

# Jim Kelly, Class of 2002

Courtesy of the Pro Football Hall of Fame

Year	Tm	G	Passing					Rushing				
			Att	Com	Yard	TD	Int	Rating	No.	Yds.	Avg	TD
1986	Buf	16	480	285	3593	22	17	83.3	41	199	4.9	0
1987	Buf	12	419	250	2798	19	11	83.8	29	133	4.6	0
1988	Buf	16	452	269	3380	15	17	78.2	35	154	4.4	0
1989	Buf	13	391	228	3130	25	18	86.2	29	137	4.7	2
1990	Buf	14	346	219	2829	24	9	101.2	22	63	2.9	0
1991	Buf	15	474	304	3844	33	17	97.6	20	45	2.3	1
1992	Buf	16	462	269	3457	23	19	81.2	31	53	1.7	1
1993	Buf	16	470	288	3382	18	18	79.9	36	102	2.8	0
1994	Buf	14	448	285	3114	22	17	84.6	25	77	3.1	1
1995	Buf	15	458	255	3130	22	13	81.1	17	20	1.2	0
1996	Buf	13	379	222	2810	14	19	73.2	19	66	3.5	2
Totals		160	4779	2874	35467	237	175	84.4	304	1049	3.5	7

Additional Career Statistics: Receiving 2-40

USFL: 1984-1985 Houston Gamblers - Passing: 1154-730-9842, 83 TD, 45 INT; Rushing: 113-663, 6 TDs; Receiving: 2-(-10).

## JIM KELLY

Kelly, James Edward

Miami (FL)

B: 2 / 14 / 1960, Pittsburgh, PA

Drafted: 1983 Round 1 Buf

## QB

6-3, 217

HS: East Brady [PA]

All-Pro: 1991; All-AFC: 1991

Pro Bowls (5): 1988, 1989\*, 1991, 1992, 1993\* (\*Did not play)

Pro Football Hall of Fame 2002

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It seems appropriate that Jim Kelly was the fourth Buffalo Bills alumnus elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It was, after all, Kelly who quarterbacked the team to an unprecedented four consecutive Super Bowls, a feat never before accomplished by a quarterback or a team. But as significant as that is, it's only one part of his Hall of Fame résumé. There's more.

During his 11 seasons with the Bills, Jim virtually rewrote the team's record book. He led the National Football League in passing in 1990 and the American Football Conference in both 1990 and 1991. At the time of his retirement, his 84.4 passer rating ranked him sixth all-time in NFL history. His 35,467 yards passing ranked tenth, and his 2,874 completions were eighth best. Only Fran Tarkenton, Dan Fouts and Johnny Unitas, among Hall of Fame quarterbacks, had passed for more yardage and only Tarkenton and Fouts had completed more passes. Just three players in NFL history had reached the 30,000-yard career passing mark faster than Kelly. Eight times during his NFL career he passed for more than 3,000 yards in a season, and twenty-six times he passed for more than 300 yards in a game. There's still more.

Five times he was selected to play in the Pro Bowl, and was the Player of the Game in 1991. In 11 seasons in Buffalo, "Machine Gun Kelly" led the Bills to the playoffs eight times. Impressive, yes, but it's still not the whole story.

Veteran Buffalo sports columnist Larry Felser may have best summarized the most important portion the Kelly résumé. "Kelly is not about statistics," he observed. "Never was. Jim Kelly was about leadership,

true grit, toughness, unlikely comebacks and an ability to convince his teammates that they could win games against formidable odds. His statistics were impressive, but his intangibles are the jewel of his résumé."

The Bills selected the 225-pound rifle-armed passer from the University of Miami in the first round of the 1983 NFL Draft. However, the Miami Hurricane star opted to sign with the Houston Gamblers of the upstart United States Football League. In two seasons with the Gamblers, Kelly threw for 9,842 yards and 83 touchdowns. The USFL folded following the 1985 season, and Kelly, just prior to the start of the 1986 NFL season, signed with the Bills.

Kelly's arrival in Buffalo was met with a sense of optimism not seen since the signing of O. J. Simpson in 1969. In addition to being a proven performer on the field, Kelly was perceived by Bills fans as their kind of guy. "I'm a down-to-earth guy," he told a reporter. "...I'm a guy who knows his roots. I'll always remember where I've been. I'll remember the tough times."

For Kelly, the roots were East Brady, Pennsylvania, where he lived with his parents Joe and Alice Kelly and his five bothers. The Kellys were a close-knit blue-collar family in a blue-collar town. Joe Kelly, loved football and enjoyed watching his sons play. One, Pat, played well enough to play linebacker in the now-defunct World Football League. While all the Kelly brothers played football on some level, it was in young Jim that Joe saw the greatest potential.

"Jim was eight years old when he told me he had this dream of being a pro quarterback, so I told him, 'If you're really serious, you're going to have to work awfully hard,'" Joe Kelly was quoted as saying in a 1986 interview. "Every day during lunch hour Jim would come home and I'd have him practice his drop backs and sprint outs." It was a daily routine that Jim remembers with mixed emotions.

"I regretted it at times," he recalled. "But now, I'm glad my Dad pushed me. He told me I'd thank him some day and he was right."

After an outstanding high school career at East Brady High, Kelly began to hear from interested college recruiters. Several schools, including nearby Penn State, considered Kelly's future to be at the linebacker position. But the strong-armed and strong-willed high school senior knew it was as a quarterback that he wanted to make his mark.

Eventually, the University of Miami offered Jim the opportunity he sought, a chance to play quarterback. Miami coach Howard Schnellenberger called Kelly, "the single most important person in the revival of Miami football." In his first start at quarterback Kelly led the Hurricanes to an upset victory over Penn State. He went on to post a 20-6 record as a starter at Miami.

Kelly's promising pro career, however, nearly ended before it had a chance to start, when he suffered a major shoulder injury in his senior year. "They put three rods in my shoulder," Kelly recalled. "The doctor told me to get it back where it was, I'd have to bust my butt. He said 'If you do it, great. Not many people have.'"

The doctor's pessimism only motivated Kelly. And he had his support group. "My family kept reminding me, 'You're a Kelly. You've been through rougher times than this.'"

Fortunately, his recovery was near perfect and pro scouts began to drool at the prospect of signing the "quarterback with a linebacker's mentality." The Bills got the chance. But the Gamblers trumped the Bills with a then-unheard-of guaranteed contract offer said to be worth in excess of \$3 million.

Kelly went on to become the USFL's MVP his first season, passing for more than 5,219 yards and 44 touchdowns. The following season he threw for an impressive 4,623 yards and 39 touchdowns. Still, even the excitement of the Gamblers wide-open passing attack could not save the USFL.

When Kelly reported to the Bills in August of 1986, fans gave him a hero's welcome, lining the streets from the airport to downtown Buffalo. In his NFL debut before a sold out Rich Stadium crowd, Kelly offered a prelude of what was to come. Although the Bills fell 28-24 to the New York Jets, Kelly performed like a seasoned veteran completing 20 of 33 passes for 292 yards and 3 touchdowns. Paul Zimmerman of *Sports Illustrated* referred to him as "Joe Namath with knees."

Bills head coach Hank Bullough was impressed by what Kelly was able to do after just three weeks of being a member of the young squad. "No one can learn the play book in three weeks," he said with reserved praise.

Unfortunately for the coach, his future was not as bright as his quarterback's. Midway through the 1986 season, Bullough was replaced by future-Hall of Fame coach Marv Levy.

The Bills, under Levy's direction and Kelly's arm, underwent a swift reversal of fortunes. The young team climbed from 4-12 in 1986 to 12-4 in 1988, winning the AFC East crown before falling 21-10 to the Cincinnati Bengals in the AFC championship game.

The following season the Bills opened with one of the most dramatic comebacks in team history. Trailing the Miami Dolphins 24-13 with 5:17 remaining in regulation play, Kelly orchestrated two dramatic touchdown drives, the second coming on a two-yard quarterback keeper as time expired. The exciting comeback and Kelly's physical "take-charge" approach, turned out to be just the beginning of a season that included many such heroics.

Kelly's tough style of play seemed to mirror that of Buffalo residents' self-image of being hard-working blue-collar types, who won't give up without a fight. "Tough as nails," was one teammate described him. Even a shoulder separation in week five of the 1989 season couldn't sideline the gutsy quarterback for very long, missing just three weeks. And when he returned he picked up right where he left off -- piling up yardage and victories - as the team again finished first in the division and advanced to the playoffs.

In the 1989 Divisional Playoff Game, a 34-30 loss to the Cleveland Browns, Kelly turned in yet another all-star performance, passing for 405 yards and four touchdowns. Even in a losing effort, Kelly's effective use of the "hurry-up" offense during the later part of the game served as a prelude to the future.

Levy and Bills offensive coordinator Ted Marchibroda, inspired by Kelly's remarkable ability to direct his team in the final minutes of a game, decided to make the hurry-up drill part of the team's regular offense in 1990. And so was born the Bills' "no-huddle" offense.

The "no-huddle" was used sporadically through the first part of the 1990 season. But by season's end, it was the featured offense and Jim Kelly was doing something no other NFL quarterback of the day was doing - calling his own plays. It was something Kelly loved to do and he appreciated his coaches' confidence.

"Imagine being a quarterback and having your coaching staff allow you to call your own plays," Kelly remarked. "That doesn't happen. Ted Marchibroda and Marv Levy allowed me to do that...I had full rein of the offense up until we got inside the 3-yard line. And a lot of times I'd pretend like I didn't see guys running in from the sideline. I would hurry up and get the guys to the line of scrimmage so Marv wouldn't send the big guys in," he half-joked.

"We're out of it completely," insisted Marchibroda. "The whole ball game is Jim's." Kelly didn't disappoint as he led the Bills to their first of four consecutive Super Bowl appearances in 1990. That year he became only the fifth player to maintain a quarterback rating over 100 (101.2) since the rating system was implemented in 1973. In the AFC championship game, Kelly's "no-huddle" Bills were near perfect, thumping the Los Angeles Raiders 51-3. "I don't think anyone can stop it," Raiders future Hall of Fame defensive end Howie Long lamented after the game. Unfortunately for the Bills, though, the New York Giants found a way to slow it down just enough to squeak out a 20-19 win in Super Bowl XXV.

The Super Bowl XXV loss was the first of four such disappointing finishes. Yet, again and again, and against what at times seemed to be impossible odds, the Kelly-led team regrouped to give it another shot.

Although the Bills never came home with the championship trophy, it's not the losses that football fans now seem to recall. It's the "never say die" attitude of Jim Kelly and the resilient Bills that has emerged as "the real story."

"Jim will go down as one of the finest quarterbacks in the NFL," predicted Marchibroda in 1997, when Kelly announced his retirement. "He gave us everything he had. He battled on every play. Jim's a leader, a tough guy and a winner."

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Jim's teammates agreed. "Without a doubt, I think he is the most competitive quarterback to ever play in the National Football League," stated Bills center Kent Hull. "He's like a hero," chimed in teammate Mark Pike.

Marv Levy offered equally laudatory praise when assessing his friend and former player. "Jim Kelly was the ultimate competitor," he proclaimed. "Unselfish, maybe the toughest player I've ever coached. We're not going to see the likes of him for a long time."

Without a doubt, Kelly's pro football résumé at the time of his retirement was a long and storied one. It seemed only one entry was missing. Five years later, however, after the mandatory waiting period, the void was filled. Jim Kelly, who spent his high school lunch hours throwing a football in his backyard, was accorded pro football's highest honor, election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

### IN THE NFL RECORD BOOK (at the time of his 1996 retirement)

#### Regular Season Records

[Tied for 2nd] Most Seasons, 3,000 or More Yards Passing - 8

#### Super Bowl Records

[1st] Most Passes Attempted, Career - 145

[1st] Most Passes Attempted, Game - 58 (vs. Washington, S. Bowl XXVI)

[1st] Most Passes Completed, Game - 31 (vs. Dallas, Super Bowl XXVIII)

[Tied for 1st] Most Passes Intercepted, Career - 7

[Tied for 1st] Most Passes Intercepted, Game-4 (vs. Washington, SB XXVI)

[Tied for 1st] Most Fumbles, Game - 3 (vs. Washington, Super Bowl XXVI)

[2nd] Most Passes Completed, Career - 81

[2nd] Most Fumbles, Career - 4

[Tied for 2nd] Most Passes Attempted, Game - 50 (vs. Dallas, SB XXVIII)

[3rd] Most Yards Gained, Career - 829

[Tied for 3rd] Most Passes Completed, Game-28 (vs. Wash., SB XXVI)

[Tied for 3rd] Most Consecutive Completions, Gm - 9 (vs. Dallas, SB XXVIII)

#### Post-Season Records

[1st] Most Passes Intercepted, Career - 28

[2nd] Most Passes Attempted, Career - 545

[2nd] Most Passes Completed, Career - 322

[2nd] Most Yards Passing, Career - 3,863

[Tied for 2nd] Most Consecutive Games, 300 or More Yards Passing - 3

[3rd] Most Passes Attempted, Game - 58 (vs. Washington, S. Bowl XXVI)

[Tied for 3rd] Most Touchdown Passes, Game- 4 (vs. Cleve., Jan. 6, 1990)

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