



# Johnny Unitas: Mr. Quarterback (Great American Sports Legends)

*Mike Towle*

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Many have said Johnny Unitas was the best quarterback who ever played the game. No less an authority than Sports Illustrated thinks so. In a 2002 statistical analysis of NFL Hall of Fame quarterbacks and active quarterbacks with HOF credentials, Unitas was ranked # 1. Johnny U was also the hero of untold millions of youths who spent countless hours in their backyards emulating the stoop-shouldered, rifle-armed legend who wore the familiar 19 on his jersey. Johnny Unitas's story is a classic rags-to-riches tale. The skinny, blue-collar kid who played college ball at a little-known school and failed in a tryout with his hometown pro team was given a second chance by the Baltimore Colts. Two years later he led the team to victory in the 1958 NFL Championship game, a game dubbed the greatest ever played. Unitas played eighteen seasons (and in ten Pro Bowls), retiring in 1973 as the league's all-time leader in passing yards with more than 40,000. His unsurpassed record of forty-seven consecutive games with at least one touchdown pass continues to be mentioned in the same breath as baseball icon Joe DiMaggio's fifty-six-game hitting streak. When Unitas unexpectedly died in September 2002, the sports world mourned the passing of a genuine sports hero. In ""Johnny Unitas: Mr. Quarterback, dozens of his friends, neighbors, acquaintances, relatives, fans, and teammates present compelling firsthand memories, insights, and testimonials. Their stories begin with his schoolboy days in Pittsburgh and carry on to his years of toiling in near anonymity at the University of Louisville and his nearly two decades in the NFL and beyond.

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