

NFL HOT STREAKS



BY RYAN WILLIAMSON



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FAST FACTS

Game Rules

- ▶ A National Football League (NFL) game consists of four 15-minute quarters. Each team has 11 players on the field at one time.
- ▶ Teams can score a touchdown by getting into the end zone with the ball. A touchdown is worth six points. After a team makes a touchdown, it can either kick the football through the goalposts behind the end zone for one extra point or go for a two-point conversion.
- ▶ Teams can also score by kicking a field goal. A field goal is kicked through the goalposts and is worth three points.

The Super Bowl

- ▶ The top six teams in the National Football **Conference** and the American Football Conference make the playoffs each season. The teams then play three rounds of playoff games before the Super Bowl.
- ▶ The Super Bowl began after the 1966 season and features the winners of each conference.

Football is a physically demanding sport. ▶





THE PERFECT SEASON

Miami Dolphins head coach Don Shula sat on his players' shoulders as they **paraded** him around the stadium. After a long season, Shula and the Dolphins had finished their 1972 season strong and won the Super Bowl. That capped off the NFL's first—and still only—perfect season.

At the start of the season, Miami came out as an unstoppable force. The team kept winning every game. Miami faced challenges during its run for a perfect season. Quarterback Bob Griese got hurt in the fifth game of the season. He didn't return until the playoffs. Backup quarterback Earl Morrall came in and played well. He succeeded by making good passes and giving the ball to players such as star running back Mercury Morris. The Dolphins stayed undefeated through 14 regular season games. Then they won two playoff games.

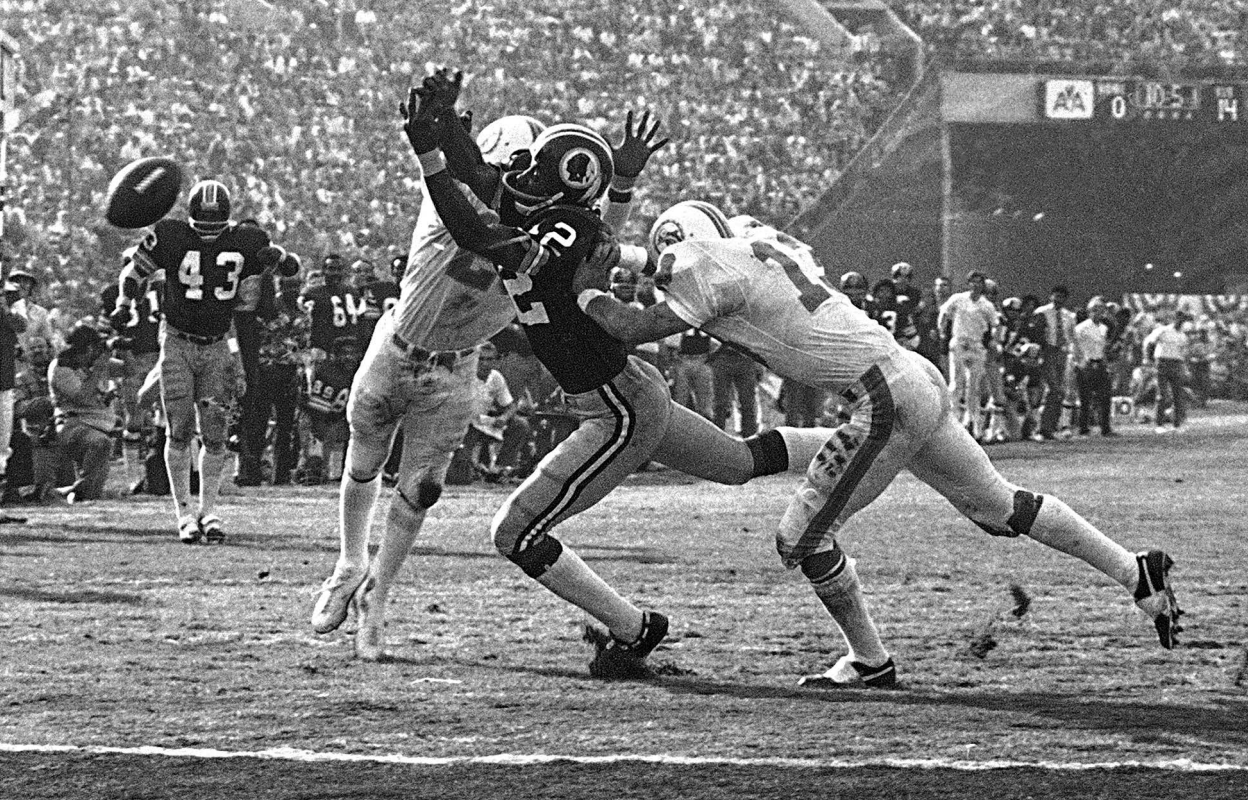
◀ **Quarterback Bob Griese prepares to pass the football.**



▲ Miami wide receiver Howard Twilley catches a pass during the Super Bowl.

Their last stop was the Super Bowl in Los Angeles, California, against the Washington Redskins.

Miami's fans had something to cheer about early in the game. Griese returned from his injury and threw a touchdown pass that sailed over the heads of the Washington defense. The football fell into the arms of wide receiver Howard Twilley. He sprinted into the end zone, and the team took an early 7-0 lead.



▲ **The Miami defense worked hard to stop Washington's offense.**

The Redskins were down 14-0 late in the game. Miami fans stood and watched with hopes that the Dolphins could stop Washington from scoring. The Redskins were close to the end zone. But a pass flew directly toward the defense. It was snatched up by Dolphins player Jake Scott. He ran up the field as the crowd roared with excitement.

Scott's **interception** helped secure the victory for Miami. The Dolphins had won the Super Bowl and completed the perfect season at 17-0. "It's not a record, it's an accomplishment," Morris said. "Records can be broken. Accomplishments can't."¹



▲ Peterson was a difficult player to tackle.

The Vikings running back had nowhere to go and gained just 2 yards. But soon the yards began to add up.

The Chargers kept following Peterson around. But that didn't stop the Minnesota running back from making big plays. With the Vikings trailing 7–0 and just yards away from the end zone, Peterson got the ball. He kept his feet moving and pushed himself into the end zone for a touchdown.

Peterson's total yards kept piling up. In the third quarter, Peterson ran 64 yards for a touchdown. In the fourth, he had a 46-yard touchdown run. As the game went on, Peterson surpassed 200 yards. He needed 296 to break the single-game record. Eventually, whether he would break the record came down to the final carry. Peterson needed only three more yards.

The snap went to the Vikings quarterback. He handed the ball to Peterson. He ran into a group of players from both teams. Keeping his feet moving, Peterson managed to pick up those 3 yards. He hit 296 yards to break the previous record of 295. The crowd knew it and gave a resounding cheer. They had witnessed a record-breaking day from their star running back.



THINK ABOUT IT

- ▶ Both teams and individual players can accomplish different milestones. Which type of milestone do you think is most impressive? Explain your answer.
- ▶ Football is one of the most popular sports in the United States. Why do you think so many people like to watch football?
- ▶ Do you think winning a game comes down to teamwork, the skills of individual players, or both? Explain your answer.

GLOSSARY

conference (KAHN-fur-uhns): A conference is a group of teams. The NFL has the National Football Conference and the American Football Conference.

consecutive (kuhn-SEK-yuh-tiv): Consecutive means it happened in a row. The Patriots had 21 consecutive wins.

footwork (FUT-wurk): Footwork is the way someone moves their feet. The wide receiver got around the defense by using good footwork.

interception (in-tur-SEP-shun): An interception is when the defense catches a pass from the quarterback. An interception allowed the defense to score points.

migraine (MY-grayn): A migraine is a bad headache that can cause vomiting or other pain. A migraine forced Davis to leave the game for a while.

paraded (puh-RAYD-ed): To be paraded is to go around in a proud fashion. The head coach was paraded around the field after the team won.

snap (SNAP): A snap occurs when the center hands the ball to the quarterback to start the play. The quarterback took the snap and threw the ball.

subtle (SUHT-uhl): To be subtle is to have done a little thing that can be hard to notice. The coach made a subtle change to his appearance by moving his pencil from his left ear to his right ear.

SOURCE NOTES

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TO LEARN MORE

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