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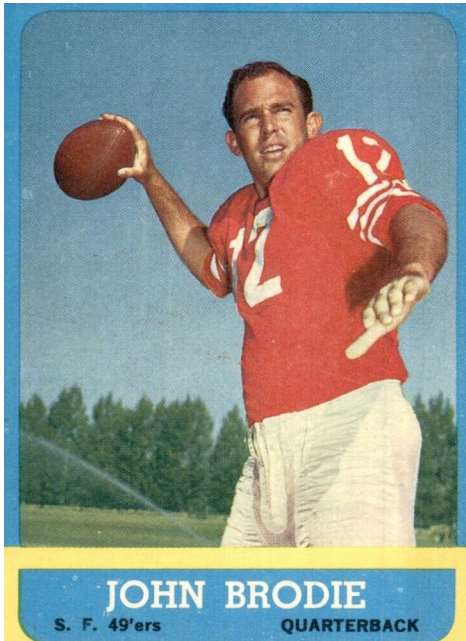
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John Brodie

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

John Riley Brodie (b. August 14, 1935) ingrained in his mind at an early age that second place was the first loser. He never settled for less than the best, recalls his wife Sue. She said, “John wants to be tops in anything he attempts, or it's not worth the effort.”¹ He was competitive in just about every possibility: tennis, ping-pong, paddleball, dominoes, jacks, etc. when he stated, “If there's action, I like it.”² As Brodie ascended through the ranks, he left his mark: youth tennis champion; baseball and basketball star at Oakland Tech High School; first team football All-American at Stanford; an excellent quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers during his tenure.³

Brodie exhibited a natural talent in football, choosing it over professional golf in the mid-1960s stating, “Football was something I was better at at that time.”⁴ The 49ers are glad he chose football, because Brodie helped deliver the franchise's first division title in 1970. He also ended their 12-year playoff drought, leading the 49ers to three consecutive playoff appearances (1970-1972).⁵ Playing with a lack of star offensive talent for most of his career that included zero future hall of famers on offense, Brodie produced three very solid, if not outstanding, seasons.





In 1965, he was the NFL's leading passer, topping the charts in completions (242), pass attempts (391), passing yards (3,112), and touchdown passes (30).⁶ For his efforts, Brodie was chosen as the Associated Press Comeback Player of the Year. He was also a Pro Bowl choice, first-team all-NFC, and second team all-pro choice by the Associated Press.⁷ He teamed with his favorite target, Dave Parks (80 receptions, 1,344 yards, 12 receiving touchdowns), backs John David Crow and Ken Willard, to boast the NFL's top ranked offense in both points scored (421) and yards gained. Unfortunately, the team finished in fourth place in the NFL Western division at 7-6-1, three games out of the playoffs.⁸

His play in 1965 attracted the attention of the AFL's Houston Oilers. Houston offered Brodie a contract worth \$750,000 to sign during the height of the war for veteran players between the AFL and NFL. The merger of the two leagues on June 8, 1966 voided the contract, and Brodie remained in San Francisco after the team offered him a raise, paying him up to \$900,000 over the next few seasons.⁹

Three years later in 1968, Brodie repeated such success. He regained the NFL lead in passing, tops in completions (234), pass attempts (404), passing yards (3,020), and passing touchdowns (21) with a 57.9 completion percentage.¹⁰ San Francisco was in a tough spot playing in the NFL's Coastal Division that featured the Baltimore Colts' Johnny Unitas and the Los Angeles Rams' Roman Gabriel, which were always difficult competition. The 49ers went winless in those four division games (0-3-1), sliding to a 7-6-1 record good for third place.¹¹

- 1 "John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros," 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.
- 2 "THE PRIME OF MR. JOHN BRODIE," SportsIllustrated.com, September 20, 1971, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1971/09/20/the-prime-of-mr-john-brodie>.
- 3 "John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros," 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.
- 4 "John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros," 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.
- 5 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.
- 6 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.
- 7 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.
- 8 "1965 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/1965.htm>.
- 9 Povich, Shirley. "Pro Struggle Hot, Ditka Case Proves," *The Tuscaloosa News*, February 16, 1967.
- 10 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.
- 11 "1968 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/1968.htm>.



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Brodie saved his best efforts for 1970. He led the league in completions (223), passing yards (2,941), and 24 touchdowns against just 10 interceptions. The work led to a consensus first-team all-NFC selection, as well as Pro Bowl honors, and unanimous first-team All-Pro honors by the Associated Press, Pro Football Writers, *Newspaper Ent. Association*, and Pro Football Weekly. Not to mention, he was named the league MVP by the Associated Press, beating out the Oakland Raiders' George Blanda.¹² On winning the award, Dallas coach Tom Landry remarked of Brodie's deserving and his abilities, "The highest tribute that can be paid a quarterback is to say that he strikes a little fear into whatever defensive team he faces. Brodie does that. I marvel at the way he has now mastered the art of the quarterback."¹³

That year, San Francisco accumulated a 10-3-1 record, their first double-digit win campaign since 1948. They won a close game in the divisional round at the Minnesota versus the Vikings, 17-14. Brodie sealed the game on a 1-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter, extending the San Francisco lead to 17-7.¹⁴ San Francisco went on to lose to the Dallas Cowboys, 17-10, in the conference championship game. The defeat marked the first of three consecutive losses by the 49ers to Dallas in the conference championship round.

Drafted third overall in the 1957 NFL draft, Brodie saw much time as a backup in his first four seasons, splitting time with savvy veteran Y.A. Tittle, a future Hall of Famer. Tittle was traded to the New York Giants for the 1961 season, leaving Brodie to take over the starting duties.¹⁵ One of his signature wins included a comeback against the Green Bay Packers on December 10. Jumping out to a 14-0 lead 49ers saw their early lead disappear and trailed 21-19 in the fourth quarter. Brodie rallied his team, going 19 of 29 for 328 yards for the game and the determined quarterback drove the 49ers into Packers territory to set-up Tommy Davis' game-winning field goal for a 22-21 upset victory.¹⁶

San Francisco finished the 1961 season at 7-6-1 and slumped to 6-8 in 1962. His 1963 season was limited to just three games due to a car wreck that caused Brodie to break his arm. He recalls, "I took my eyes off the road for a moment and that caused me to

1 2 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.

1 3 "THE PRIME OF MR. JOHN BRODIE," SportsIllustrated.com, September 20, 1971, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1971/09/20/the-prime-of-mr-john-brodie>.

1 4 "Divisional Round – San Francisco 49ers at Minnesota Vikings – December 27th, 1970," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022.

1 5 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.

1 6 "Green Bay Packers at San Francisco 49ers – December 10th, 1961," ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196112100sfo.htm>.



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misjudge a sharp turn.”¹⁷ Three games in, San Francisco fired head coach Red Hickey, who was replaced by Jack Christensen. Christensen lasted just four complete seasons before the team brought in Dick Nolan. In Brodie's 17 seasons with the club, he worked under four different head coaches, a sign the team could not maintain any sort of consistent success.¹⁸

Brodie continued to play well in 1971 and 1972, and with Nolan at the helm, the 49ers boasted a 9-5 record in 1971. Brodie had a feeling it might be the year to break through to the Super Bowl, “I always thought if the pieces were put together properly, our direction would be up. And it is. We're in better position now than we were even at the close of last season.”¹⁹

He was praised by various football publications, “John Brodie always has had a style which impresses people, whether they're teammates, rivals or professional observers.”²⁰ One scout commented, “If I had an obstacle course for passes, where they had to throw a variety of passes, I think Brodie would rank right up there at the top. Maybe behind Joe Namath, but right in there with Unitas and Jurgensen.”²¹

He saw action in just 5 games in his final season in 1973, retiring thereafter. At the time of his retirement, he ranked third all-time in passing with over 30,000 yards and eighth in touchdown passes.²² The gaudy passing numbers he charted demonstrated his offensive prowess that was immersive in a run-first era of football.

The team retired his number 12 in 1973. Brodie remains the longest tenured 49ers player in team history, playing 17 seasons with the franchise. He was also inducted to the San Francisco 49ers Hall of Fame inaugural class in 2009. Brodie finished his career compiling 31,548 passing yards and 214 passing touchdowns against 224 interceptions, playing in 201 games, making 158 starts. His career record as a starter was 74-76-8.²³ These accolades have called for Brodie's induction to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but

1 7 “THE PRIME OF MR. JOHN BRODIE,” SportsIllustrated.com, September 20, 1971, <https://vault.si.com/vault/1971/09/20/the-prime-of-mr-john-brodie>.

1 8 “San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

1 9 Troup, TJ. “JOHN BRODIE: A 17-Year Journey,” NFLFootballJournal.com, August 14, 2018, <https://nflfootballjournal.blogspot.com/2018/08/john-brodie-17-year-journey.html>.

2 0 Troup, TJ. “JOHN BRODIE: A 17-Year Journey,” NFLFootballJournal.com, August 14, 2018, <https://nflfootballjournal.blogspot.com/2018/08/john-brodie-17-year-journey.html>.

2 1 Troup, TJ. “JOHN BRODIE: A 17-Year Journey,” NFLFootballJournal.com, August 14, 2018, <https://nflfootballjournal.blogspot.com/2018/08/john-brodie-17-year-journey.html>.

2 2 John Brodie,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.

2 3 John Brodie,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.



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his lack of an NFL championship and a losing overall record have kept him from gaining the necessary support.

Trent Dilfer, who played with the club in 2007 advocated, “I really believe John should be in the Hall of Fame, and hopefully this will create some awareness of his career and how spectacular it was.”²⁴ Sports Illustrated has also made a case. He is one of 10 quarterbacks to win the MVP award, but not a member of Canton, others in that category include Ken Anderson, Charlie Conerly, Roman Gabriel, and Earl Morrall, .²⁵ Former teammate Gene Washington added his praise, “Forget about the statistics. He was truly one of the great, great football players in college and the NFL.”²⁶ Defensive back Jimmy Johnson, Brodie's teammate for 13 seasons agrees, “It's a question that doesn't need to be asked, really. I think he had the quickest release following the snap as I've seen in the game of football.”²⁷

Brodie's pathway to athletics began in his youth, growing up in the Montclair neighborhood of Oakland. Starring at tennis, his athletic ability translated smoothly to a standout baseball and basketball player, attending Oakland Tech High School.²⁸

He chose to attend local Stanford University to concentrate on the two sports, baseball and basketball, ironically never thinking of playing football. In 1954, an injury during basketball season caused him to walk-on to the football team, where he had three excellent seasons (1954-1956).²⁹ As a senior, Brodie earned consensus first team All-American honors, leading the nation in total offense, and finished seventh in the Heisman trophy voting. Brodie accrued a higher offensive output than Heisman trophy winner Paul Hornung.³⁰ John also played on the Stanford golf team, that caused him to declare, “spring is golf time.”³¹

2 4 “John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros,” 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.

2 5 Gosselin, Rick. “State Your Case: John Brodie,” SportsIllustrated.com, July 28, 2015, <https://www.si.com/nfl/talkoffame/nfl/state-your-case-john-brodie>.

2 6 “Hall of Fame push for John Brodie,” *The Mercury News*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2015/07/30/hall-of-fame-push-for-john-brodie/>.

2 7 “Hall of Fame push for John Brodie,” *The Mercury News*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2015/07/30/hall-of-fame-push-for-john-brodie/>.

2 8 “John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros,” 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.

2 9 “John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros,” 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.

3 0 “John Brodie of Stanford Leads in Total Offense,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 17, 1956, 23.

3 1 “John Brodie: A Bay Area Legend from Prep to Pros,” 49ers.com, June 19, 2015, <https://www.49ers.com/news/john-brodie-a-bay-area-legend-from-preps-to-pros-15428897>.



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Upon graduating from college, Brodie turned pro in golf, concurrently working on a pro football career. Among his finest moments as a golfer, he participated in both the 1959 and 1981 US Open. Later, he played on the Senior PGA Tour, securing his first ever victory in the Security Pacific Senior Classic with a birdie on the first playoff hole.³² Brodie recalls a great deal of pressure during his days on the links, “You talk about pressure. I was always worried that I wasn't going to make the cut. Fact is there was only one time I was close enough to say I was in competition in the final round.”³³

In 1986, he was inducted to the College Football Hall of Fame, and he is also a member of the Stanford University Athletics Hall of Fame.

End Notes:

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- 3 2 Jordan, Gregg. “John Jumps Over to Candlestick,” *Petersen's 11th Pro Football 1971 Annual*. Los Angeles, CA: Petersen's Publishing Co., 1971, p. 17.
- 3 3 Jordan, Gregg. “John Jumps Over to Candlestick,” *Petersen's 11th Pro Football 1971 Annual*. Los Angeles, CA: Petersen's Publishing Co., 1971, p. 17.