Position Labeling in the NFL: An Anthropological Study of the Labels Imposed on

Professional Football Players

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the labels imposed on professional football players in the NFL and the cultural impacts these labels have on players and the sport of gridiron football from an anthropological perspective. These labels are durable, complex, and subjective in nature, and they encompass aspects of ethnicity, identity, and masculinity perpetrated by a phenomenon [in sports] known as the "Look Test." In this process, players are reduced to a positional label in a hyper-masculine environment by such subjective qualifications as precedence, race, and athleticism. Three examples of these labels are observed and analyzed: The Instinctual Polynesian Defender, and the two most prominent quarterback labels: Dual Threat and Pocket Passer. In the final chapter, current Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota serves as a case study following these examples, displaying those characteristics of durability, complexity, and subjectivity in his career, as well as his unique status as an exception to all three positional labels. In analyzing these football identifications, this thesis thus adds to our understanding of how the influence of race, ethnicity, and masculinity is created and perpetuated at the everyday level.

Introduction: Positional Labeling in the NFL: Identity, Ethnicity, and Masculinity

The National Football League (NFL), the pinnacle of performance for the sport of American gridiron football, prides itself on employing a diverse and talented pool of athletes from a multitude of social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. It is from within this diversity inherent in the sport's athletes that a process of positional labeling based on the complex factors of identity, ethnicity, and masculinity has become prominent. This cultural phenomenon serves to dichotomize players into positional groups that are defined by more than just statistics, but on the observer relying on tradition, precedence, and his or her own personal perspective to form a definition for the player's position, style, and quality. This is known in football as the "Look Test" (Schalter 2012). Owners, coaches, fans, and even players use this process not only to describe, but also to prescribe value in a controlled-commodification process within a hyper-masculine environment. In this thesis I demonstrate that these labels exist, and provide examples of three of these labels–"The Instinctual Polynesian Defender," "the Dual Threat Quarterback," and "the Pocket Passer Quarterback"–focusing on the endurance, complexity, and subjectivity evident within each label to illustrate their power and presence over realistic perceptions.

In conjunction with academic sources and media outlets such as ESPN, Sports Illustrated, and other team-specific media, my experience as freelance sportswriter for the NFL over the past four years can personally attest that such labels are not unfamiliar, if not a conscious aspect of the sport. Examples can be observed regularly during the season but are particularly evident during the offseason when every team in the league is feverishly evaluating upcoming talent and revaluating their own. The subconsciousness

of this process would seem to model itself well off the archetypes championed by Carl Jung; however, this thesis maintains a mindfulness of the present and refers to these processes as labels, similar to the concept of positional prototypes outlined by Thomas P. Oates (Jung 1970[1955/56], Oates 2017: 66).

The natural dichotomy inherent in gridiron football's structure of offense and defense, positions, and roster depth lends itself to these labels in application and exhibition. These labels are not always evident and can be perceived as subtle. An example of this illustrating the first of these labels, the Instinctual Polynesian Defender, was evident in a 2016 contest which I had the privilege to attend as a member of the press and subsequently inspired this thesis.

Polynesians Athletes as "Instinctual"

On October 2nd, 2016, Week 4 of the NFL season, I witnessed first-hand a contest between an injury-depleted Chicago Bears and the Detroit Lions at Soldier Field in Chicago. Both teams had delivered lackluster performances during the previous three weeks without a win between them, which was evidenced by a despondent combined record of 0-6. Led by a dominant rushing attack, the Bears kept the first half lead in their favor, but were being tested regularly by Detroit's pass-heavy offense. In the second half, the Lions methodically moved up the field 66 yards to the Chicago one-yard line. At third-and-one, only a tailback dive away from taking the lead, the Lions assumed a goalline formation to rush in for the score.

Scarcely after the snap and handoff had taken place, the Bears' middle linebacker John Timu penetrated the offensive line between the left guard and center unmolested to dive at the ankles of running back Zack Zenner, halting the play for a two-yard loss. The defensive stand held the Lions to a field goal and ultimately helped earn the Bears their first victory of 2016 at a tight final score of 17-14. As arguably the most important play of the contest, those few seconds of prowess catapulted Timu into nearly every record of the event, which was quite a feat for a player elevated from the practice squad one week prior.

I, as well as my peers, regarded Timu's play as the game-winning catalyst. Even at season's end, a full twelve games later, Timu and his goalline stand were included in Bears senior writer Larry Mayer's top ten plays of 2016 (Mayer 2016, 2017). However, this recognition was not the only constant, as the most consistent description of the second-year pro, contrary to my own, was "instinctual" both regarding his play style and capacity as a player (Briggs 2016, Eurich 2016, Lambert 2016, LeGere 2016).

The dilemma with such a description is the blatant misrepresentation of both the player and the play in question. The play was, from my first-hand perspective, not instinctual at all, but carefully planned and timed both in design and execution. This perspective was supported in the post-game interviews. According to Timu, the responsibility for the counter play's success rested with his own preparation during the previous practice week and defensive coordinator Vic Fangio for making sure he was properly positioned to execute the play.

It was part of the call. Vic (Fangio, the defensive coordinator) dialed it up. We kind of knew what they were about to do. He's a chessmaster and that's what he does. We saw the formation and that told us what play was coming. I just had to time it right. Even if the timing wasn't right, it would have been good to go for the Bears. It was no guess. We knew the indicator of when they were about to snap it. I had to make sure I timed it perfect and it held true to that play. I'm supposed to cause a pile and make sure there are no run-through lanes. [Briggs 2016]

Chicago defensive veterans, linebacker Jerrell Freeman and defensive end Akiem Hicks, also supported Timu's preparatory skills and lauded his intelligence when interviewed regarding his performance. Freeman stated in an interview with Bob LeGere of the *Daily Herald*:

Timu might be one of the smartest people we have on our team. You can bring him up, and he's going to fit right in. I trust him as soon as he lines up. I call him 'Shooter McGavin,' because he knows what to do, and he's going to shoot it. He's going to shoot it faster than I will sometimes because he recognizes stuff. [2016]

Hicks made similar comments on the young linebacker to Matt Eurich of *247 Sports*:

I've been talking about Timu from the day I first got here, just because of his athleticism, his mental views. He picks up the game really fast. He comes up to the defensive line and tells us what we need to expect. That's something you appreciate from your linebacker. [2016]

Even with this testimony, the instinctual label remained, and it became evident to me upon further research that such labels were not new to the Samoan-descended linebacker. As a rookie with the Bears in 2015, injuries forced the former Washington Husky into a starting role late in the season where he racked up 24 combined tackles. He

helped hold the league's two leading rushers at the time, Adrian Peterson and Doug Martin, to less than 75-yards each, and he recovered two fumbles for the Bears in a victory over Tampa Bay. Similarly, the quality of his play remained defined as a hard-hitting, run-stuffing linebacker with an instinctual nose for the ball (LeGere 2015, Mayer 2015, Perper 2017).

Little, if anything, is mentioned regarding his dedication to preparation or the mental aspects of the sport of football which feature so prominently in first-hand sourcing from him and teammates. Even less is mentioned regarding Timu's time at the collegiate level and the massive effort he placed in film study of opposing teams and constructing a strong academic resume, ironically presenting ethnographic research debunking the typical jock stereotype at Washington's 16th Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium as well as studying his own Samoan culture (Allen 2013, Condotta 2012, Jude 2013). In this research, Timu drew a similar conclusion regarding how football players in general are perceived and labeled. "If you look at media, video games, and even NFL commentators, what they say and the phrases they use focus on the player's physical ability rather than their intelligence. It's disturbing how often athletes are compared to animals or described as savage or machinelike." (Duff 2013).

Timu is not the only player of this decent to be labeled as such either, with a prime example of this being exhibited in the recent retirement of NFL defensive stars. The first half of the 2010's saw several of the biggest names in football of the previous decade retire, including Baltimore Ravens middle linebacker Ray Lewis in 2012 and Pittsburgh Steelers safety Troy Polamalu in 2015. While both defenders had enjoyed Hall

of Fame worthy careers as some of the best to ever play their respective positions, there were notable differences in how those who were associated with these players described the impact of their careers.

Lewis, arguably the most ferocious defensive player of the last 20 years, known for his big hits and harsh play style, was remembered for his passion, intensity, and for his football intelligence and dedication to younger players, which in 2017 led to rumors that he would move into coaching (Baltimoreravens.com 2012, Reed 2017). Polamalu was also known for his defensive prowess, hard hits, and leadership qualities, as well as for moving freely in and out of position, providing himself better opportunities to be a playmaker within defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau's system (Varley 2015). A prime and all too familiar example of this is the Samoan-descended stars infamous knack for diving over the offensive line in a blitz to halt opposing offences. However, instead of equating these attributes during his career to intelligence or even passion, the word instinctual crept into those qualities people, such as former Steelers Head Coach Bill Cowher, remembered most about him, being paired with memories of athletic prowess and even the word "inhuman" as Steelers General Manager Kevin Colbert remarked in a statement regarding Polamalu's retirement. (2015). While this thesis does not seek to equate the two players with identical qualities and attributes, it is curious that two, similar, and great NFL defenders are remembered in such a different fashion, down to the very diction used to describe themselves and their careers.

In Timu and Polamalu's case, such a consistent misrepresentation likely has little to do with conduct on or off the field, but rests soundly on ethnic origin being racialized

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in a hyper-masculine environment, fundamentally modifying the perceived identity of the individual. Identity is defined as that which: "expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential characteristics with others'' (Erikson 1980:109).

This process in relation to athletes of Polynesian descent, those athletes with ancestry from the triangular region of the Pacific between the islands of New Zealand, Hawaii, and Rapa Nui (Easter Island) known as Polynesia, has been the subject of recent anthropological research by Christine F. Manarpaac (2014) and Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa (2014). The labeling process proves to be particularly apparent in the careers of those athletes with ancestry from the islands of American Samoa, Hawaii, and New Zealand, as Uperesa and Manarpaac relate in their respective works.

Manarpaac's masters dissertation entitled "Heads & Shoulders: Representations of Polynesian Men in the NFL" chronicles the rise of the hyper masculine identity and its perception in Polynesian athletes in the NFL. The study uses former Pittsburgh Steelers, All-Pro safety Troy Polamalu's professional and advertising career for Head and Shoulders to display the use of the label in mass media. Manarpaac also comments on the endurance of such an image, including her own attempts to artistically modify media images from the shampoo ads to reduce or neutralize the hyper-masculine symbolism.

Uperesa studied the previously mentioned factors in relation to Polynesian NFL athletes, identifying sports as a way for men of Polynesian descent to provide for themselves and their families. Her work, "Fabled Futures: Migration and Mobility for Samoans in American Football," documents this and its effects by utilizing the case study

of her father and stand-out lineman, Tu'ufuli (2014: 281-283). His experiences as a professional football player of Polynesian descent reflect and embody factors that led to the emergence of Polynesian players in the NFL, revealing the deepest roots in the colonial era.

The colonial subjugation of the Pacific Islands initiated by Western powers in the 19th and 20th centuries brought with it detrimental cultural changes for the indigenous people. European powers modified or abolished cultural practices and substituted their own in attempts to civilize the natives. In doing so, they were forced to align to a western perspective of themselves as little more than a race built for laborious tasks (Hokowhitu 2004: 193-198, Johnston 1976, Manarpaac 2014: 28-30, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,414-2,416). This perspective resulted in the negation of such things as identifying cultural practices and education for island natives in these new colonies, and the propagation of arduous agricultural work.

Sports like rugby and gridiron football came to replace practices of tribal warfare, ceremonial exercise, and traditional competitions as conflicts necessary to meet cultural needs, eventually resulting in a cultural focus on football throughout the twentieth century (Franks 2009: 2,400, Johnston 1976, Miller 2002, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,413). This created a new path of economic possibility and success for Polynesian men in the impoverished post-colonial Pacific Islands, a way to "make good" in achieving the privileges of education and financial stability through professional sport (Uperesa 2014: 294-295, Manarpaac 2014: 29-30, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,424-2,425).

In taking advantage of a perspective initiated by colonialism and perpetuated by few economic and educational opportunities in these former colonies, talented men of Polynesian descent dedicate their lives, risking serious harm in the process, to play professional sport for the opportunities it presents. In doing so they maintain a hyper-masculine identity that has come to define their cultural affiliations and pigeonholes them to defensive positions where a violent and powerful mentality goes together with the perception of a quality player like Super Bowl champion safety Troy Polamalu and Hall of Fame linebacker Junior Seau (Uperesa 2014: 285-286, Manarpaac 2014, Tengan and Markham 2009). The NFL stimulates this process by maintaining an environment of hyper-masculinity, "where aggression is rewarded; and where a player who fails to fit this model is often deemed a pussy, bitch, or worse" (Perdue 2014). It is this emphasis on the masculine gender role, "instrumentality or agency, restricted emotional expression, and rejection of all things feminine…passivity, emotional expression, and concern for others' well-being", that enables such an identity to label John Timu and to defy testimony and stand unabated (Smiler & Epstein 2010: 150).

On the other end of the spectrum, there also exists cases where this label is being modified or more accurately, defied, as is the case with Tennessee Titans quarterback and Hawaiian native, Marcus Mariota. The winner of 2016's Polynesian Man of the Year Award, instead of being known for the attributes that have led Polynesian professional football players to success for over a century, has transcended a hyper-masculine identity and played dominantly from an offensive position instead of the brutal defense or the trenches of the offensive line (Titans Online 2017). In an increasingly global world, a

modification in this label will likely have profound effects on future Polynesian athletes and the future of the sport of American gridiron football, especially in relation to the other two labels of focus in this thesis: the quarterback labels of Dual Threat and Pocket Passer.

Labeling Quarterbacks

The most important positions on an NFL team, the quarterback, can be divided into two positional labels that, differing on style, have grown to define the position in the sport of gridiron football's history. While not explicit in the quantifiable difference between the two, the general, subjective consensus is that a Dual Threat quarterback is more likely to run with the football as opposed to passing it as a Pocket Passer would. This lack of a recognized definition has given rise to a plethora of interpretive explanations, with the most popular amongst the media, coaches, and even fans, relying on the subjectivity of the "Look Test" (Schalter 2012). Based on this, the most commonly attributed explanations involving the social construct of race, the Dual Threat quarterback is generalized as an exceptional, non-white, athlete with natural athleticism that is more characteristic of positions like running back or wide receiver; with which he utilizes to run the football (Martin 2015: 54-55, Schalter 2012, McKinney 2017).

The Pocket Passer is generalized in much the same way as an antithesis to the Dual Threat. A Pocket Passer is regarded as a white, intelligent, leader to the offense. Primarily a passing quarterback, this label builds upon the collective history of the NFL, representing almost a century of professional football passing as opposed to running

(2012). The longevity of which is represented in some of the most successful names to play the position, Joe Montana, Dan Marino, and Peyton Manning.

While scientists have long ruled out any biological or genetic variations capable of suggesting one race is better suited for positions in sports, (an interpretation rejected by this thesis) there still exists a popular bias for such interpretations into these labels, resulting in the underrepresentation of non-white ethnicities at quarterback, and over representation at other positions (Entine 1999, Malik 2000, Pellissero 2014, Pitsiladis 2010: 243-245). In this respect, it is a similar label to that of Polynesian football players with the projected hyper-masculine perception and cultural bias resulting in limiting them to the positional roles of the defense and lineman due to supposedly possessing predisposed genetic builds and a violent warrior mentality based on their ethnicity. This thesis first seeks to more quantifiably differentiate the two quarterback labels, utilizing comparative rushing statistics to find a more stable definition. In doing so, this should reveal comparisons in various aspects of note between the two. Those of importance to this thesis include comparisons to league-wide distribution, success rate, and longevity associated with each label.

Finally, this thesis returns to quarterback Marcus Mariota, analyzing his professional career from draft day to his early 2017 performances to determine the effects these labels have had on the comparatively young quarterback. This includes statistical evaluations of performances in his rookie season of 2015 and sophomore season of 2016, but also the perceptions of him as detailed by media outlets. In doing so, this thesis

illustrates him as exhibiting all three positional labels in addition to proving the exceptions during his NFL career so far.

Methodology and Structure

Going forward, the use of academic writings by the likes of Lisaclaire Uperesa, Christine Manarpaac, Thomas P. Oates, among others, are utilized to form the structure for the argument that ethnicity, masculinity, and identity define this cultural phenomenon of labeling in football. This is supported by media interpretations from television, radio, and internet sources from the likes of ESPN, Sports Illustrated, and team-specific media noted as authorities on the sport, as well as my own observations as a free-lance sports writer. All player statistics are provided by Pro-Football-Reference.com for utilization of statistical analysis and recognition of player accolades.

The recognition and study of this process falls within the confines of cultural anthropology, in studying the ways in which culture is characterized and the variations amongst different peoples. Culture, as defined by Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* as "…that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1871: 1). Identifying a cultural phenomenon, this argument illustrates a narrow avenue of positional representation propagated by incorrect assumptions of genetic and cultural practice that stimulates a process for determining player positions in the NFL that looks beyond player performance; becoming almost subconscious in the minds of coaches and fans, as a label that can be identified on sight. Further, this study contributes to the anthropological study of sport as a cultural mainstay, using the presence and power of

positional labeling in the NFL to explain the complexity with which concepts such as race, masculinity, ethnicity, and identity permeate the attributes of status, power, and competition inherit within human society.

The structure of this thesis is therefore divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 outlines the label of Polynesian athletes as Instinctual Defenders by detailing the ethnicity's representation within the history of gridiron football, collegiate football, and later in the National Football League. With roots stemming from periods of colonial subjugation by Western powers, this chapter explains the gradual changes in the history, as well as recognizes specific players who have been most notable both for their success and failures in the sport from inception to contemporary times.

Chapter 2 details the current hyper-masculine environment of the NFL, including the dominating aspects of player-franchise relations, and the practice of viewing players as expendable commodities. Emphasis is placed on value-assessing mechanisms and events in the NFL. This includes the NFL Scouting Combine and NFL Draft. The forms in which players maintain this value is also be a focus, identifying the lengths players will go to maintain the statistics necessary to remain valuable enough to not warrant replacement.

Chapter 3 fleshes out the Instinctual Polynesian Defender label, examining the gender identity that perpetuates qualities of strength and violence and characterizes such players of this ethnicity as instinctual in their practice. This includes observations of perception for Polynesian-descended athletes both as they identify, how they are prescribed the label by others, and how that label is perceived. The pros and cons such as

label provides over the length of a player's career as well as before and after their playing days are over will also be examined.

Chapter 4 interprets the two most prominent quarterback positional labels: Dual Threat and Pocket Passer. An attempt to better quantify the quarterback labels in a more definitive light utilizing quarterback rushing statistics will be the primary subject. In doing so, comparisons of distribution, success rate, and longevity prove more revealing in their relation to the popular interpretation of race as a factor in determining quarterback labels.

Chapter 5 builds upon the previous chapters to present a case study of the recent career of Titans quarterback, Marcus Mariota. Emphasis is placed on the apparent defiance of the Instinctual Polynesian Defender label and exhibiting evidence of both quarterback labels in his career thus far and what further potential such changes to entrenched labels will have on future generations of players of Polynesian-decent and the quarterback position.

Chapter 1: History of Polynesian Players and Football

Polynesian islanders, particularly from the islands of Samoa, New Zealand, and Hawaii, have been a large part of the football's history for more than a century (Manarpaac 2014: 19-20). In tackling the Instinctual Polynesian Defender label, the history of Polynesian representation in the sport of gridiron football is paramount. In outlining the ethnic history and individuals who have impacted the sport and the NFL, this chapter demonstrates the various effects they have had and provides a record of the positional label so often imposed upon them.

A Long and Proud History

Polynesian representation in Gridiron Football has been observed as far back as the foundation of the sport in 1869, as part of the colonial presence of American Navy personnel in the western Pacific (Uperesa 2014: 286, Manarpaac 2014: 19-20, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,415). In his chronicle of the history, "Pacific Islanders and American Football: Hula Hula Honeys, Throwin' Samoans, and the Rock," Joel S. Frank observes that while football was initially offered as a white, elitist sport designed to teach the next generation the discipline of war without the cost of life, Polynesians not only found their way onto rosters, but were noted as exceptional athletes (Franks 2009: 2,398-2,399). Despite competing with sports like rugby and baseball, Gridiron Football secured its foothold in Polynesian culture, particularly in Hawaii and American Samoa. The first recorded instance of a game in Hawaii comes from an 1884 newspaper and by 1903, three schools on Oahu island of Hawaii—private school Kamehameha, Oahu College, and Honolulu High School had teams (2009: 2,398). Islanders on American Samoa were

also exposed to the game by Navy personnel at Pago Pago before the 1950s (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,416, Johnston 1976).

During the 1920s, barefoot leagues were established in Hawaii. These leagues were heavily viewed and favored by the working-class residents of the Islands, who would attend the games in the thousands. Among the biggest draws for players was the non-necessity of shoes and varying weight limit (Franks 2009: 2,400-2,401). This allowed those youth who could not afford shoes and/or did not meet the physical requirements of school sponsored programs to practice the sport, adding to its popularity.

The 1920s and 1930s saw the movement of Polynesian-descended athletes to mainland collegiate football programs as well as professional play. Walter Tin Kit Achiu and August Cabrinha, two residents of Hawaii, hold the honor as the first Asian and Polynesian descended players to play professionally. The pair went on to play football as backs for the University of Dayton in 1920. Eventually they would be enshrined in Dayton's athletic Hall of Fame in 1974 (2009: 2,401).

Throughout the 1940s, the presence of Polynesian football players at high levels of the sport continued to grow, with bruising backs like Tommy Kaulukukui of the University of Hawaii, Herman Wedemeyer of St. Mary's, and Joe Corn of Southern California all promoting the prowess and skill such players could add to a team (2009: 2,401-2,406). Franks also records the presence of standout players such as Al Lolotai, noted as the first Samoan to play in the NFL, a 220-pound lineman who was employed by the NFL's Washington Redskins in the 1940s (2,405, Miller 2002). The 1950s would see a greater increase in representation among the ranks of professional teams in 1951 and

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the mass migration of other Polynesian islanders to United States cities like Honolulu but also to mainland locales like San Francisco, Seattle, and San Diego, when Samoa became part of the Department of the Interior (Johnston 1976, Miller 2002, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,416). This migration helped meet the demand of universities looking for what Franks calls "Polynesian Power" and a rash of football scholarships followed; with schools like the University of Michigan featuring several players of Polynesian descent on its 1950's powerhouse roster, earning a Rose Bowl appearance in 1957 (Franks 2009: 2,406-2,407).

Among the most toted and fascinating careers from this era is the case of Joe Francis from Hawaii. Francis attended Oregon State where he played halfback and quarterback. With experience running the pass-friendly T-Formation with Oregon, pioneered by the successful Chicago Bears teams of the 1940's, Francis was picked 51st overall in the fifth-round of the 1958 NFL Draft by the Green Bay Packers, who were looking to imitate their rival's success. Unfortunately, Francis was unable to replicate the MVP caliber performances he had enjoyed in high school and college. Famously, Francis was beat out for the starting quarterback position by future Hall of Fame quarterback Bart Starr (2009: 2, 406).

The Shift Towards a Defensive Positional Label

Gridiron football in the 1970s and 1980s saw massive spikes in popularity, developing into a multi-billion-dollar industry and seeing a noted shift in positional play for Polynesian descended players at the collegiate and professional level (Manarpaac 2014: 20-21). This shift was largely defensive. Linebacker Frank Manumaluega played

for the Kansas City Chiefs after a stellar career at San Jose State. Fellow San Jose Alum, Wilson Faumuina, was drafted to play defensive tackle by the Atlanta Falcons with the 20th overall selection in the first-round of the 1977 NFL Draft (Franks 2009: 2,407).

The CFL (Canadian Football League) was not exempt from this phenomenon either. Noted defensive end Junior Ah You from the University of Arizona made an impact as a member of the Montreal Alouettes, winning two Grey Cups in 1974 and 1977, garnering MVP honors in the 1974 championship, and being inducted into the CFL Hall of Fame (Franks 2009: 2,407). Standout offensive lineman out of the University of Montana, Tu'ufuli Uperesa, the same subject of his daughter's ethnographic study "Fabled Futures: Migration and Mobility for Samoans in American Football," also made a name for himself in the CFL from 1973-1977, winning a Grey Cup in 1976 with the Ottawa Rough Riders (Uperesa 2014, Johnston 1976).

Here it is important to note another Polynesian-descended athlete, Jack Thompson. The Seattle native found success playing quarterback for Washington State. Nicknamed the 'Throwin Samoan', Thompson broke the NCAA career passing yards record with 7,818 yards in 1978 (Franks 2009: 2,408). His performance in college led to his eventual draft by the Cincinnati Bengals as the third overall pick in the first-round of the 1979 NFL Draft. However, like Joe Francis before him, Thompson struggled in the NFL. A career touchdown-to-interception ratio of 33-45 and dismal quarterback rating of 63.4 led to ESPN ranking him as the 26th worst draft bust ever (ESPN 2008). Thompson would play for only six years, four for Cincinnati and two for Tampa Bay, before retiring in 1984 (Franks 2009).

Junior Seau is likely the most famous NFL athlete of Polynesian descent during the 1990s, and set the bar for future NFL athletes (Franks 2009: 2,408-2,409). The linebacker played professionally for his hometown San Diego Chargers as well as the Miami Dolphins and New England Patriots after an All-American Career at USC. As the fifth overall selection in the first-round of the 1990 NFL Draft, the status left Seau with high expectations. From 1990-2009, Seau delivered, garnering numerous honors including: 12 Pro Bowl Appearances, 8 All-Pro Team Selections, the 1992 NFL Defensive Player of the Year, and he became the first NFL player of Polynesian descent to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2015 (2009).

University of Washington quarterback Marques Tuiasosopo became the third prominent player of Polynesian descent to play the position professionally when he was drafted by the Oakland Raiders with 59th selection in the second-round of the 2001 NFL Draft. While drafted in the same years as notable quarterbacks Michael Vick and Drew Brees, Tuiasosopo served nearly his entire career from 2001-2008 as a backup quarterback for the Oakland Raiders and New York Jets (2009, Jude 2013). He is more recognizable for his collegiate quarterback coaching endeavors following his retirement (Jude 2013).

Perhaps the most famous Polynesian-descended athlete in recent times is former Pittsburgh Steelers safety Troy Polamalu. The California native played for USC and joined the Steelers as the 16th overall pick in the first-round of the 2003 NFL Draft. Known for his big hair and intimidating play, Polamalu compiled what is likely a Hall of Fame resume from 2003-2014: winning Super Bowls XL and XLIII as well as playing in

Super Bowl XLV in an eventual loss to the Green Bay Packers, being voted to eight Pro Bowls, four-time All-Pro selections, and winning 2010 NFL Defensive Player of the Year honors. Polamalu's fame also made him an ideal model for commercial testimonials, something he did often in his career for such products as Head & Shoulders shampoo (Manarpaac 2014: 54-55).

As of 2012, representation for NFL players of Polynesian descent was found to be less than 1%. "69% of all players in the NFL are black. 30% of all players are white. 1% of all players in the NFL are either Pacific Islander, Latino, or Asian American". Manarpaac utilized this data in comparison with 2013 NFL rosters to deduce a 1.8% percentage, or roughly 30 NFL players of Polynesian descent in the league as of the 2013 Super Bowl (2014: 21-25). This suggests an average of one-two players of this ethnic descent per NFL team. Below is a list of a few current notable players of this ethnic background playing as of August 2017, including the notable outlier of Marcus Mariota who will feature more prominently in Chapter 5.

- Defensive tackle Haloti Ngata of the Detroit Lions (Samoan-descended, drafted 12th overall in the first-round of the 2006 NFL Draft by the Baltimore Ravens).

- Guard Mike Iupati of the Arizona Cardinals (Samoan-descended, drafted 17th overall in the first-round of the 2010 NFL Draft by the San Francesco 49ers).

- Defensive tackle Stephen Paea of the Dallas Cowboys (New Zealand native, drafted 53rd overall in the second-round of the 2011 NFL Draft by the Chicago Bears).

- Defensive lineman Star Lotulelei of the Carolina Panthers (Samoan-descended, drafted 14th overall in the first-round of the 2013 NFL Draft).

- Linebacker Manti Te'o of the New Orleans Saints (Samoan descended, drafted 38th overall in the second-round of the 2013 NFL Draft by the San Diego Chargers).

- Middle linebacker John Timu of the Chicago Bears (Samoan-descended, undrafted free agent, 2015).

- Defensive tackle Danny Shelton of the Cleveland Browns (Samoan-descended, drafted 12th overall in the first-round of the 2015 NFL Draft).

- Quarterback Marcus Mariota of the Tennessee Titans (Samoan-descended Hawaiian native, drafted second overall in the first-round of the 2015 NFL Draft).

Among the most important aspects of these players to consider in relation to the context of the label is the value the NFL places on them as commodities, creating a demand for this type of player. A startling majority of those names listed in this chapter enjoyed or are enjoying high draft stock, professional careers longer than the league average of four years (Oates 2017: 87), and/or have seen play for one team for an extended time and/or multiple teams; professing their value to the league without even analyzing a statistic or witnessing play. In support of this, CBS's *60 Minutes* episode, Football Island, referring to American Samoa, estimates that players of Samoan decent are "56 times more likely" to play in the NFL than players of other ethnic backgrounds or that Polynesian players in general are at least 28 times more likely to play in the NFL (Pelley: 2010). Thus, to fully contextualize the "instinctual" identity of Polynesian

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descended NFL players that helps add to such value, it is necessary to first understand the environment of the NFL and its relation to it this supply and demand.

Chapter 2: NFL Players: Supply and Demand of Masculinity

The NFL is a league devoted to spectating. One should look no further than the statistics for viewers of televised professional football games to understand the depth of the American public's fascination with the sport and the corresponding hyper-masculinity of the league. The Super Bowl alone nearly always surpasses viewership of previous years, with USA Today reporting a total US viewership of 172 million for 2017's Super Bowl LI—five million more than the historic ratings of Super Bowl 50 (Perez 2017). While statistics record viewership of the event, ultimately it is the players that garner the public's interest and their bodies remain the focus, functioning as models of desire.

Toby Miller in "NFL Sex" defines/describes the Sporting Body as" a site of discipline and domination, a mirror, and a form of communication,", per the typology of Joseph Maguire and is "…embossed with signs of free will, self-control, health productivity, and transcendence" (Maguire 1993:32-5, Miller 2014: 103). The desire these bodies form is in the desire to emulate domination of the corporeal form in exercise, training, and diet (2014: 103-106). This practice of the primary attribute of masculinity, domination, mirrors the managerial environment in professional football where these bodies are currency equivalent to hundreds-of-thousands of dollars. The league derives their product from dominance of these bodies and benefits from views of their performances.

This hyper-masculinity of the environment does not stop at viewings however, or sponsorship branding, but now exports the product in a variety of experiences beyond the living room television. Ways to enjoy football include playing, coaching, and

commentating and even extend further into simulating the practice of owning an NFL team in video games and fantasy football; all of which emphasize control as a key attribute (Oates 2017: 138-139). The rise of fantasy football leagues and the *Madden NFL* video game franchise by Electronic Arts particularly emulates this by allowing fans to control the franchise of their choice as either an owner, coach, or player. In these fictitious leagues, the player is left with a host of options in pursuing the management of franchises and player careers, just as the league conducts business every day (2017: 138-139). For example, in *Madden NFL* fans can add players to their teams via the draft or signing free agents, cut aging veterans, franchise the next big superstar, and even relocate and rename storied teams to different cities not only in the United States but the world (2017: 140). The product that is being exported by the NFL is not so much the game, but the simulation of the control exhibited by the league over commodified players. Such a complex simulation experience expresses masculinity in several different ways, but primarily stems from this controlling aspect.

This control is one of the defining attributes of hegemonic masculinity and the NFL, however in this form it is not considered natural, but is instead considered "geek masculinity" or how "the valorization of highly refined skill and mastery operates through technology, science, and gaming" (2017: 145). In this form masculinity can be experienced and claimed by those without the same legitimate claim as perceived by the bodies of elite athletes. These games also allow players to briefly inhabit the bodies of these athletes and derive pleasure through experiencing competition as the Other. This dynamic allows players, as David Leonard notes, to "try on the other, the taboo, the

dangerous, the forbidden, and the otherwise unacceptable" (Leonard 2006: 111). This symbolic marriage of masculinity and capitalism using the athletic body as currency is the driving force behind the NFL and is often the first experience a prospective NFL player will have with the league outside the realm of fandom.

Commodification and Evaluation of Players

Roughly 2,500 college football athletes annually become eligible for the NFL draft, however only around 260 players will be drafted by NFL franchises (Long & Czarnecki 2011: 280-281). In addition to performances from their college career, another annual event, the NFL Scouting Combine, is held in Indianapolis, Indiana to help determine player value by measuring physical quality (2011: 281). Here the observance of the commodification of players is on full display, with players being poked and prodded in what has been likened to checking meat on a slab. Tim Green, a former defensive end for the Atlanta Falcons, reflected on this in his book, *The Dark Side of the Game*.

> They ask you questions about old injuries you had in college. You try to lie and say there weren't any. You don't want to be perceived as damaged goods. They've got you though. In the corner is a computer-literate trainer from one of the teams who is banging away and extracting your complete medical history, electronically preserved somewhere in your past. Some of the things he pulls up you forgot about yourself, a broken finger, a bruised thigh…No team wants to buy into a health risk, and if you've got a congenital heart problem or high blood pressure, your stock in the upcoming draft will drop. This makes sense to you. You wouldn't want to invest a million dollars in a sick race horse, why should they do so in a sick player? [1996: 9-10]

The bodily capital of a player, or "…the means of production, the raw materials he and his handlers (trainer and manager) have to work with and on, and, for a good part, the somatized product of his past training and the extant mode of living" is held to an unofficial set of agreed-upon criteria to measure potential athletic success (Wacquant 1995: 67). This is assessed in several events, primarily the 40-yard dash, 225lb bench press, cone drill, vertical jump, broad jump, as well as a few position-specific drills to determine physical talent. The factors of this physical talent according to Thomas P. Oates are:

(1) Measuring and assessing the bodily dimensions, condition, speed, strength and agility.

(2) Intangibles of technique and coachability (2017: 63-64).

Arizona Cardinals running back Chris Johnson perfectly illustrates the affect these events can have on a career. During the 2008 NFL Scouting Combine, Johnson saw his stock explode when he shattered the 40-yard dash record, running it in 4.24 seconds. Originally suspected to be a second-round selection at best, Johnson would be selected by the Tennessee Titans with the 24th selection of the first round (Johnson 2016). This was largely in thanks to this record-setting performance, which would stand until 2017 when wide receiver John Ross improved the record to 4.22 seconds (Kirshner 2017).

The successes and failures of individuals in these events and their careers has also set up criteria informally known in the NFL as position prototypes, or players that embody measurements and assessments necessary to succeed in the NFL based on their performance (Oates 2017: 66). An example of such a prototype is Julius Peppers. Now in

his 16th season in the NFL, he is widely considered as the prototype for a 4-3 defensive end/ 3-4 pass rushing outside linebacker. Standing 6'7 and 295lbs, Peppers possesses the size valued by defensive coordinators for lineman, while his 40-yard dash low of 4.64 seconds suggests him fast enough to pursue and even cover offensive players in space. Despite only running the 40-yard dash at the combine, Peppers was drafted second overall in the first round of the 2002 NFL Draft and has had a Hall of Fame caliber career as an NFL All-Time sack leader with the Carolina Panthers, Chicago Bears, and Green Bay Packers. Since 2002, several elite NFL pass rushers fitting the Peppers prototype have been drafted highly, most recently including Jadeveon Clowney of the Houston Texans and Myles Garrett of the Cleveland Browns, drafted first overall in the 2014 and 2017 NFL Drafts respectively (Brookes 2014, Linton 2016).

The role as a commodity for players is just as evident at the end of a career as it is at the beginning, often before a player reaches their prime. A common proverb in the NFL is "next man up" and focuses on the sport's necessity for depth at all positions due to injury, illness, or suspension. It is this mentality that likely contributes the most to the short length of the average NFL career. Coincidentally, it also contributes to the masculine aspects of the NFL player, encouraging players to "tough it up" and ignore potentially debilitating or deadly injuries in favor of continuing their careers.

Katie Rodgers in her article "I was a Gladiator: Pain, Injury, and Masculinity in the NFL" encounters this aspect of the game in her interviews with past NFL players. Repeatedly, Rodgers was informed in her interviews that players feared being replaced and had to desensitize themselves to the concept of pain, and mentally propel themselves

to play hurt to avoid hearing words like "the legs are just not the same as they used to be" or "we're moving on; we're moving in a different direction" as their contracts were terminated or they were denied a new one (Rodgers 2014: 146-149). In some cases, players are pushed by the coaching staff or even the organization to return before they are 100% (2014: 148).

Tim Green dedicated several chapters to injury and the concept of playing hurt. His recollections substantiate Rodger's research in confirming this "fear" as the reason why one would play injured:

> Most guys spend their entire careers either trying to overtake some cagey veteran and get his job, or trying to outdistance themselves from a young rookie breathing down their necks for an opportunity to replace them. It's a vicious and never-ending cycle. [1996: 84]

The inability to stay on the field does more than endanger roster spots, but hampers a player's ability to produce. The NFL keeps meticulous records of every play and outcome that occurs, yet another example of masculine dominance.

Statistics make the NFL franchises capable of placing a value on the productivity of every player, from star quarterbacks, all the way to a second-string linebacker and kicker (Quinn 2012:137). There are even several reputable websites devoted entirely to doing just this, from Football Outsiders to Pro-Football Reference. The practice of including statistical incentives in contracts is also a recognized standard in the NFL and failure to produce, in addition to costing them their jobs, whether due to injury or not, can keep players from accruing bonuses on their contract (Long & Czarnecki 2011: 286).

These incentives are both motivation for players, as well as league-wide benchmarks for what is considered exceptional player performance. Examples of this would include a million-dollar bonus for a quarterback who throws over 4,000 yards or a defender who racks up 15 quarterback sacks.

It is this environment of masculinity and human commodities that contextualizes and stimulates the identity of Polynesian descended athletes as instinctual football players. Further, it places immense value on these players, in some cases exceeding their own abilities as players at the professional level. This label of a hyper-masculine identity on Polynesian athletes, a valuable commodity by NFL standards, has several complex factors to consider; encompassing not only masculinity, but colonialism, economic opportunities, and other explanations as to the reasoning for its value to the NFL and its Polynesian descended players (Hokowhitu 2004, Johnston 1976, Manarpaac 2014, Tengan and Markham 2009, Uperesa 2014).

Chapter 3: Labeling Athletes of Polynesian Ethnicity as Instinctual Defenders

In 2002, Ted Miller wrote an article that featured for ESPN's Asian Pacific American Heritage Month page entitled "American Football, Samoan Style". In this article, Miller summarized almost perfectly the identity label of Polynesian descended football players.

> Samoans once were known as fierce warriors who practiced cannibalism. Now they take their aggressions out on the football field, and they do so with uncanny power and skill due to a potent brew of genetics and culture. Their bodies are naturally big-boned; traditional dances make them nimble; and a disciplined upbringing emphasizes the group over the individual, wiring them for team sports. [2002]

While inherently this identity labeling seems detrimental, this projection of hyper-masculine qualities wrapped in the tradition of cultural custom and expression simultaneously provides agency and opportunity for those athletes that embody it.

The Football Islands: Colonialization and Sport

American Gridiron Football is almost an institution in the Pacific Islands, particularly in American Samoa and Hawaii where the sport sees heavy participation by young boys and massive support from the population. Such support is evident in regularly televised NFL and collegiate events and heavy attendance at games and camps (Uperesa 2014 288-289, Manarpacc 2014: 28). However, this attendance and support of the sport of football is not naïve in its purpose of commitment to what is now a cultural staple, but the product of over a century of cultural modifications in the pursuit of agency in a variety of forms manifested in a label of hyper-masculine identity.

Sport held much cultural prominence in the Pacific Islands before the advent of colonialism. Surfing in Hawaii, dart throwing and royal bird-hunting in Samoa, and even whip tops of the Maori in New Zealand were all seen as important avenues to power and status for men alongside participation in warfare (Uperesa 2014: 265). In common colonial practice, the arrival of Europeans in the 19th century saw the outlaw of war and in some cases traditional sports. Colonial powers then would often replace them with western sports, to assimilate and control the population. The adoption of sports like baseball, rugby, and later gridiron football had an affect like that observed by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and the introduction of cricket by colonial powers to the Trobriand Islanders in Papua New Guinea (Uperesa 2014: 266, Manarpaac 2014: 28, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,415-2,416).

European dominance of the island brought with it the abolishment of intertribal warfare. This was problematic for the islanders, as warfare provided necessary avenues for the accumulation of status and agency within their culture (Blanchard and Cheska 1985: 69). To accommodate these cultural demands and to resist foreign influence, the Trobriand Islanders adjusted the rules of the game, which now include: no limit to the number of players, military garb, use of magic to fortify bats (like fortifying war spears) and strict rules of Kayasa, or "any period of competitive, obligatory activity" with a ceremonial pattern (Malinowski 1935: 42). In modifying the sport of cricket to fit the need amongst tribes in the Trobriand Islands to define themselves through competition, the islanders, according to Malinowski's approach, utilized the function of sport to meet their human needs (Abrams 1983).

In American Samoa anthropologist Margaret Mead conducted research and found evidence of similar roles in Polynesian culture. Her 1928 work on youth and Samoan culture in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, while focusing heavily on female perspectives, also included recognition that males were judged on their status and power in society based on exploits of achievement displaying his discipline and prowess. However, there was a cultural proviso while one was to seek to perform his best, he must also remain humble and not drastically outclass his fellow men: simultaneously extolling skill and humility. Thus, it appears there is a cultural link to status that can extend to sport in Samoan culture (Mead 1928: 34-37).

These cultural perceptions integrate into what anthropologist's call, "Sport as Conflict," in which competition over resources, status, and power by two-or more individuals results in the neutralization, injury, or elimination of the opponent (Coser 1956:8, Nisbet 1977: 77, Popenoe 1974: 52, and Arens 1975: 77). Thus, sport is defined as a product of culture in relation to competition; a theme present in relation to football in the Pacific Islands (Malinowski 1935, Manarpaac 2014, Uperesa 2014). This cultural adoption of football to administer conflict to provide for cultural needs has led to Uperesa's observation that football (and sport in general) has reinvigorated the national pride of many nations within the Pacific, providing pathways of agency in a period of limited mobility; instilling "hope, meaning, confidence, and spectacular expression…" (2014: 265). This is especially true in areas of low economic opportunity in the Pacific, as exemplified in American Samoa.

The agricultural practices of the colonial period in Samoa's history were the standard mode of economic agency for much of the islands both in pre-and post-contact periods. In some ways, they still are. Richard W. Johnston's 1976 article for Sports Illustrated "Shake'em Out of the Coconut Trees" describes the rigorous physical labor many Samoan children are exposed to early in life (1976). Before and after school, children are expected to assist in the harvesting of bananas and coconuts. While the former requires the movement of 75-80lbs of the fruit from out of the islands mountainous areas, the latter includes the climbing of multiple 100ft tall trees per day. Due to this, Johnston recorded from Famika Anae, conductor of the annual summer football clinic in Pago Pago that, "By the time a boy is ready for high school football, his muscles often are as defined as those of a weight lifter."(1976).

Even with the continued existence of familial agricultural practices, these are no longer the most notable form of subsistence on the island. When the Navy, responsible for most employment left the island in the late 50's and early 60's President John F. Kennedy appointed Rex Lee the Governor of American Samoa in 1961. Lee contributed mightily to the contemporary American Samoa by introducing new schools and opening two canneries to help fill the employment gap. Consequently, the primary mode of subsistence today in American Samoa is a single StarKist tuna canary, the other having closed in 2009. The military is also a noted alternative for many Samoans, despite their active serviceman leading the nation in most casualties per capita. Notably, none of these adequately support the population (Johnston, 1976, Miller 2002, Manarpacc 2014: 33-36, Pelley 2010, Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,416).

The struggling economic situation in American Samoa stimulates interest in the sport of football and the potential rewards it could bring, mainly scholarships to a mainland university and education, as well as the possibility of playing professional football in the NFL and the celebrity and financial benefits that accompany it (Uperesa 2014: 290, Manarpacc 2014: 30-33). This is also the case for the islands of Hawaii and New Zealand, which rely almost solely on the tourist industry to support nearly the entirety of the population (33). Therefore, it is little surprise that when gauging an elementary school classroom while studying at the University of Hawaii, Manarpaac found that ten-out-of-sixteen boys in the class professed to wanting to play professional football (2014: 14).

Adopting the Label

Football also allows Polynesian-descended islanders to give back to their homes and future generations. As University of Washington defensive lineman Tui Alailefaleula was quoted as saying to Ted Miller in 2002, "Football is the game where we can reach our goals and help our families." The sense of community is strong in many Pacific Island cultures, never being separate from the whole of their family or extended family. In American Samoa, Fa'a Samoa, Samoan for "The Samoan Way", helps explain that it is common practice for islanders who "make-good" to return to their homes and communities and impart the skills and knowledge they accumulated and distribute them to the next generation. This is known as *Malaga* and has been observed by many prominent football stars including Troy Polamalu, Pisa Tinoisamoa, and Isa'ako Sopoaga (Tengan and Markham 2009: 2,413, Manarpacc 2014: 34-35, Johnston 1976). This

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includes sponsoring camps, making donations to local schools and clubs, as well as providing equipment and coaching. In the era before the massive celebrity of NFL players, former players would often return to the islands to coach and mentor the next generation personally. Such was the case with Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa's father, Tu'ufuli, who returned to American Samoa and mentored multitudes of players to success at a variety of levels; earning him a Vince Lombardi-like reputation (Uperesa 2014: 292-294). This expression of pride and commitment in Polynesian cultures also contributes directly to the outside perception of themselves as warrior-like, violent, and instinctual players.

When first being colonized in the nineteenth century, the perception of the Polynesian warrior was that of "godless heathens or cannibals" who were later utilized for their strength as laborers in the agricultural plantations of the Pacific. Now the image of the Pacific Warrior has been modified and romanticized by spectators into an exotic representation of primal hyper-masculinity akin to that of the "Noble Savage," an uncorrupted aspect of the Other. Brendan Hokuwhitu recognizes this regarding Maori "Masculine Physicality" stating that "… in the twenty-first century it has become a spectacle played out by the overachievement of *tane* (Maori Men) on the sports field" (Hokuwhitu 2004:259, Manarpacc 2014: 37-47). In addition to participating in and exemplifying this masculine identity, many players of Polynesian descent not only proudly recognize this identity as their own, but perpetuate its existence with how they represent themselves and other popular explanations.

Jon Entine in his controversial book, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We Are Afraid to talk About It* had this to say regarding the idea that Polynesian athletes were genetically naturals for football:

> Polynesians, especially the Samoans, are amongst the world's most mesomorphic (muscular) body types. A number of studies have shown that muscle bulk and the degree of muscularity, especially in the thigh and buttock, are important predictors of success in rugby players, whereas the opposite applies in such sports as distance running. This genetic admixture helps in part explain why athletes from this region are large, agile and fast. [Entine 1999, Garber 2002]

To suggest that Polynesian athletes are superior due to genetics is an incorrect assumption based on insufficient and heavily biased evidence (Pitsiladis et al. 2010: 243). Unfortunately, such a statement has become mainstream as to the perception of these athletes. However, in some cases the athletes believe and propagate this belief themselves.

For example, Johnston made note in his article that Samoans stimulate the myth that their abilities are instinctual by claiming a continued racial purity among the islanders. His article observes that the islander genetics have not comingled with those of missionaries or other non-islanders, and that many players subscribe to the idea that they are naturally superior to other races in this capacity on the football field. Junior Ah You, a standout defensive end in the CFL, was quoted as saying: "My father is half Chinese. My mother is pure Samoan. Does that make Junior one-fourth Chinese? No, sir! "That makes me all Samoan!"(1996). Not only does such a statement contextualize being

Samoan as the dominant identity of a Polynesian descended athlete playing professional football, it also helps link the connection between being Samoan and playing football.

Manarpaac makes use of an interview with former NFL quarterback, Marques Tuiasosopo, for ESPN's "They Might be Giants" that outlines how it feels to be Samoan and a football player and the expectations for yourself within the culture based on history and tradition.

> There's an attitude in our culture. I go back and look at pictures of great-great grandparents and they were wearing ceremonial clothes. They battled other cultures and maybe that's been passed down through the years. It's in the blood, an attitude when they go out there. Off the field -- I can't speak for a particular person -- but in general, they're quiet, don't like to bring attention to themselves. But get into a competitive situation and it's like Jekyll and Hyde -- it's fierce. [2002, Manarpacc 2014: 52]

The former quarterback indicates that there is a precedent for such a mindset within Polynesian culture and that this is now related to football. Combined with the opportunities football brings to themselves and their families via economic agency and the prior existence of a sort-of stereotype painting them as masculine warriors, it seems then that rewards of an existence as such a commodity may outweigh the risks. The risks, and there are many, are largely physical and form in relation to damage a player's body suffers while playing the game, but also encompasses those preconceived, erroneous notions regarding the player and Polynesians.

Injury, as discussed in earlier chapter, is a certainty in the NFL, as one respondent of Katie Rodgers communicated to her in "I was a Gladiator"; "The injury rate in the NFL is 100%" (2014: 147). In fact, this is true in more than one way. While physical

injury such as broken bones or muscle tears are regularly recognized and treated in the NFL, there are other much more debilitating injuries that are often overlooked or in some cases ignored. The injury I am referring to is chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disease associated with consistent head trauma. The effects include: memory degradation, depression, mood change, and suicidality (McKee et al. 2017; Manarpacc 2014: 48-49).

CTE has claimed several prominent victims over the years, including Junior Seau who committed suicide in 2012 and is believed to be linked to the disease (2014: 48). While the NFL has taken efforts to reduce the chance of the concussive episodes that increase the chance of CTE, recent studies may indicate that no matter the steps taken to secure player safety, CTE may be a certainty for players (Rodgers 2014: 142-144). In 2017 Dr. Ann McKee of Boston University, who had conducted past autopsies of NFL player brains for CTE, co-authored a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on 202 brains from deceased former football players. Of those 111 brains from NFL players, 110 exhibited evidence of CTE (2017). This startling correlation between NFL players and CTE in one of the largest studies on the disease to date, only escalates the already high-risk factor inherent in playing professional football for Polynesian descended athletes; especially considering the bias that sees them only play positions on the line of scrimmage or on the defense, where such concussive episodes are most likely.

Such a narrow avenue of positional representation propagated by incorrect assumptions of genetic and cultural practice implies a typing system or process for

determining player positions in the NFL that looks beyond player performance. I believe that this is not only true, but that such process has become almost subconscious in the minds of coaches and fans, as a label that can be identified on sight of a player, sometimes without ever seeing him play. This is another example of utilizing a process known as "The Look Test" or "Eyeball Test" and is regularly used, not only by fans, but by scouts and coaches as well. The method behind this phenomenon rests on the observer relying on tradition, precedence, and his own personal perspective on the player to form a definition for the player's position, style, and quality (Schalter 2012). To further illustrate this concept of labeling, I will break down the most venerated position on any NFL team, the quarterback, and determine the recognized requirements for the positional label of a player to be considered either a Pocket Passer or a Dual Threat.

Chapter 4: Labeling Quarterbacks: Mobility vs Stability

The quarterback position is arguably the most important position on an NFL team. An NFL quarterback is responsible for several different aspects of the game. The quarterback: communicates plays to the rest of the offense and is responsible for knowing the playbook better than any other player, recognizes defensive patterns and coordinates his teammates in the best formation to take advantage of these patterns, accepts the football at the snap, coaxing it into play with proper cadence and timing unique to each play, either hands off the football to backs, runs it himself, or throws the football to receivers to attain yardage (thus making him equally responsible for almost all scores an turnovers), and is largely considered the undisputed leader of an NFL team. From this near impossible list of responsibilities, it seems apparent that the quarterback is not only important, but a necessary nexus through which a team's offense flows.

This is reflected in the value the position has in the NFL. As of 2017, the top 25 average player contracts in the NFL were leaned largely towards quarterbacks with 19-of-25 of those belonging to signal callers and 5-of-6 remaining contracts going to pass rushing defenders seeking to stop quarterbacks according to NFL.com (2017). Furthermore, ten quarterbacks have been drafted within the first five picks of the NFL draft since 2010. In no uncertain terms, the quarterback position is of immense importance in the NFL. That importance also brings with it a series of characteristics and traits universally considered evidence of a competent quarterback.

The Standard Model for NFL Quarterbacks

Perhaps the simplest definitions of the expected qualities of a quarterback can be found in *Football for Dummies,* where according to Oakland Raiders Hall of Fame defensive end and gameday analyst Howie Long, the following attributes are most necessary for a quarterback to succeed in the NFL:

- **Arm Strength:** velocity is important when throwing a football because it allows a quarterback to complete a pass before a single defensive player can recover (react to the pass) …The more arm strength a quarterback has, the better his ability to throw the ball at high speeds. [Long & Czarnecki 2011:64]
- **Competitiveness:** To be a competitive player, a quarterback must have an inner desire to win. The quarterback's competitive fire often inspires his teammates to play harder. Competitiveness is a quality that every coach (and teammate) wants in his quarterback. [64-65].
- **Intelligence:** Many NFL teams have a 3-inch playbook that includes at least 50 running plays and as many as 200 passing plays. The quarterback has to know them all. He has to know not only what he's supposed to do in every one of those plays but also what other skilled players (running backs, receivers, and tight ends) are required to do. [65]
- **Vision:** A quarterback must quickly scan the field when he comes to the line of scrimmage prior to the snap of the ball. He must survey the defense, checking its alignments and in particular the depth of the defensive backs… After the ball is snapped the quarterback must continue to scan the field as he moves backward. … vision is critical if he wants to discover whether a receiver other than his first choice is open on a particular play. [67]
- **Release:** After the quarterback raises the ball in his hand, usually near his head or slightly above and behind it, he releases, or rapidly brings his arm forward and lets the ball loose… Quarterbacks with great releases generally are born with the ability… A quarterback either has this coordinated motion between his arm, elbow, and wrist, or he doesn't. [66]
- **Size:** A quarterback who's 6'5" and 225 pounds is considered ideal. A quarterback wants to be tall enough to see over his lineman—whose average height in the NFL is 6'5" to 6'7"—and look down the field, beyond the line of scrimmage, to find his receivers and see where the defensive backs are positioned. [66-67]

- **Mobility:** When a quarterback has excellent mobility, you hear him described as having quick feet. This term means that he moves quickly and effortlessly behind the line of scrimmage with the football. A quarterback doesn't have to be speedy to do this. He simply must be able to maneuver quickly and gracefully. [65]

While these highly subjective traits outline what is commonly looked for in a quarterback, no two quarterbacks accomplish their massive list of tasks the same way, and generally quarterback play style can be broken down into two distinct labels: The Pocket Passer and the Dual Threat.

Pocket Passer or Dual Threat Quarterback?

Pocket Passers or Pro Style represent the classic image of an NFL quarterback outlined by Howie Long; the product of nearly a century of play resulting in a style that coordinates the team from the pocket and is adept at passing the football to gain yardage and score. The Pocket Passer stands tall and resolute within the pocket (the area delineated on the field by the protective area the offensive line creates for the quarterback) during the play, looking off coverage as he reads his receiver options before throwing the football to the one he deems the safest (Long & Czarnecki 2011: 63, McKinney 2017, Schalter 2012). This quarterback label is renowned for managing games down to the second and winning games with accuracy and perhaps even arm strength should he be endowed with such a talent. Generally, this quarterback label does not run the football deliberately; only rarely extending plays with his feet to avoid a sack or on goalline sneaks to acquire a touchdown (Long & Czarnecki 2011). Some positional prototypes of this quarterback label in the NFL are former Indianapolis Colt and Denver Bronco Peyton Manning and San Francisco 49ers legend Joe Montana.

Almost in direct antithesis of this quarterback label is the Dual Threat or Mobile quarterback. Dual Threat quarterbacks are generally recognized by one defining characteristic: they will willingly and often spectacularly run the football. Thus, comes the term Dual Threat, recognizing that the quarterback is just as likely to rush on the ground as pass through the air (McKinney 2017, Schalter 2012). Typically, a quarterback of this label is lauded more for his athletic physique and mobility than any other characteristics, and can rush for as many as 300 yards a season. While originally somewhat of a rarity in the NFL, with few names of note being recognized as Dual Threats, in 2011 the typing saw a renaissance, with many notable additions to the league employing the attributes of this style in their play. It is commonly believed that the rise of spread and option offensive systems, sporting multiple receivers on the field or spontaneous, mid-play adjustment to determine whether quarterback, running back or receiver rushes with the football, which depend heavily on an athletic and mobile quarterback at the collegiate level helped stimulate this shift (Pelissero 2014, Schalter 2012, McKinney 2017). There is also the notable criticism of this quarterback label, in that they are often mentioned as requiring extra development to teach them the professional offenses that are drastically different from the spread offenses run by colleges (Hirschhorn 2015). The most notable Dual Threat quarterbacks of the modern era include Carolina Panther Cam Newton and Seattle Seahawk Russell Wilson.

The subjective nature of these traits and definitions provides difficulty in identifying these quarterback labels; meaning that there is, to my knowledge, no absolute, quantifiable way to identify a quarterback by his play style that does not involve a

personal bias or conjecture. This is a process is known as "The Look Test" or "Eyeball Test" and is regularly used, not only by fans, but by scouts and coaches as well. The method behind this phenomenon rests on the observer relying on tradition, precedence, and his own personal perspective on the player to form a definition for the player's position, style, and quality (Schalter 2012). This is not to say that there is no quantifiable data on quarterbacks in the NFL; in fact, there is arguably more data on quarterbacks than any other position. However, this data is archaic in its analysis, in some cases not even recording the statistics vital in identifying a quarterback label. An example and among the most infamous of these statistics is the quarterback passer rating.

$$Passer\ Rating$$
$$= \left(\frac{\left(\frac{COMP}{ATT} - 0.3 \right) * 5 + \left(\frac{YARDS}{ATT} - 3 \right) * 0.25 + \left(\frac{TD}{ATT} \right) * 20 + 2.375 - \left(\frac{INT}{ATT} * 25 \right)}{6} \right) * 100$$

Figure 1. NFL quarterback passer rating formula.

The formula for the quarterback passer rating was developed in the 1970s by Don Smith, Seymor Siwoff, and Don Weiss; becoming a standard statistic of measurement in the league since 1973 (Quinn 2012: 138). The formula computes the aspects of a player's performance at the position— completed passes, passing yards, touchdown passes, interceptions, and attempted passes (2012). A rare perfect score stands at 158.3, while anything over 100.0 is considered a great performance and anything less than 80.0 is generally considered poor (Long & Czarnecki 2011: 74-75, Quinn 2012: 139-140). As

evidenced by the formula in Figure 1., the math behind computing the score is complicated, but also lacking in its ability to measure the full quality of a quarterback, as it does not account for rushing yards or touchdowns, or other turnover and lost yardage outcomes such as fumbles or sacks (Quinn 2012: 139).

This poses difficulties when gauging quarterbacks whose play-style does not fit within the confines of the Passer Pocket-friendly formula. Thus, a Dual Threat quarterback who rushes for 75-yards and scores two rushing touchdowns will see no increase in his quarterback passer rating and will consequently receive negative marks towards the rating with every incompletion or interception thrown; making the quarterback passer rating a poor indicator of both performance and play-style. Does this reflect a negative bias towards rush oriented quarterbacks in the NFL? Not necessarily, but it does reflect the prevalence of the "Look Test" and the affects it can have on the structures and data within the sport. To aid in clarifying the definition of quarterback labels, I offer up the following statistical analysis as a more definable way of quantifying two of the NFL's most prominent quarterback play-styles by identifying the least definable of the two: The Dual Threat.

Statistically Defining a Dual Threat Quarterback

To start, the data most relevant to identifying the Dual Threat quarterback label must be discerned from the massive amounts of data available on NFL quarterbacks. As the primary trait of a Dual Threat quarterback is his ability to rush the football, it therefore seems most logical to begin with that data most relevant to this; forgoing data on passing more relevant to Pocket Passers. In this case, this includes rushing attempts,

rushing yardage, and rushing touchdowns. The reliability of each data type must then be qualified.

Of the three, rushing touchdowns proves the least reliable. While scoring is undoubtedly an important statistic in the NFL, rushing touchdowns are not unique to any quarterback label. While one could argue that a Dual Threat quarterback is more likely to rush for a touchdown score, this does not take into the account the likelihood of other quarterback labels rushing for touchdowns. Not utilizing this statistic will help avoid answering such comparative problems as those that would arise between a quarterback who rushed for five touchdowns, but only for five-yards, and a quarterback who rushed for 750-yards, but only scored two rushing touchdowns.

Rushing attempts fares slightly better, highlighting when a quarterback rushes with the football. However, this becomes an issue when observing that some quarterback rushes are not deliberate in nature as part of a play. Such an occurrence may be called "scrambling" and sees the quarterback rushing due to defensive pressure and/or the collapse of the protective pocket. It may also be called "extending a play", referring to situations when a quarterback recognizes a risky opportunity to exceed the yardage possible in the called play, and rushes forward.

Rushing yardage was by far the most reliable statistic, as whether the play was premeditated or spontaneous, a score or lost yardage, this data was impacted by it. With the "Look Test" prescribing rushing as the primary trait of identification in a Dual Threat quarterback, it would logically be assumed that this quarterback label would rush for more than the average quarterback. While this is not necessarily false, the issue with this

data arises when recognizing the number of quarterbacks who play in the league annually and the large number of reserve players who rarely play during the season, let alone rush the football.

There are also erroneous analytical problems to recognize in the benchmarks by which the label will be measured. The NFL is highly dynamic, prone to fads, scheme evolutions, talent droughts, and a multitude of other factors that affect the product the league distributes annually. This makes it difficult to measure the effectiveness of players from different eras and even within the last five-ten years. This means that while rushing-record quarterbacks may seem the perfect yard-stick by which to measure the Dual Threat label, the reality is that these players hold these records for exceptional play across nearly the entirety of the NFL's history. Therefore, measuring the likes of modern quarterbacks to the older, exceptional careers of the likes of Michael Vick and Steve Young not only holds the standard exceptionally high, but ignores the various changes in quarterback play throughout the history of the league. It seemed more plausible to measure a quarterback based on standards in the league during his career and amongst his peers; effectively measuring the player within his own era. The following section outlines the methods I employed to better determine quarterbacks of the Dual Threat label amongst the NFL's 32 starting quarterbacks in 2016.

After identifying each of the 32 NFL franchise's starting signal caller in 2016, the next step involved determining the average number of rushing yards per season each quarterback was responsible for over his career. It should be noted that the necessity of a career rushing yards average requires at least two seasons worth of data to compute. It is

for this reason that rookie starting quarterbacks Dak Prescott of the Dallas Cowboys, Carson Wentz of the Philadelphia Eagles, and Jared Goff of the Los Angeles Rams will be mostly omitted from this study.

The factor of measurement relied on a host of different variables. To begin, we first needed to know how long each of the quarterbacks had been playing in the league. Tom Brady proved the oldest starting quarterback, with statistics starting in 2000. So, the data comes from across 17 years of quarterback rushing statistics in the NFL. To address the issue of the sheer number of quarterbacks in the NFL, as well as discrepancies in average rushing attempts; I resolved to take the average rushing attempts from quarterbacks in each season from 2000-2016.
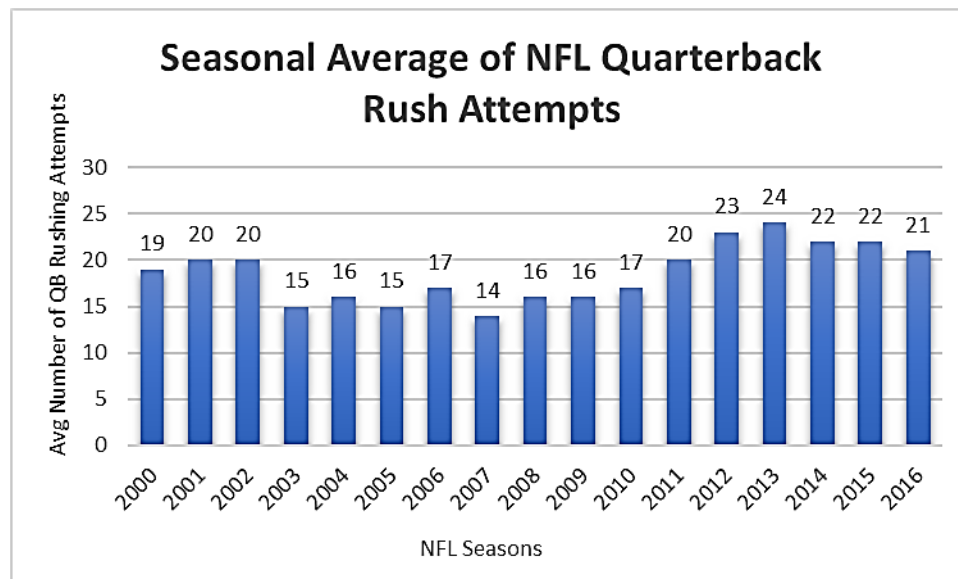

Figure 2. Seasonal average of NFL quarterback rush attempts.

Now armed with average rushing attempts by a quarterback from 2000-2016 shown in Figure 2., I determined that from there one could calculate a more stable

average for quarterback rushing yards per season without including data from quarterbacks who rarely played or were more likely to rush spontaneously than as part of a play call. To do this, I took the rushing yards only from players who met or exceeded the average rushing attempts for that season. When averaged together, these rushing yards produced a seasonal average that was not as susceptible to the errors of the general quarterback population, better describing quarterbacks that saw significant playing time.
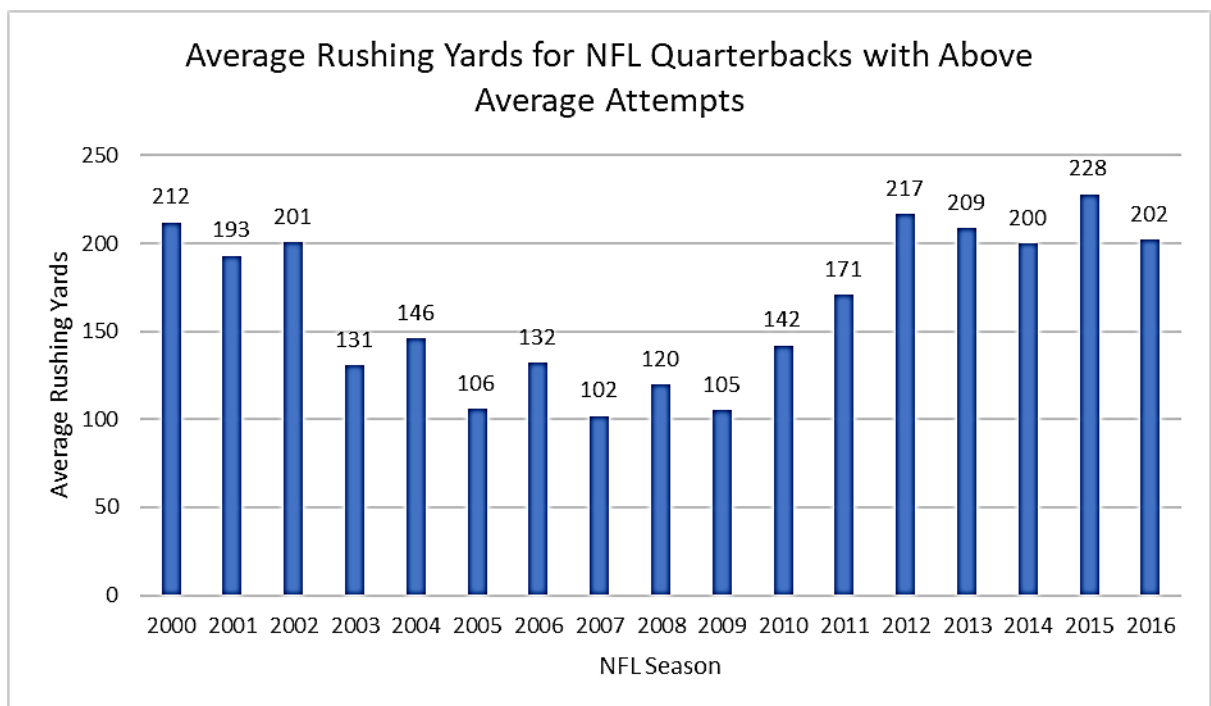

Figure 3. Average rushing yards for quarterbacks with above average attempts.

Once the seasonal averages had been determined, shown in Figure 3., the final step in determining a Dual Threat quarterback could be implemented. To do this, I took a quarterback's career rushing average, and compared it to the average of average seasonal rushing yards for quarterbacks who had rush attempts above the average for that season

across the quarterback's career, now shown in Figure 4. If the career average matched or exceed this league career seasonal average, it could be reasonably assumed that the quarterback is of a Dual Threat label. To better explain this, let's look at Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers; who's style is often debated as being either Dual Threat or Pocket Passer.
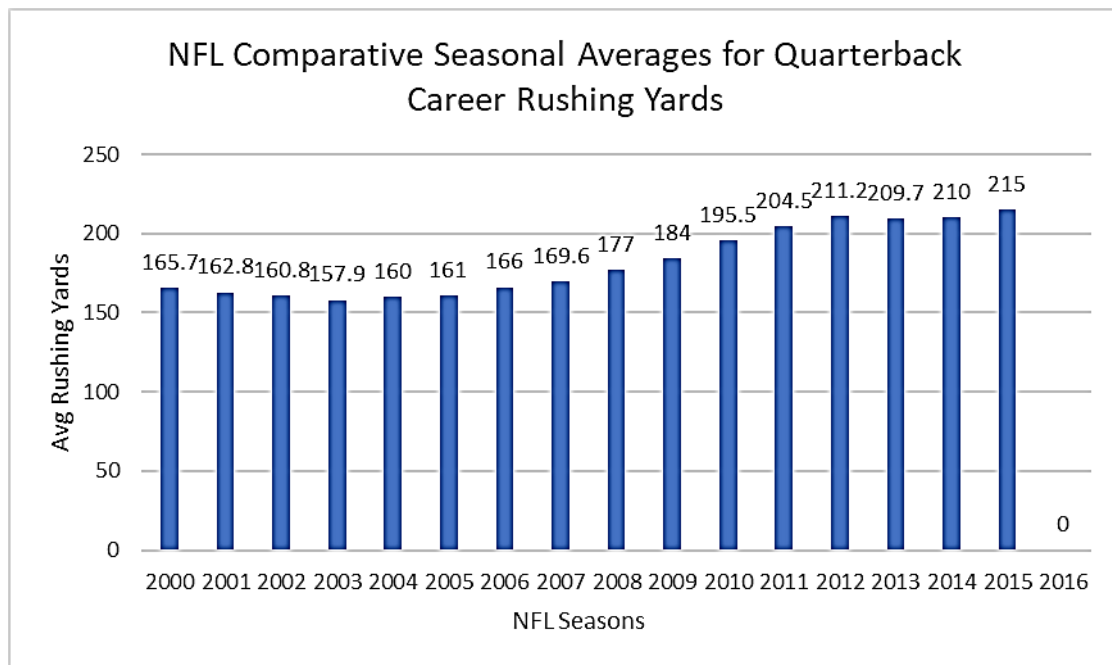

Figure 4. NFL comparative seasonal averages for quarterback career rushing yards.

Aaron Rodgers has been a quarterback for Green Bay since being drafted in 2005 and has a career rushing average of 212 yards per season over his 12-year career. When averaging the seasonal rushing yard averages for quarterbacks with above average rushing attempts, the seasonal average for a quarterback during this time can be calculated as 161-yards. Rodgers's career average greatly exceeds the league comparison to his peers during the same time, suggesting that he can be considered a Dual Threat

quarterback. The likes of Aaron Rodgers, Alex Smith, and Andrew Luck are the closest to hybrids of the two labels in the NFL, boasting a quantifiable Dual Threat ability and recognized prowess as passers.

The results of this analysis can be seen in the Figure 5., revealing an evident division between the two quarterback labels.
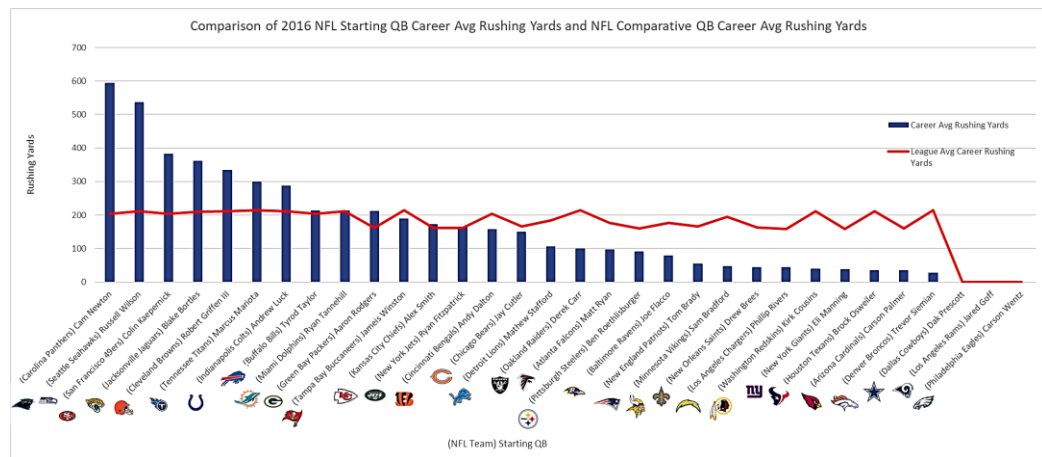
Figure 5. Comparison of 2016 NFL starting QB avg. rushing yards and NFL comparative QB career avg. rushing yards.

With the definition and identification of quarterbacks who meet the standards set here for Dual Threat labeled quarterbacks, there are a few notable points and correlations that such data reveals when combined with further analysis. 1). The disproportion of Dual Threat quarterbacks with ethnicities that are not white. 2). The drastic difference in success between Pocket Passers and Dual Threat quarterbacks. 3). The comparative longevity of each label.

Race in the NFL and Quarterback Position

From the data collected, it can be concluded that of the identified twelve Dual Threat quarterbacks who started in 2016, five have ancestries that were not white. Initially this may not seem too odd, that is until the scope includes all 32 quarterbacks. Of the 32 quarterbacks in the NFL there are only eight who do not ethnically identify as white; meaning over 60% of the NFL's 25% non-white starting quarterbacks are Dual Threat quarterbacks. The three outliers in this study being Tampa Bay's Jameis Winston, Dallas's rookie Dak Prescott (who would likely qualify as Dual Threat following 2017), and Minnesota's Sam Bradford (Bradford is 1/16th Cherokee and a member of the Cherokee Nation) (Evans 2008). Race as a concept related to sport is not a new topic by any means. Studies into racial representation and marginalization have long been a staple of the sporting mythos. The victories of early African American boxers like Jack Johnson over white heavy weight champion James Jefferies and Jackie Robinson's breaking of the color barrier in Major League Baseball in 1947 are all examples of the power of race in relation to sport (Norrell 2005: 69-73, 138-139, Regester 2004: 269, Wiggins 2015: 184-185).

In the NFL, the relation of race to positionality and perception is no less relevant; especially at the quarterback position where non-white representation has been historically low (Martin 2015: 54-56). The first non-white quarterback to play in the NFL and throw a pass was Willie Thrower, an African American who made his debut with the Chicago Bears on October 18th, 1953 against the San Francisco 49ers (Mayer 2017). While Thrower only played in a few contests for the Bears in 1953, his impact on the

sport was an important one, that would eventually lead to the dissolvement of the color barrier in 1962, the eventual triumphs of Denver Bronco's Marlin Briscoe as the NFL's first African American starting quarterback in 1968, and the first Super Bowl victory by an African American quarterback by Doug Williams and the Washington Redskins in 1988 (Gartland 2016). Despite this, non-white representation in the sport's most important positions, including quarterback, ownership, and coaching remains sparse.

The opposite remains true of other, less prominent positions. By the 1980s, non-white and particularly African American athletes dominated such positions as wide receiver, corner back, and running back. According to the *2012 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League*, the decade of the NFL's 2010s white/non-white(black) ratio at these positions was a staggering 15% and 84% for wide receivers, 2% and 98% for corner backs, and 12% and 86% for running backs (Lapchick et al. 2012). Similarly, to the way players of Polynesian descent are labeled, the overwhelming representation by non-white athletes at these positions and underrepresentation at others is often cited as the product of natural biological advantages and a lack of work ethic necessary to succeed at those more cerebral positions (Martin 2015: 55).

Again, Jon Entine stands at the forefront of the erroneous perspective of race, biology, and eugenics. In the same book where he outlined why Polynesians have preferable genetic structures for line positions, Entine had this to say regarding African American disproportion in the NFL, "While some sociologists remain dubious, most scientists are now convinced that, on average, West African—descended blacks draw on a physiological and biomechanical gold mine when it comes to competing in anaerobic

sports such as football, basketball, and sprinting" (1999). Such an incorrect and largely unsupported explanation remains vastly rejected by scientific communities, yet is still an aspect that is a popular explanation for the disproportionate ratio.

Another attribute that is often called into question is the work ethic that is commonly attributed to white players, but not those of non-white ancestry. Whereas a white athlete is often accredited his prowess to hard work and a strong work ethic, a non-white athlete's skill is almost always attributed to some sort of natural ability. This was the case with linebacker John Timu, whose career was observed at the beginning of this thesis, and other Polynesian-descended players. Another good example was utilized by Ronald L. Mower, et al., in the observation of the opposite in the careers of NFL running backs Danny Woodhead and Toby Gerhart (2014: 128-130). The pair of running backs are infamous in the last decade of football for being a rarity at the position: white. In those media outlets that are researched, the descriptive vocabulary used to define the two revolved around the white-working class man, dedicated to hard work. This was especially evident when describing Woodhead's home life, accenting his family's roots in a 115-year old farmhouse and the deep Christian values and working-class demeanor symbolized in such simple events as family dinner (129). The non-white athlete rarely receives such commendation based on work ethic, instead only being recognized for physical prowess connected to the perception of race imprinted on the individual (130).

The connection of such racial profiling and the disproportion of non-white quarterbacks who can be defined as the Dual Threat label seems to support these phenomena as a part of the football mythos. It also seems to support the use of the "Look

Test" in football not just as a phenomenon mentioned offhandedly during broadcasts or game reviews, but as an example of practice evident in the very fabric of the sport. Bleacher Report writer Ty Schalter examined this phenomenon in his article "Why African-American QBs Are Systemically Trained to Abandon Mechanics".

According to Schalter, a prospective football player at the quarterback position is already designated a Pro Style or Dual Threat before they even reach the collegiate level and that race plays a factor in this evaluation. To illustrate his point, Schalter included images from Rivals.com, widely regarded as the authority on football talent in transition from the high school to the collegiate level, of the top 15 high school players designated as either Pro Style or Dual Threat. The results were highly supportive of Schalter's point, with not a single player listed under Pro Style being non-white, while the Dual Threat quarterbacks were well overrepresented with African American and other non-white ethnicities. A follow-up by this thesis with the top ten per type for 2018's class of quarterbacks revealed similar results as displayed in Figure 6. and Figure 7.

Figure 6. Rivals.com Top 10 Pro Style quarterbacks 2018.

Figure 7. Rivals.com Top 10 Dual Threat quarterbacks 2018

Schalter builds on this by observing that these players are denied training in proper passing mechanics that make the Pocket Passer label so successful.

> Overwhelmingly, players that are groomed on the first track [Pocket Passer] fit the old archetype. They're trained to polish their mechanics, improve their footwork, fit the profile that colleges—and ultimately, pro teams—are looking for. Overwhelmingly, players groomed to the second track [Dual Threat] are barely "groomed" at all. Their coaches build the offense around their athletic gifts. They're *not* expected to hone their craft as passers; that's just wasted time. They're human weapons, whose strengths are systematically maximized and faults systematically minimized. [2012]

Schalter expands upon this further by utilizing the career of quarterback, turned wide receiver Tyrelle Pryor's collegiate career at Ohio State to exemplify the point, where his raw athleticism was utilized without developing the other skills necessary to play quarterback; hurting his college performance and hindering his professional career.

Instead of grooming Pryor within the existing system, Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel deployed Pryor in specific packages designed to exploit his athleticism. In the second game of Pryor's freshman year, Tressel threw Pryor into the fire against mighty USC. Tressel had Pryor run more often than he threw into the teeth of a USC defense stacked with NFL talent. Pryor was brutalized en route to a 35-3 road defeat—not the way an elite "pro style" quarterback prospect is ever developed. [2012]

While Schalter illustrates the "Look Test" and the affect it has on those designated as Dual Threat quarterbacks, he also brings up the topic of success at the quarterback position, citing Pocket Passers as the more successful type. This success can be readily identifiable based on the previous data utilized in this chapter. When comparing the 2016 starting quarterbacks designated Dual Threat in this chapter, 12, and those considered Pocket Passers, 17, among the biggest things that will stand out is the massive differences in the level of success between the two, particularly in those areas where success is best measured in the NFL: playoff appearances, super bowl appearances, and super bowl victories.

Success and Longevity at the Quarterback Position

During the careers of those who were defined as Dual Threat quarterbacks, the 12 players combined for 27 playoff appearances, five super bowl appearances, and two super bowl victories. Compared to the other type this is woefully inadequate, as the 17 Pocket Passers combine for 66 playoff appearances, 15 super bowl appearances, and 11 super bowl victories. This analysis is not entirely definitive, as football is a team sport and factors other than quarterback label are bound to have an influence on such dynamic data

as postseason appearances. However, such a massive gap in success between one label and another is difficult to ignore.
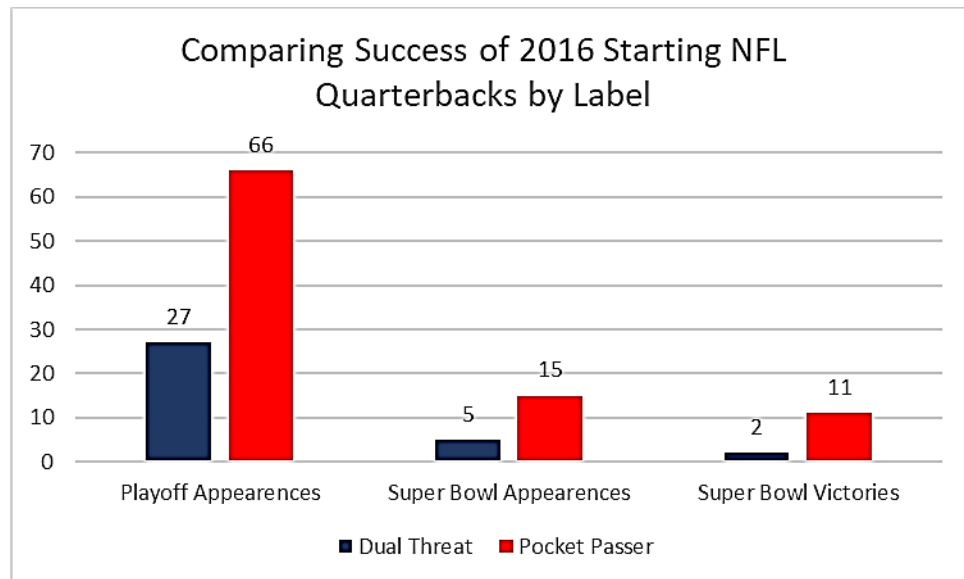

Figure 8. Comparing success of 2016 starting NFL quarterback by label

Longevity for each label is also a difference that can be noticed in the data in and enhanced with further research; as exemplified in Figure 8. Except for three quarterbacks, the other 9 Dual Threat quarterbacks sport careers no older than the year 2011, with an average career length of 4.7 years. Even when adding the careers of the three outlier quarterbacks for an average of 6.5 years, this falls almost three years less than the Pocket Passer average of 8.9 years. Injury is typically cited as a primary reason for this lack of longevity, with Robert Griffin III serving as a perfect example of what injury can do to the game of a Dual Threat quarterback. The 2012 Offensive Rookie of the Year received reconstructive knee surgery following a stellar season which diminished his explosiveness, leaving him without the athleticism that had made him a great Dual

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Threat. Now forced to pass more often, Griffin's prowess quickly eroded, primarily due to injury-proneness but possibly also for lacking the passing development accrued by Pocket Passers during college detailed by Schalter (2012, Pelissero 2014).

Arizona Head Coach Bruce Arians outlined his perspective on Dual Treat quarterbacks in the NFL as well as his and the NFL's preference for Pocket Passers in an interview with USA Today in 2014.

> I just think that they always have been [preferred]. People got wowed a little bit by Cam. Russell wins a championship with a great defense, and he's really tough to defend. I just don't think those guys are the answer myself. I'll take Manning, Brady, Ben (Roethlisberger), Carson (Palmer), Drew (Brees), Philip (Rivers) – all the guys out there first. And if they have mobility like Andrew Luck, that's a blessing. [2014]

For even further examples on the leagues longevity preference for Pocket Passer quarterback in the NFL, one needs to look no further than the differences between team personnel at the position from 2016 to 2017. As of 2017 Colin Kaepernick and Robert Griffin III are no longer employed in the NFL. Andrew Luck and Ryan Tannehill are both suffering from season debilitating injuries. Blake Bortles sits amidst a quarterback controversy that may see him ousted from Jacksonville and Ryan Fitzpatrick is no longer a starting quarterback, now backing up Jameis Winston in Tampa. Even the unassailable Superman, Cam Newton is struggling, throwing for 3,509-yards, 19 touchdowns and 14 interceptions in 2016 after posting an MVP caliber season that saw him lead the Carolina Panthers to a 15-1 record and a Super Bowl appearance in 2015.

Just as Polynesian-descended athletes are labeled and prescribed positions within schemes based on preconceived notions regarding ethnicity and culture, wagering their futures playing the least glorious positions upon the line and defense; so too are quarterbacks labeled and utilized based on such shallow characteristics as race and athletic ability, and stunted instead of developing into more successful and longeval styles (Shalter 2012, McKinney 2012, Pelissero 2-14). Further, just as preference is given to Polynesian-descended athletes, Dual Threat quarterbacks are seemingly employed as gimmicks with preferences being given to Pocket Passer labels and with only a rare few adapting to the passer friendly nature of the NFL.

In fact, some of the most longeval Dual Threats are attributed to having maintained quality in their play far longer than others by adapting to the passing friendly environment of the NFL. Mainly this includes the likes of Russell Wilson and Cam Newton, both of whom, according to their statistics, have seen increases in passer quality and performance over the length of their careers, which also likely reduces their chance of injury. Although, the pair is still primarily known for their rushing abilities, they have become moderate Pocket Passers, like how Aaron Rodgers and Andrew Luck may qualify as Dual Threat quarterbacks but are more recognized as Pocket Passers. This illustrates an aspect of these labels that has not yet been addressed: how dynamic are they? To expound upon this aspect, this thesis considers the recent career of Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota, which has been telling regarding positional labeling.

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Chapter 5: Case Study: Mariota: A Prime Example of NFL Labeling

Marcus Mariota's career as the quarterback of the Tennessee Titans defies established and prominent position labels in the sport of football. As a Polynesian-descended quarterback, Marcus Mariota defies the typing of an instinctual defensive or line player and breaks a tradition of poor quarterback play from players of this ethnicity dating back to the likes of Joe Francis and Jack Thompson. He further shows evidence of cracking the Dual Threat quarterback mold by establishing himself as a developing passing threat from his rookie-sophomore seasons. In defying these labels imposed on players for generations, Mariota exhibits not only how rare it is for these changes to occur and how subtly, but will hopefully inspire further change in coming seasons as the players and sport of football continue to change over time.

Marcus Mariota: A Polynesian Quarterback

Born Marcus Ardel Taulauniu Mariota on October 30, 1993 in Honolulu, Hawaii, and standing at 6'4" and 222lbs, Mariota's professional career has been the near polar-opposite of what is typically assumed of a Polynesian descended athlete (Titans online 2017). As an NFL quarterback, Mariota does not draw from the traditional precedents of defensive standouts Junior Seau or Troy Polamalu, but forges his own identity on the offensive side of the ball. Traditionally, quarterbacks of Polynesian descent have been known as draft busts or career backups. However, in just two seasons, Mariota has exceeded the careers and statistics of those three quarterbacks of Polynesian ethnicity that preceded him: Joe Francis, Jack Thompson, and Marques Tuiasosopo.

As a Samoan-descended Hawaiian native, Marcus Mariota's career as a quarterback began where most players of this ethnicity's offensive dreams end. At Saint Louis High School in Honolulu, Hawaii he established himself as a quarterback prospect during his senior year of 2010, throwing for 2,597 yards on 165-of-255 passes including 32 touchdowns against only five interceptions and rushing 60 times for 455 yards and seven scores. His play was good enough to lead the Crusaders to an 11-1 record and a state title. His performance justified the seemingly unbelievable decision by Oregon's football program to offer him a full scholarship prior to this stellar senior season, after shining in the university's football camp and never having started (2017).

This faith was rewarded, as Mariota went on to have a phenomenal career at Oregon from 2012-2014 after redshirting in 2011. Mariota threw for 10,796 yards including 105 touchdowns and only 14 interceptions in addition to 2,237 yards rushing and 29 rushing touchdowns in his career. The former Oregon Duck was a finalist for the 2013 Heisman Trophy, winning the award in 2014; becoming the first Hawaiian to win the prestigious honor. He capped off his 36-5 college career with a trip to the National Championship where the Ducks lost to the Ohio State Buckeyes (2017).

Declaring for the 2015 NFL Draft, Marcus Mariota was ranked amongst the best mobile quarterback prospects, with some analysts concerned with his pro transition, citing the lack of pro-style offense experience at Oregon which primarily ran a spread offense (Hirschhorn 2015). Mariota was drafted second overall by the Tennessee Titans in the first-round of the 2015 draft, the second quarterback taken following Jameis Winston who went first overall to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Since then, Mariota has

led his Titans team to success during his first two seasons after posting a dismal 3-13 record in 2015, to rebounding to 9-7 in 2016: only one-win shy of a playoff appearance. Mariota's former high school coach Darnell Arceneaux, had this to say in relation to Mariota's success and the perception of Polynesians as instinctual football players.

> As far as breaking stereotypes and boundaries, Marcus winning the Heisman and doing the things he's done…have really opened up opportunities for local boys, whether it's been in Hawaii, Samoa or wherever it may be for Polynesians, I think he's already helped them quite a bit. [Glennon 2015]

While playing as a quarterback at a high level immediately discounts the label of a Polynesian athlete as an instinctual defensive player, this does not mean all aspects of such an identity label are not present. In an article written for the *Tennessean* by John Glennon titled, "Marcus Mariota: The Quiet Quarterback", the characteristics of humility, benevolence, and generosity are center stage. Glennon cites the quarterback's involvement with Boys & Girls Clubs, setting up a scholarship for students attending his former private school of St. Louis, and general politeness on and off the field as evidence of what has "charmed those around him with his generosity, selflessness and humility." (2015). Teammate Ropati Pitoitua (another Samoan-descended player) places these examples into a perspective that is familiar to the typical Polynesian football player, equating his behavior to the concept of Fa'a Samoa. "There's something we call Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan Way, that teaches humility, respect and just the right way to represent our people and our families. We live by it, and we're proud to carry it on." (2015).

Fa'a Samoa is not the only traditional Polynesian practice Mariota continues. The quarterback made waves on draft night when he chose to stay in Hawaii with his family instead of traveling to Chicago for the draft. Mariota also sports the traditional Hawaiian lei around his neck during prestigious moments, such as during his first several interviews after being drafted and even gave his acceptance speech for the Heisman trophy in Samoan for his family (2015). It is clear, Mariota recognizes the rich history of Polynesian representation and not only does he honor his ethnicity by maintaining a cultural presence, but openly admits to wanting to modify the perspective of Polynesians and football. He had the following to say when asked if he hoped his career would inspire future quarterbacks of Polynesian-descent.

> I hope that's what happens — that's what it's all about. You want to give some hope to kids where I came from, that they can make this an opportunity for themselves as well. [2015]

As a groundbreaker for players from the Polynesian islands, Mariota's career does not stop at redefining a century old positional label, but can extend to the labeling of quarterbacks as well.

Development as a Pocket Passer, by the Numbers

During the months preceding the 2015 NFL Draft, Mariota was noted as being one of the top quarterback prospects in the upcoming class. However, there were those who questioned his ability, including former Green Bay Packers head coach Mike Holmgren. Holmgren's work with Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre makes him

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familiar with quarterback mobility, but it's the passing ability and offensive scheme experience that gave him pause regarding Mariota.

> If you have a quarterback who can move, it's an advantage, but those quarterbacks that can move have to be able to pass the ball. Coming into the NFL, you can't play the position without having that skill… "If you come from a system's offense like [Oregon's], you, normally speaking, aren't asked to do the same thing as pro quarterbacks… [Hirschhorn 2015]

Despite these claims, it can be argued that the play of Marcus Mariota over the first two years of his career shows development and adaptation away from the Dual Threat, mobile quarterback he was originally drafted as. Instead, the young quarterback has followed in the footsteps of the likes of Russell Wilson and Cam Newton and is displaying those attributes more akin to a Pocket Passer.

When first observing Marcus Mariota's seasonal statistics, it is difficult to separate the quarterback from the Dual Threat label. Averaging 300 rushing yards a season, Mariota appears to be a lock for a mobile quarterback type. However, when the perspective is reduced to individual performances on a game-by-game basis, this changes immensely. Regarding passer rating, (which has already been established to favor Pocket Passers) Mariota has posted a rating of 100.0 or higher in 10/27 of games he has started, and 12/27 with a passer rating above 95.0. That's a well-above-average passing performance 37% and 44% of the time over the length of his career, including that dismal 3-13 season of his rookie season, which would indicate that Mariota can play well in the pocket. In fact, this prowess is evident in Mariota's first regular season game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on September 13th, 2015.

In this contest Mariota became the first, youngest, and only rookie quarterback in NFL history to post a perfect passer rating of 158.3, in his first game no less. Completing 13-of-15 passes for an 86.7% completion rate, 209-yards, throwing four touchdowns and no interceptions, Mariota won the game nearly single-handedly with his arm; helping the Titans defeat the Buccaneers and the quarterback drafted ahead of him 42-14. He rushed for only six yards in the contest. Mariota went on to repeat his four-touchdown performance against the New Orleans Saints on November 8th, of 2015 when the rookie led his team to victory. Completing 28-of-39 passes for a career high 371-yards and no interceptions in addition to the touchdown passes. Mariota's passing prowess far exceeded his rushing statistics in the game, which included one rush for five yards. Further evidence of his near immediate passer development is actually supported by the rushing statistics from his rookie season of 2015.

In the 12 games Mariota played that season, the quarterback recorded three contests where he rushed for more than 20-yards, and only one contest with over 50 yards rushing; which occurred on December 6th, against the Jacksonville Jaguars when he rushed for 112 yards on nine attempts. However, most of these yards came from a massive 87-yard touchdown run, that was, at the time, the longest scoring run of the season for the league. This one rush alone accounts for almost 35% of Mariota's rushing yardage total of 252 yards in 2015.

Going into his second season as a pro, there is also evidence of Mariota's continued growth as a Pocket Passer. From his rookie to sophomore season, his passer rating increased from 91.5, to 95.6, he threw for seven more touchdowns and one less

interception, and threw 600 more yards than the previous year. His best performance of 2016 also included an impressive passing performance against the Green Bay Packers on November 13th, 2016. Mariota led the Titans to a 47-25 victory in the harsh environment of Lambeau Field. He posted a season best 149.8 passer rating (the second time that season his rating exceeded 145), completing 19-of-26 passes for 295 yards and four touchdown passes. Mariota also recorded no rushing yards in the game. This performance was notable for putting the Titans in the playoff conversation in 2016; talk that persisted until Mariota went down with a right fibula fracture in Week 16.

However, even with these statistical examples to support the concept of Mariota as a developing Pocket Passer, this interpretation is by no means irrefutable. There are counter examples that combat this analysis. In 2016, Mariota's rushing style proved more consistent, accumulating 349 yards on the ground. Scheme changes and personnel shifts to a power run style from his rookie to sophomore seasons undoubtedly impacted his play style. It is also quite common to see Mariota throw from outside the pocket, rolling out or scrambling. Not to mention that injury (a common aspect of Dual Threat quarterback careers) has limited him to only 27/32 potential games. The fact of the matter is that Mariota's comparatively short NFL career makes it impossible to determine such a statistical analysis as definitive. Despite this, the subjective nature of the NFL and positional typing leaves this study with one more piece of evidence in the form of intangibles observable during a recent 2017 contest that have been largely interpreted not only as an evidence of Pocket Passing, but at an elite level.

Mariota as an "Elite," "Pocket Passing" Quarterback

On Thursday September 7th, 2017, opening day of the 2017 NFL season, WGFX FM station 104.5 The Zone's morning show, The Wake Up Zone hosts Mark Howard, Kevin Ingram, and Blaine Bishop discussed Marcus Mariota's potential going into his third season along with Nashville Post senior writer David Boclair. The theme of the over thirty-minute conversation focused on determining if Mariota was an elite quarterback, and if not, was he capable of making the jump to that status in his third year, just as David Boclair argued similar elite quarterbacks Troy Aikman, Terry Bradshaw, and Titans legend Steve McNair had. Blaine Bishop, a former NFL safety who spent nine-years with the Tennessee Titans from 1993-2001 playing with McNair and was part of the "Music City Miracle" team that played in Super Bowl XXXIV, had this to say regarding Mariota:

> It's time for him to put the team on his back and say: 'this is my team' and win some that you know you shouldn't win. You shouldn't win, you say the team played like crap, but Marcus was phenomenal; he won two or three games by himself…We have to see those signs this year [2017] …I'm not looking at stats. I'm talking about, you watched the game, you said 'This guy won the game and we played like crap.' I don't remember those games. That's when you know you've reached the where-you-need-to-go-to to be elite, because that's when you take it to the Super Bowl level. Because the guy won the game by himself. He put the team on his back and said 'I got ya'll. Give me the ball, I've played like crap, we've played like crap, but I will score every time I get the ball.' [*The Wake Up Zone* 2017]
> .

Mark Howard's counter argument on the topic of Marcus Mariota's elite play relied on statistics over an eight-game period in 2016, from October 9th in a contest

against the Miami Dolphins until November 22nd against the Chicago Bears. During that

time Mariota threw 21 touchdowns compared to only three interceptions. However,

Bishop refuted this claim based on the Titans win-loss record of 5-3 during this span,

stating an elite quarterback would have done more.

> What was their [win-loss] record during that 21-3 [touchdown-interception] ratio? I think that's the stat that should stand out more than any. 6-2 [5-3]? Well, then, that's not elite enough in my opinion. He should have been 24-0 as far as touchdown [-interception] ratio, because he didn't do enough. We're talking about the elite-of-the-elite. If we are trying to put him in there. This why I keep bringing up, they keep saying Jameis Winston is in the MVP conversation. Well I keep saying, I barely, if, maybe, one media guy I'll hear say Marcus Mariota is in the MVP conversation. Well I don't really hear that. I don't hear his name. So, to me then they're not viewing him nationally as an elite-level quarterback. You hear Carr. You hear Winston. Where is Marcus in this picture? Well, obviously he hasn't turned the corner to eliteness. You can have a 21-3 [touchdown-interception] ratio, which is great by the way Mark, honestly that's easy to see. But when you watch the Eyeball Test, you say 'Did he put us on his back and did we win a game, or games, when we weren't supposed to win but Marcus was the difference?' And I haven't seen that yet. That's all I'm saying. That third year, to me, as [David] Boclair has been saying, is the time to show that. There's going to be games when he's not going to have his A game, but he still finds a way to win. There was many times McNair didn't have his A game, but he said 'Hey, get me the ball back. Imma get'em.' And then he goes down and scores. And you don't know what that means to the whole team. Then they feel like they're invincible and then once that happens, now you're talking about an elite level quarterback and not just a great quarterback who had great numbers. Cause great numbers mean a lot, but the win-loss record means more than anything… That's why you must use the Eyeballs Test to say, 'Hey man, he really was a difference maker. Even when he didn't play great, he still found a way to win....' [2017]

Based on Bishop's statement, relying on the "Eyeball Test," akin to the "Look

Test" mentioned in previous chapters, points to an elite quarterback as one that can

perform at his best when he and/or his team are at their worst. Further, Bishop argues that the elite quarterbacks in the league can win the games that they are not expected to win; literally willing their teams to victory as his teammate Steve McNair did during the early 2000s. Admittedly, Bishop's argument held water. Even with victories over elite teams like the New Orleans Saints and Green Bay Packers in his first two seasons, there exists few examples of Mariota playing outside of his comfort zone to lead his team to such a victory, even when displaying Pocket Passer statistics or qualities. However, this changed recently on October 16th, in Week 6 of the 2017 NFL season on Monday Night Football in Nashville, against the Indianapolis Colts.

As of the time of the game, the Tennessee Titans were the victims of an 11 game skid against the Indianapolis Colts; tied for the longest losing streak against another team with the Cleveland Browns against the Denver Broncos. As arguably the lowest point of Titans history since their move to Nashville in 1997, the team's predicament was made even more precarious given the outcome of the previous two weeks. In Week 4, the Titans were routed by division rival, the Houston Texans in a 57-14 defeat and in the process lost quarterback Marcus Mariota with a hamstring injury after the first half. The effects of this were clearly felt in Week 5 when the Titans struggled with backup quarterback Matt Cassel, losing to a dysfunctional Miami Dolphins team 16-10.

In the week preceding the Monday Night game against the Colts, the team now 2-3 on the season, Mariota's rehabilitation from the hamstring injury was the primary story for the Titans. When the trigger was ultimately pulled to start him, there was further concern about whether the injury would hamper his ability to perform in the mobile style

with which he is typically associated. The results of the contest ended up confirming not only the potential for Marcus Mariota to become an elite quarterback in his third year according to the criteria of Blaine Bishop, but the style in which he played to prove this—pocket passing—was at its most evident.

The observation of these characteristics was not initially evident with the game's start. Hampered by a bad hamstring, Mariota was indeed reduced in his playmaking abilities outside the pocket, barely able to keep the Titans in the contest with field goals in the first half. Following an interception that Colts linebacker John Simon returned for a touchdown to open the second half, the Titans were on the edge of losing momentum down 19-9. At the time, Mariota had only 9-of-14 pass completions for 108-yards and the interception.

Instead, Mariota took command of the Titans and managed the game from the pocket, keeping the run game effective with accurate and quality throws to open-up the lanes. His play in the pocket brought the Titans to a 22-22 tie with the Colts in the fourth quarter. Then, with 5:29 left in the contest, Mariota made his play of the game on a play action pass. With pressure coming, Mariota stepped up in the pocket to rifle a deep pass to rookie wide receiver Taywan Taylor. The rookie not only made the catch but continued unmolested into the end zone to take the lead. Ultimately, Mariota's play out of the pocket and highlight touchdown pass proved the catalyst in breaking the 11-game losing streak and improving the Titans 2017 record to 3-3 with a 36-22 victory over the Colts.

According to odds favoring the Colts to win by a touchdown, the contest was not one that the Titans were expected to win, but Mariota willed them to victory from the pocket (Kay 2017). Completing 23-of-32 passes for 306 yards, a touchdown, and interception, Mariota posted a passer rating of 99.2 in the game—all from within the pocket—accomplishing the criteria set by Bishop to display elite status by putting the team on his back and winning a game he was not supposed to. True to the former Titan's prediction, the Titans morale is soaring, and Mariota's biggest fans are his own teammates who recognize his sacrifice in playing hurt for their benefit. As running back Derrick Henry related to NFL.com, "Credit to Marcus, now that's a leader. That's a tough guy. To come out here not even 100 percent, and to play against a good division opponent, that shows what type of leader he is, what type of guy he is." (Patra 2017). However, even with the mountain of praise sent his way, Mariota's performance on Monday Night Football is not as important for his establishment of himself as a potential elite quarterback, but the style of play in which he utilized to achieve it and the shifting perception of his play style it sparked.

In the morning post game recap on the same show in which his potential was questioned only a few months prior, Mark Howard of the Wake Up Zone show on WGFX FM 104.5 The Zone discussed Mariota's "new" Pocket Passer abilities with Cameron Wolfe of ESPN.com.

Howard:

> I've been saying, you know, since last night, that I thought this might be the best thing that ever happened to him. Because it forced him to be a

better pocket passer and whether it was play action or whatever, it was obvious he got better as the game went along. And yeah, you know the numbers, 10-of-11 for over 180-yards on play action, but that last drive, 8-for-8, driving them down the field, you know, was pretty impressive. So, just long term, you know, for Marcus, this could end up really helping him… [*The Wake Up Zone* 2017]

Cameron Wolfe:

Yeah, no, I absolutely agree. I could almost see his confidence grow throughout the game as he realized, 'Hey, you know, I don't need my legs to really beat teams, I can beat teams with my arm.' I'm sure he was confident in himself as a passer, but to actually do that in a game where all of his stats and all of his yards came inside the pocket. All 306 of his yards came inside the pocket. He only had one throw from outside the pocket and it was a throwaway and that was the first time in his career that I don't think he's had, or maybe the second time that he hasn't had a completion outside the pocket. So, it was a different Marcus that we're seeing and it really shows his growth as a passer that he was able to have that much success. So, you know, obviously when he's back 100% you'll see more of his legs. He's not going to become, you know, Tom Brady in the pocket as far as staying there, but the fact that he can do that and have success in that, that may help him mentally just to maybe slow down a little bit and get his feet set when he is making those passes and that may help him and the team in the long run. [2017]

In the following conversation and others about the performance, it seems that in being forced to play from within the pocket due to his hamstring injury on one of the NFL's biggest stages, Mariota limited not what he was capable of, but what the audience can see; forcing them for the first time in three years to recognize his ability to operate as a Pocket Passer. Such an occurrence truly illustrates the level at which positional typing in the NFL is at work. The label of a Dual Threat quarterback has been thrust upon Mariota to such an extent, that it took a national stage and a potentially serious injury to showcase a talent he has exhibited since his first NFL game when he was as perfect as a

passer can get in the NFL. Mariota, staying true to his ethnic identity, remained humble,

regarding the experience as a tool he can use to learn to improve his game.

> For me my legs are something that, you know, bail me out, you know,
> provide us an opportunity to make some big plays, but sometimes that's
> not going to be there. And to be able to play the game within the pocket,
> you know, make reads, make the progressions and just playing the game
> from that standpoint is different but that's part of it and I've got to
> continue to learn and grow in that aspect, and being able to do that
> Monday Night, I think, was huge and a tool that I can use to learn from
> and get better. [*The Wake Up Zone* 2017]

He also reminded fans that he had played in such a fashion before, citing his

rookie year and collegiate career as evidence to Jim Wyatt of Titans online.

> I have done it before. My rookie season was kind of similar a couple of
> times, as well as even in college. It is not something that is brand new. It is
> a little different and something that doesn't happen very often, but it is
> part of the game. You have to be ready to go. I thought the guys around
> me did a great job and I thought we did a good job of executing. [2017]

Even with this admission and consistent evidence of an ability to pass within the pocket,

Mariota remains typified by his Dual Threat label, just as linebacker John Timu is unable

to escape the label of an instinctual defender based on his ethnicity, even with

intelligence and preparation. This not only speaks to the power of these labels within the

sport of football but has a great deal to say regarding their longevity. Over the near

century of football played in the NFL, Mariota has been the only quarterback of

Polynesian descent who has found success at the position and in doing so he has both

rejected and modified a generations old label on players of his ethnicity. Mariota also

represents the ability of positional labels to persist over a career, sometimes misrepresenting a player's abilities to more soundly align with traditional expectations, only being modified through great effort.

Conclusion

In the days preceding the 2017 NFL Draft, quarterback prospect Deshaun Watson gave reporters his perspective on the Dual Threat quarterback label. "People think, 'Oh, he's a black quarterback. He must be dual-threat.' People throw that word around all the time. It's lazy." (McKinney 2017). The subsequent article written by ESPN staff writer Erik McKinney followed up on this statement by addressing recent changes in the quarterback position and that such labels should be retired, as they appear to no longer accurately represent players. As accurate as these observations may be, with positional labeling indeed being a "lazy" concept utilizing race, ethnicity, identity and masculinity to determine a player's position and expectations within the sport via "The Look Test", this thesis recognizes that while this may be the reality, the discourse created by these labels proves more powerful within the culture stimulated by gridiron football and the NFL.

In identifying and analyzing three positional labels within the sport of gridiron football and the NFL, such labels are revealed to be highly subjective, complex and resilient cultural phenomenon. Though Tennessee Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota may embody both the example and exception to these labels, those exceptions came only over long periods of time and with great effort. Three quarterbacks of Polynesian ethnicity over nearly a century preceded Mariota before his successful dismissal of the Instinctual Polynesian Defender label took place. It further took three seasons and a national stage and playing with a debilitating injury to showcase his ability to pass from

the pocket, forcing viewers to see his overlooked abilities and suggest that he was more versatile than the Dual Threat label imposed upon him.

This also places importance on studying these labels within the NFL and gridiron football. Those labels mentioned within this thesis represent only a small fraction of those labels that exist within the sport of professional football and sports in general. Further critical scholarship, including interviews, historical research into past seasons utilizing other statistical models, and other methodologies can only increase our understanding not just of gridiron football and the NFL, but the entirety of sport and its relation to complex attributes of culture.

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