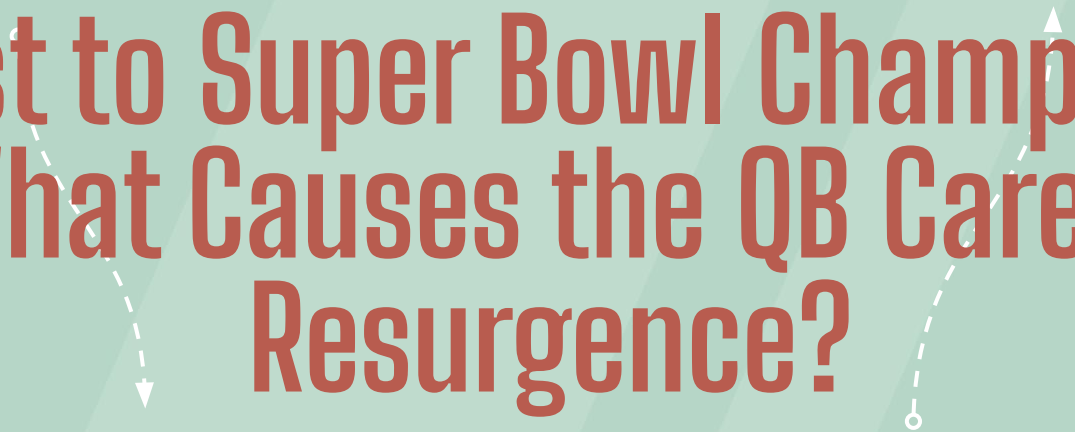


Bust to Super Bowl Champion: What Causes the QB Career Resurgence?

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Brendan Annulis

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Introduction

- The quarterback position is the most important position in football. A good quarterback can be the difference between contending for the Super Bowl and missing the playoffs
- Teams continue to draft quarterbacks early in the draft, hoping they will be the missing piece for their franchise
- A few work out. Many don't.

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Introduction

- The ones that don't live up to the huge expectations the teams and fans have are labeled busts and are left to free agency at the end of their rookie deals. If they're lucky, maybe another team gives them a chance
- It seems illogical to give the player another chance given their performance, but yet a select few, seemingly inexplicably, manage to revitalize their careers

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The Question

What common trends, if any, are present in QBs who find success later in their careers?

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The Method

- Three recent quarterbacks who fit this idea of bust to resurgence were selected:
 - Baker Mayfield
 - 2018 first overall pick, played just four years in Cleveland, spent time with Panthers and Rams before establishing himself in Tampa Bay
 - Daniel Jones
 - Drafted 6th overall in 2019, won one playoff game over six years with the Giants, reached Pro Bowl level play before an Achilles injury this past year with the Colts
 - Sam Darnold
 - The Jets selected him 3rd overall in 2018, didn't even play out his full rookie contract before being traded to Carolina, served as a backup in San Francisco, has a career year with the Vikings and led the Seahawks to a Super Bowl

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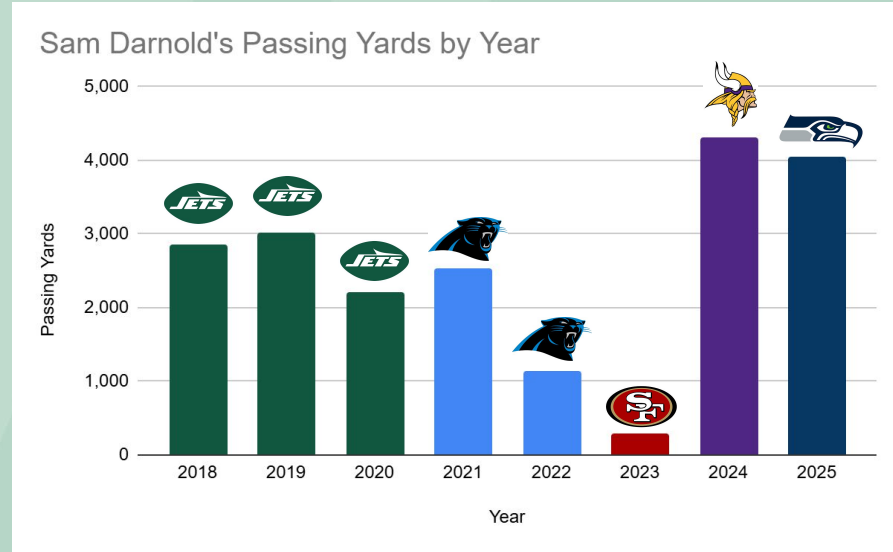
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Evidence of Resurgence

- All three of these quarterbacks demonstrated significantly improved stats in more recent years.
- While this is a trend, we're more interested in what caused this trend.



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Coaching and Scheming

- Mayfield cycled through five offensive coordinators in five years. Head coach Kevin Stefanski operated a run-heavy offense that consistently ranked towards the bottom of the league in many categories throughout his time in Cleveland (points per game, yards/play, EPA/play). Moving to a more pass-heavy offense in Tampa Bay allowed him to flourish
- Darnold began under Adam Gase and Matt Patricia, two notorious coaching names. Their offenses as a whole also struggled, as the Jets went 13-35 in Darnold's time with the team. However, Darnold moved to mastermind Kyle Shanahan's system before working under Kevin O'Connell in Minnesota, a failed quarterback himself who said "organizations fail young QBs before young QBs fail organizations." He continued his success under the young genius Mike Macdonald.
- Jones likewise experienced turnover, with the likes of Joe Judge and Brian Daboll. He then moved to a Colts offense under Jim Bob Cooter, who has guided Matthew Stafford and Trevor Lawrence in his career as a coach

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Supporting Casts

- Mayfield saw a large improvement from the Browns when his leading receiver in 2021 was Donovan-Peoples Jones to throwing to Mike Evans and Chris Godwin with the Buccaneers. The improved offensive line in Tampa Bay also likely helped.
- Darnold's best receivers in New York were Robbie Chosen and Jamison Crowder, while over the past two years he has been able to throw to Justin Jefferson, T.J. Hockenson, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and Cooper Kupp.
- Jones' leading receiver for four of his six years in New York was Darius Slayton, who is yet to top 800 yards in a season. While Michael Pittman and Alec Pierce aren't Justin Jefferson, they still provide a significant improvement.
- Offensive lines were more difficult to draw a conclusion with, as sack numbers don't show a noticeable trend upon changing teams.

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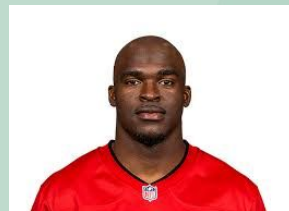
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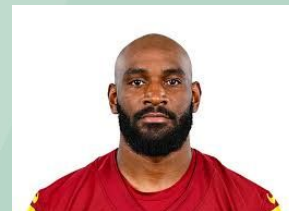
Darius Slayton



Kadarius Toney



Breshad Perriman



Jamison Crowder



Golden Tate



Chris Herdon



Rashard Higgins



Robbie Chosen



Kenny Golladay



Richie James



Terrace Marshall Jr.



Donovan Peoples-Jones

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Timing

- All of these quarterbacks made the most out of one year “prove it” deals - Darnold even did it twice.
- They’re playing with their career on the line. It’s possible high draft picks develop a high false sense of security when drafted given their reputation and seemingly long contract.
 - Being older and only having the next year guaranteed gives a sense of urgency.
- All three have experienced being benched or not starting for a prolonged period of time, potentially allowing them to focus on learning and developing
- Being older in general also helps. The “peak” of a quarterback’s career is much later than other positions, commonly considered to be right around 30.
- These players aren’t making “rookie mistakes” anymore. Turnover numbers decline while completion percentage and passer rating go up.
- Football is a mental sport. The more a quarterback reads a defense, the better they are at doing it.

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Team Situation

- Even without these quarterbacks, the Jets, Browns, and Giants have not been good in recent years.
 - All three of these teams held top 6 picks in the draft
- The Jets have not even made the playoffs since 2010, the Browns have won one playoff game in the past 30 years (with Mayfield), and the Giants have one playoff win since their Super Bowl win in 2011 (with Jones)
- Is the quarterback really the failure? Or is it the organization itself?
- Bad owner, poor practice conditions and facilities, incompetent front office, poor organization sense of unity
 - These factors don't show up in the numbers, but certainly may play a role

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Conclusion

- O'Connell seems to be correct in saying that organizations fail young QBs.
- If they are never put in a true position to succeed, they will inevitably disappoint
- Even the elite quarterbacks with the ability to “carry” a team (Jackson, Allen, Mahomes), were put into a solid position from the start that allowed them to develop into high caliber players.
- The quarterback is one of eleven players on the field on one side of the ball, and he needs some help
- Coaching, weapons, team quality, and time spent developing are all factors that correlate to a career resurgence
- Teams drafting their QB of the future should have at least a solid team surrounding them if they want success
- Ultimately, every player is different, and there are no guarantees as to whether one will find success, but no QB should fail due to their organization's failure to support them

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