football. Crow scored 51 touchdowns in his high school career and averaged 16.3 yards per carry in his senior season, but didn't have enough attempts to rank among the all-time leaders. He was recruited by everybody, including Bud Wilkinson of Oklahoma, but signed with Texas A&M (then coached by Paul "Bear" Bryant), probably because of the influence of Texas A&M assistant coach Elmer Smith¹ who had coached his older brother, Ray, at Southern State College in Arkansas.

"I wanted to play," Crow said, "and anybody could see my chances to play would be a lot better at A&M."

He didn't compile staggering statistics at Texas A&M, gaining 1,455 yards rushing in three varsity seasons and scoring only six touchdowns the year he won the Heisman. But he was a complete football player, leading Bryant's Aggies to the top of the college football world until they stumbled from No. 1 in the nation to No. 3 in the Southwest Conference in the last two games of the 1957 season.

"Crow had so much pride," Bryant said, "that he would never let you have a bad practice."

He was also an All-State basketball player, leading Springhill to the state championship with a 56-42 victory over a Minden team built around Jackie Moreland, one of the greatest basketball players in Louisiana history.

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