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## **LHSAA Celebrates Black History**

### **Doug Williams: The Louisiana Trailblazer Who Changed the Super Bowl Forever**

**By Ethan W. Anderson**

**BATON ROUGE** – As the football world turns its attention to Louisiana for the Super Bowl, we celebrate a Louisiana legend whose impact on the game is etched in history. Doug Williams, a proud product of Louisiana high school football, forever changed the NFL when he became the first Black quarterback to start and win the Super Bowl. His record-breaking performance in Super Bowl XXII not only secured his place in football history but also shattered racial barriers that had long kept Black quarterbacks from leading teams on the sport’s biggest stage.

On January 31, 1988, Williams led Washington to a dominant 42-10 victory over the Denver Broncos. In one of the most electrifying quarters in Super Bowl history, he threw four touchdown passes in the second quarter alone, finishing the game with 340 passing yards and earning Super Bowl MVP honors. Williams became the first Black quarterback to be named Super Bowl MVP.

At a time when the quarterback position was widely seen as reserved for white players, Williams was often viewed as an anomaly. The conversation leading up to the Super Bowl focused more on the color of his skin than on his ability as a quarterback. While Williams understood the significance of the moment, he chose to focus on the game rather than the outside noise.

“I knew the impact but would not speak on it. I wanted it to just run its course,” Williams told *The Gambit*. “I would just tell myself that I was not here as Washington’s Black quarterback, but as the quarterback of the Redskins at the time, knowing all along that I was Black and was going to be judged that way.”

His performance was not just a victory for his team—it was a victory for every young Black athlete who had been told that the quarterback position wasn’t for them. When the lights shined the brightest, Williams delivered a performance that left a lasting impact on his home state of Louisiana and the entire country.

Williams' path to Super Bowl glory began in Zachary, Louisiana, where he developed his skills at Chaneyville High School, now known as Northeast High School. Standing 6-foot-4 and 220 pounds, he quickly embraced the quarterback position, possessing all the measurables needed to excel. A standout multi-sport athlete, Williams earned district

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honors in football, baseball, and basketball. However, his passion for football ultimately led him to Grambling State University in North Louisiana, where he would continue his journey under the legendary Coach Eddie Robinson.

At Grambling, Williams established himself as one of the most dominant quarterbacks in college football, throwing for over 8,400 yards and 93 touchdowns while leading the Tigers to three SWAC championships. In 1977, he finished fourth in the Heisman Trophy race, bringing national attention to HBCU programs and paving the way for future Black quarterbacks. His remarkable college career led to a historic moment in the 1978 NFL Draft, when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers selected him in the first round, making him the first Black quarterback ever taken that high.

Despite facing racial adversity in the NFL, Williams never wavered. He led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to three playoff appearances in his first five seasons, but contract disputes forced his departure, as he remained one of the league's most underpaid quarterbacks. Seeking a fair opportunity, he signed with the USFL's Oklahoma Outlaws, where he was compensated more appropriately for two seasons before the league fell apart.

Williams later joined the Washington Redskins, where he became an icon in the D.C. area and solidified his place in football history. His perseverance and talent not only earned him a Super Bowl victory but also helped break barriers for Black quarterbacks in the NFL. After retiring, he continued shaping the game as a coach and executive, mentoring the next generation of players while championing HBCU programs and opportunities for Black athletes.

As we celebrate Black History Month and gear up for another thrilling Super Bowl, we honor Doug Williams, a Louisiana native who shattered barriers and redefined what was possible on football's grandest stage. This year's Super Bowl features two Black starting quarterbacks for only the second time in history, a milestone made possible by Williams' groundbreaking achievements.

"There's been a lot of great Black quarterbacks throughout the entire NFL's lifespan, and they haven't got the same opportunities that I've been given now." Chiefs starting quarterback Patrick Mahomes told ESPN. "Doug Williams, the first Black quarterback to be in a Super Bowl ... That opened the door for me."

What was once considered rare is now becoming the norm, thanks to the path he paved. The LHSAA Hall of Famer's legacy is a powerful reminder that greatness knows no color, and his story continues to inspire LHSAA student-athletes and countless others across the country.

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