

Philadelphia Eagles

Philadelphia Eagles: Donovan McNabb Most Under-Appreciated Player in NFL History

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(Contributor) on March 1, 2012

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It's been a very quick fall from stardom for Donovan McNabb. After consecutive unsuccessful stints as the starter for the Washington Redskins and a mentor for Christian Ponder in Minnesota, McNabb remains a free agent garnering little interest.

At this point, most fans and league insiders believe that McNabb is finished as an NFL quarterback. "Teams simply don't want McNabb, they haven't wanted him since he was cut, and there's no reason to think anyone will want him at any point in the foreseeable future," says Mike Florio of Pro Football Talk.

After two years of struggles, it is easy to see why fans and team evaluators might doubt his current ability. It is intriguing, though, how the doubters have followed McNabb throughout his career, even as he put up stellar numbers and led deep playoff runs for a full decade in Philadelphia.

Indeed, it is truly amazing how high the standards are set for athletes. In essence, they have to play absolutely perfectly in every game to gain respect from fans.

Meanwhile, those who make a few bad plays or have an off day must endure condemnation from television analysts, journalists and just about every fan.

In Philadelphia, Eagles fans continue to forget all that their former franchise quarterback gave them for 11 seasons.



Nick Laham/Getty Images

A look at his football resume reveals some impressive accomplishments during his time as an Eagle, highlighting how particularly unforgiving the large Philly fanbase has been of McNabb.

Countless franchise passing records. Six Pro Bowl selections. Six NFC East division titles. Eight playoff appearances. Five appearances in the NFC Championship game. An appearance in Super Bowl XXXIX.

These are no small feats, but fans place an inordinate amount of criticism on McNabb for how those last two achievements did not lead to multiple Lombardi trophies.

In fact, Ross Tucker of *Sports Illustrated* deems McNabb one of the most under-appreciated athletes in NFL history, right from the moment he heard the boos during the 1999 NFL draft:

McNabb has provided Eagles fans with an exciting decade of football with an extremely entertaining style. Just like most of other teams would take the Eagles' success in a heartbeat, the same goes for franchises that would love to have him under center.

He is a proven winner who has stood in the face of intense criticism for years and handled it with aplomb. Now if only Eagles fans could see as much.

Ultimately, a quarterback usually receives both more credit and criticism than deserved.



Al Bello/Getty Images

In the case of Super Bowl XXXIX, anyone who believes that McNabb choked away the game needs to reexamine the game tape.

Often lampooned for vomiting during the game, McNabb faced brutal pressure from Tedy Bruschi and Richard Seymour on virtually every snap.

Instead of being mocked for throwing up, McNabb should be praised for showing great toughness and grit to remain in the biggest game of his life. Most other quarterbacks would have been seen riding a cart off the field instead.

Critics are also quick to point out that McNabb threw three interceptions, but the last one was a late-game heave with fewer than 10 seconds remaining on the clock. Besides, coach Andy Reid called for him to throw the ball more than 60 times.

There is no doubt that he was greatest quarterback to wear a midnight-green uniform. All he did was win.

After the turn of the millennium, he was the best quarterback in the league. Even now, he remains the third-winningest active quarterback in the NFL behind Peyton Manning and Tom Brady, two future Hall of Famers.

Still, although he contributed far more to the Eagles than his predecessors, McNabb is hardly viewed with the same respect and adoration as are Randall Cunningham and Ron Jaworski.

Not only was he hardly given any admiration, but he was also not given Marvin Harrison, Randy Moss or Andre Johnson. Instead, he threw his passes to Todd Pinkston, Freddie Mitchell and James Thrash, excluding a sour two-year adventure with Terrell Owens.

After taking a decade-long beating from the media and fans alike, Donovan nevertheless refused to turn his back on the city or request to be traded.

Only a handful of teams have fielded a great quarterback for an entire decade. Eagles fans would be wise to appreciate all that McNabb gave us during his tenure in Philadelphia.



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