



## **Staubach's Cowboys 1971-79**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since their founding in 1960, the Cowboys had been gradually gaining steam. They lost epic championship games to Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers in 1966 and 1967. Dallas returned to the playoffs in 1968 and 1969. In 1970, Tom Landry's team reached the Super Bowl. They were pounding on the door. But they were also gaining a "can't win the big one" reputation.

1971 was the year the franchise finally broke through and won a championship. By itself, that's big enough. But it was about much more. Dallas had also found the franchise quarterback who would lead them throughout the coming decade

Roger Staubach had won the Heisman Trophy in 1963 at the Naval Academy. He went on to serve an obligatory five-year stint in the Navy before being able to play professionally with Dallas, starting in 1969. He was behind Craig Morton. Given that the Cowboys were winning games, Morton wasn't easy to displace, but a quarterback controversy that built to a crescendo by mid-season of 1971 was resolved in Staubach's favor.

A new era was dawning in the NFL, as they merged with the AFL in 1970 and created the organizational structure of the league we recognize today. It was a new era for the Cowboys too—they moved into Texas Stadium. They started to play a late afternoon game on Thanksgiving Day. While it didn't become a permanent feature of the Cowboy schedule until 1978, watching Dallas at home over turkey started to become a national pastime in the 1970s.

It was an iconic decade for the NFL as a whole and Dallas was right in the middle of it. They had great rivalries with teams ranging from Washington in the NFC East to Minnesota and the Los Angeles Rams in the NFC overall, and the Cowboys played two Super Bowls against the great Steel Curtain from Pittsburgh.

Staubach built a reputation as the quarterback you could never count out. He pulled rabbits out of his hat in the biggest games. We'll cover all of those games, and the myriad of great players that surrounded him in this narrative, that goes through his retirement at the end of the 1979 season.

Each section, from 1971 through 1979, exists as its own separate article on the website. They have been pulled together for this compilation and edited to clean up obvious redundancies. Before we begin, a few historical reminders for younger readers:

\*While the NFC East was mostly the same as it is today, there was one notable difference—the Cardinals joined the division's four current teams. Moreover, in the years of the Staubach era, the Cardinals were in St. Louis

\*Through 1977, only four teams per conference made the playoffs. There was a three-division format (East, Central, West), so that meant just one wild-card. Not until 1978 was a second wild-card added.

\*Through 1977, the regular season was only 14 games long. It was '78 that the league went to a 16-game slate.

\*Through 1974, homefield advantage for playoff games was determined by a preset rotation between the divisions. Once you clinched first place, there was nothing left to play for. It wasn't until 1975 that merit-based seeding added some extra intrigue to the end of the regular season.

Are we ready? Let's get on with our game-by-game walkthrough of the nine-year era of Roger Staubach's Dallas Cowboys.

## 1971

It was the year the quarterback controversy bubbled to a head. By season's end, Staubach had a 60 percent completion rate and averaged 8.9 yards-per-attempt. Morton completed 55 percent of his passes for 7.9 yards each. That wasn't the real difference though, and both statistical lines were good in this era. What separated the two was that Staubach, with a 15-4 TD/INT ratio was only intercepted on 1.9 percent of his passes. By contrast, Morton's ratio was 7-8, and he had a 5.6 interception percentage.

Whomever was at quarterback had speedy Bob Hayes to throw to. The former track star caught 35 passes for a dazzling 24.0 yards-per-catch. Veteran Lance Alworth added 34 catches. A tight end named Mike Ditka caught 30 more balls. Fullback Walt Garrison was a reliable safety valve, and his 40 receptions led the team.

A balanced running attack was led by Duane Thomas and supported by both Garrison and backup halfback Calvin Hill. When you put it all together, Dallas scored more points than any other NFL team in 1971.

The defense was pretty good too, led by a tough line. All-Pro Bob Lilly was at tackle. Jethro Pugh recorded 13 ½ sacks and Larry Cole was a good pass rusher off the end. Veteran linebacker Chuck Howley made the Pro Bowl and intercepted five passes. An excellent secondary had Pro Bowlers in cornerback Mel Renfroe and strong safety Cornel Green. The Cowboy defense ranked seventh in the 26-team league for points allowed.

Dallas opened the season at a terrible Buffalo team, and the defense was clearly not rounded into form. The Cowboys trailed 30-28 in the third quarter. But they won the rushing yardage battle, 160-66, and the turnover margin by a 4-1 count. Morton played well, going 10/14 for 221 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions. Dallas rallied to a 49-37 win. There were certainly no signs of a quarterback controversy.

Another easy win came at mediocre Philadelphia. Cornerback Herb Adderly intercepted three passes, the rush yardage edge was 150-32 and the final score was 42-7. The Cowboy offense was humming as the Washington Redskins came to town.

The Redskins had been mediocre of late, but this Week 3 game was the first sign that new head coach George Allen was going to make a positive impact. Dallas dug themselves a 14-3 hole. Staubach was summoned into the game. The Cowboys rallied, but being outrushed 200-82 was the prime reason for a 20-16 defeat.

Monday Night Football at home against the New York Giants was historic. It was the last time Dallas would play a home game in the Cotton Bowl. It was also the first time they would win an

MNF game, an innovation in only its second year. Both quarterbacks played extensively in a game that was tied 6-6 in the second quarter. Staubach threw a short TD pass, Morton threw a long one, and the Cowboys prevailed 20-13.

Morton got the start at lowly New Orleans and played poorly. He threw two interceptions and dug a 17-0 hole. Staubach came in and went 7/10 for 117 yards and a pair of TDs, but it was too late. Six turnovers overall spelled a 24-14 loss. In an era when there wasn't a lot of parity, losses like this weren't dismissed as "it's just the NFL", the way they are today. Landry continued to wrestle with his quarterback options.

Texas Stadium would become an iconic place for future generations of NFL fans, a frequent site of high-profile late Sunday afternoon games, prime-time battles, Thanksgiving Day affairs and playoff games. The partially enclosed stadium made its debut on October 24 against New England. Staubach played and was sharp—13/21 for 197 yards, no mistakes and touchdown passes of 35 and 28 yards to Hayes. Dallas won easily 44-21.



Staubach was clearly emerging, but Landry understandably struggled with the notion of benching a trusted veteran. In Chicago, that struggle hit absurd levels. Landry used Staubach and Morton to shuttle the plays in and out from the sidelines, with a different QB *each play*. Morton did most of the passing and while he made big plays—20/36 for 257 yards—he also threw three interceptions. Staubach was 7/11 for 87 yards. Dallas lost to a mediocre team, 23-19.

We were at the halfway point of what was then a 14-game schedule and Dallas was 4-3. This was an era when only four teams per conference—three division winners and one wild-card—made the playoffs. The Cowboys were in trouble. Landry made his decision—he was riding with Staubach the rest of the way.

It would be a mistake to think that things instantly turned around. Playing at home against a bad St. Louis Cardinals team, the Cowboys trailed 10-6 in the second half. Staubach threw a four-yard touchdown pass to Dikta to get the lead, and Dallas later won the game 16-13 on a late field goal.

The following week was when the Cowboys started to settle in with a consistent victory formula. They hosted the Eagles and won the rushing battle 179-44. Staubach was 14/28 for 176 yards, the turnover edge was 5-1 and the final score was 20-7.

At 6-3, Dallas was right in the thick of a packed playoff race. Washington was 6-2-1, leading the NFC East. In the push for the wild-card, the Detroit Lions were 5-3-1. The NFC West runner-up—either the 5-3-1 Los Angeles Rams or the 6-3 San Francisco 49ers—would also be in the mix.

There was no margin for error and the visit to RFK Stadium to face the Redskins on the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving was enormous. Dallas was up to the challenge. Staubach played efficiently, going 11/21 for 151 yards and no mistakes. The rush advantage was 146-65. The defense was magnificent, pitching a 13-0 shutout. The Cowboys were in first place with four weeks to go.

But there was no time to celebrate, because the Rams, at 6-3-1, were coming to Texas Stadium for Thanksgiving Day. Ike Thomas started the party for Dallas by returning the opening kick for a touchdown. That started an excellent back-and-forth game for the national TV audience. Staubach threw a 51-yard touchdown strike to Hayes and later threw a 21-yard scoring pass to Alworth. The ultimate difference though, in the new Staubach era, was turnovers. Dallas didn't have any, and they collected three. They won the football game, 28-21.

A late Saturday afternoon home date with the New York Jets turned into a rout. Thomas again opened the game by taking the kickoff to the house. Staubach threw a pair of 27-yard touchdown passes to Hill in the first quarter alone. The balance of the Dallas running game can be underscored by this fact—all of the times in this narrative that you read of decisive Cowboy edges on the ground, Thomas' 112 yards against the Jets were the only time an individual Dallas runner went over 100 yards. They won this one, 52-10.

Washington was keeping pace in the NFC East, although at 9-3, Dallas now had a game and a half lead for the wild-card. They went to New York and jumped all over the Giants. Staubach threw a 46-yard TD pass to Hayes, a 10-yard scoring toss to Hill, and then back to Hayes for an 85-yard strike. Staubach finished 10/14 for 232 yards. The 42-14 win sewed up a playoff spot.

The division title was still out there, and Dallas would play a late Saturday afternoon game in the season finale. They hosted the St. Louis Cardinals (the Cards were an NFC East team prior to the realignment of 2002). Thomas opened the scoring with a 53-yard touchdown run, later added a short scoring burst, and then caught a 34-yard TD pass. Dallas was ahead 21-3 and coasted home, 31-12.

Since committing to Staubach as the starter, the Cowboys had swept seven straight games, closed with an 11-3 mark and were NFC East champs.

Dallas would visit the Minnesota Vikings for the divisional playoffs—even though the Cowboys and Vikings, both 11-3, were the top two teams in the NFC.

On a frigid Christmas Day at old Metropolitan Stadium, the two great teams played a defensive struggle for a half. Dallas led 6-3. But the mistake-free football played under Staubach would again bear fruit. The Cowboys forced five turnovers and committed zero. In the third quarter, Thomas ran in from 13 yards out, and Staubach hit Hayes with a nine-yard TD pass. In spite of being outgained 311-183, Dallas won comfortably, 20-12.

They came back home to play the San Francisco 49ers for the NFC Championship Game. After a scoreless first quarter, Hill's 1-yard TD run opened the scoring in the second quarter. The 49ers got a field goal in the third quarter and a tight battle went into the final period at 7-3.

Dallas' defense was shutting down San Francisco's running game. The Cowboys would grind out 172 yards, led by Staubach's 55. The passing game was hindered by allowing six sacks, but a short TD run from Thomas in the fourth quarter helped the Cowboys chisel out a tough 14-3 win. They were going back to the Super Bowl.

Don Shula's upstart Miami Dolphins were the last opponent. How far the Super Bowl has progressed as an American institution is underscored by the fact that this edition—only the sixth—was played at Tulane Stadium in New Orleans. How far Dallas had progressed during the 1971 season is underscored by the fact they were installed as a solid six-point favorite.

The first Cowboy drive bogged down near the goal-line. Landry took the points with an early field goal. Staubach found Alworth on a second-quarter touchdown pass that opened up some breathing room at 10-0, but a Miami field goal cut the lead to 10-3 at the half.

What Dallas had going for them was complete dominance of the line of scrimmage. They would win the rushing battle, 252-80, with Thomas' 95 yards leading the way. And they had Staubach's mistake-free brand of football. Roger went 12/19 for 119 yards and no interceptions. Thomas ran for a TD in the third quarter to open up the lead to 17-3. In the fourth quarter, Staubach tossed a short scoring pass to Ditka to blow it open. The final was 24-3. Staubach was the game MVP, and the Cowboys were champs.

More than champs, Dallas had ushered in a new era.

## 1972

The bid for a repeat title took a big hit when Staubach was injured in the preseason. But the 1972 Dallas Cowboys still made the playoffs and—aided by Staubach's recovery—won a memorable postseason game.



After Staubach separated his shoulder in the preseason, Landry went back to reliable veteran Craig Morton, who had steered the team to the Super Bowl in 1970. Morton was an effective quarterback—his 55 percent completion rate and 7.1 yards-per-attempt were both in the upper one-fourth of the league's starting QBs.

What held Morton back, at least compared to Staubach, was mistakes. Morton was intercepted on 6.2 percent of his passes, a figure that placed him 19<sup>th</sup> among the 24 qualifying QBs.

The passing game was further hindered when speedy Bob Hayes was hampered all year with a hamstring injury. Dallas still had a deep threat in Ron Sellers, who caught 31 passes for 653 yards. But the offense as a whole became very focused on the running backs. The tandem of halfback Calvin Hill and fullback Walt Garrison not only combined to rush for over 1,800 yards, but they were the team's two leading pass-catchers. Both Hill and Garrison made the Pro Bowl.

A big reason the running game was so effective was the presence of a pair of All-Pro's on the offensive line, left guard John Niland and right tackle Rayfield Wright. Overall, while the offense took a step back from '71, when it was the best in the NFL, they still ranked a respectable 10<sup>th</sup> in a 26-team league.

The Cowboy defense was led by a good secondary. Corner Mel Renfro and strong safety Cornell Green were both Pro Bowlers, while young cornerback Charlie Waters intercepted six passes. In the trenches, there was big Bob Lilly, now 33-years-old, but still a Pro Bowl player. The defense ranked sixth in the league for points allowed.

Dallas opened the season at lowly Philadelphia. After a sluggish first half where the Cowboys only led 7-6, they opened up. Morton went 13/29 for 235 yards. A 37-yard touchdown pass to Sellers got some breathing room and a 154-70 edge in rush yardage keyed an easy 28-6 win.

A road trip to New York to face a decent Giants team followed a similar storyline. Dallas led 10-7 at the half and still clung to a 16-14 lead in the fourth quarter. But with a 139-84 advantage on the ground, they ultimately put New York away, 23-14.

Dallas went on to Green Bay, where the Packers would ultimately win a division title. In a game the Cowboys generally played pretty well, they also turned it over five times. That was the primary cause of a 16-13 defeat.

They went on to Pittsburgh, where the Steelers were having a breakout season that would set their tone for the balance of the entire decade. After falling behind 13-3 in the second quarter, the Cowboys put the game in Hill's hands. The running back not only rushed for 108 yards, but he threw a 55-yard touchdown pass to Sellers that delivered a 17-13 win.

The Baltimore Colts had been a top team—in fact, the one who had broken hearts in Dallas in the Super Bowl just two years earlier. But the Colts would collapse this year. Morton carved them up to the tune of 22/30 for 279 yards, with Sellers catching seven balls for 113 yards. The defense dominated in an easy 21-0 win.

At 4-1, the stage was set for a trip to Washington D.C. to face the Redskins, Dallas' prime challenger in the NFC East. The game started off well. Morton went up top to Sellers from 39 yards and built an early 10-0 lead. Dallas still led 20-7 in the third quarter. But in a fourth quarter that would prove a prelude to this season's ultimate ending, the defense fell apart. The Redskins scored the final 17 points and won 24-20.

The Detroit Lions were a contender and their Monday Night visit to Texas Stadium was a big one. Morton put the passing game on display early, with a 38-yard TD strike to Billy Parks, then a 33-yard toss to Hill, and the Cowboys led 14-0. Morton finished the night 11/19 for 206 yards and three TDs. Dallas led 28-17 in the fourth quarter and hung on to win, 28-24.

Morton continued to play well in San Diego, against a bad Chargers team. He went 15/21 for 161 yards. Dallas scored a touchdown on special teams and appeared to be coasting home, with a 31-0 lead. But they weren't running the ball well and couldn't put this one away. The Bolts roared back, but the Cowboys held on, 34-28.

A sequence of soft opponents continued when the St. Louis Cardinals came to town. Morton hit Sellers with a 41-yard touchdown pass. An early 10-0 edge was stretched to 23-10 by the half. Waters delivered the dagger blow in the third quarter with a Pick-6 that made it 30-10. The final was 33-24.

Hill needed just 15 carries to get 100 yards in Philadelphia. Dallas systematically built the lead, and their 28-7 win had the unusual twist of coming with two safeties. The Cowboys were 7-2 and riding high into Thanksgiving.



San Francisco was whom Dallas ousted in the previous year's NFC Championship Game. The Cowboys took an early 7-0 lead in the now-traditional late Thursday afternoon feast. But they were turning the ball over—four times, compared to just one for the 49ers. Two of those turnovers were turned directly into touchdowns. This one got away and turned into an ugly 31-10 loss.

The bright side of the loss? Staubach was now healthy enough to get some mop-up duty. Morton was playing well enough that Landry would stick with him. But there was now an option lurking.

At 8-3, Dallas was in good position for the playoffs. While they were two games behind Washington in the NFC East, the Cowboys were a game up on the 7-4 Lions for the wild-card. Dallas the tiebreakers from that Monday Night win over Detroit. And in the era of a 14-game schedule, there were just three weeks left.

The Cowboys made their return visit to St. Louis. It was a late afternoon kickoff. The Lions, having kicked off two hours earlier in Green Bay, were in the process of getting slaughtered. The playoffs were there to be clinched, and Dallas took advantage. Hill rushed for 120 yards, Dallas had 209 rush yards as a team, and they coasted to a 27-6 win.

Washington had also won and thereby clinched the NFC East, so Dallas was locked in as the wild-card with two weeks to go. It took the edge off the Redskins visit to Texas Stadium the following Saturday. The Cowboys kept fine-tuning their ground game—Garrison went for 121 yards on just ten carriers, while Hill added 111 more. Dallas was up 28-3 by halftime and won 34-24. In the season finale at home against the Giants, Morton and Staubach split time in a game the Cowboys basically mailed in. A 23-3 loss meant they ended their regular season at 10-4.

Dallas went to San Francisco for a Saturday kickoff, one day before Christmas Eve. The Divisional Round began earlier that day in Pittsburgh, where the Steelers and Raiders produced one of the NFL's most famous and controversial endings. The Cowboys and 49ers would play an epic battle themselves.

It didn't look epic for much of the day, at least for Dallas. They allowed the opening kickoff to be run back for a touchdown. They gave up two more touchdowns in the second quarter. A couple of nice drives had to end in field goals. Trailing 21-6, the Cowboys needed something. Morton threw a 28-yard TD pass to Lance Alworth to make it a game again, 21-13 at the half.

But San Francisco responded in the third quarter. It was 28-13, and the two-point conversion in the NFL was still over two decades away, so this was a three-possession deficit. Morton was only 8/21 for 96 yards and two interceptions. In the fourth quarter, Landry called on Staubach to try and save the season.

Dallas got a field goal to cut the lead to 28-16. With just over a minute to play, Staubach found Parks on a 29-yard touchdown pass. They were back in it but needed the ball back. Then Renfro covered the onside kick. Staubach had a chance, and he made the most of it. A ten-yard touchdown pass to Sellers completed an improbable 30-28 comeback win.

In a stunning quarter of play, Staubach had gone 12/20 for 174 yards. The veteran Alworth caught seven balls for 136 yards. There was no question anymore who the Cowboy quarterback was. They would get a Round 3 with Washington for the NFC Championship. And if that worked out, the undefeated Miami Dolphins were likely on the far side in the Super Bowl.

But Roger and the offense were shut down in RFK Stadium. The game was close for three quarters and the Cowboys only trailed 10-3 at the half. But, like the regular season game in Washington, the Dallas defense broke in the fourth quarter. The Redskins rolled up a touchdown, three field goals and pulled away to a 26-3 win. The bid for a repeat title was over.

The Cowboys still continued what was now a string of seven straight playoff years. Staubach had authored what remains one of the most legendary moments of his Hall of Fame career. And Dallas wasn't going anywhere.

## 1973

For seven straight years, Dallas had been in the playoffs. For three straight years, they had at least reached the NFC Championship Game. While the 1973 Dallas Cowboys weren't able to return to the top of the heap and win a second Super Bowl in three years, they did keep both of the aforementioned streaks going.

In '73, Roger's 8.5 yards-per-attempt were the best in the league and his 63 percent completion rate was second. Where he slipped was interceptions. While a 23-15 TD/INT ratio was fine in the context of this era, his 5.2 percent interception rate only ranked 14<sup>th</sup> among the 17 QBs with enough throws to qualify.

Staubach's big-play targets were the trio of Otto Stowe, Bob Hayes, and a young Drew Pearson. Dallas also had a good up-and-coming tight end in Billy Jo DuPree. The running backs, notably Calvin Hill and Walt Garrison were a big part of the passing game, something that was not the norm in an age where more offenses simply threw the ball downfield.

Hill was one of the league's better runners, rolling up over 1,100 yards. The veteran Garrison and the youthful Robert Newsome combined to add almost 900 more. They ran behind a tough offensive line, led by All-Pro right tackle Rayfield Wright and left guard John Niland.

All in all, the balanced Cowboy attack scored the second-most points in the NFL. And the defense, which ranked seventh in points allowed, wasn't bad either. The front four was anchored by 34-year-old Pro Bowl tackle Bob Lilly, who was then flanked by good pass-rushing ends in Pat Toomay and Harvey Martin. Veteran linebacker Lee Roy Jordan was a Pro Bowler. The corners had a Pro Bowler on one side in Mel Renfro and a ballhawk on the other, with Charlie Waters intercepting six passes.

Dallas opened the season in Chicago. With the score tied 3-3 in the second quarter, Staubach threw touchdown passes from 21 yards to Stowe and 18 to Hayes. But they allowed a special teams touchdown and let a poor Bear team tie the game 17-17. Eventually though, the six turnovers collected by the Cowboy defense added up, and they won 20-17.

The home opener was on Monday Night against New Orleans. Dallas took a bad team to the woodshed. Leading 12-3 at the half, the Cowboys blew it open when Newhouse ran for one TD and caught another. The final was 40-3. And the blowouts continued six days later when the St. Louis Cardinals came to town. Staubach went 17/22 for 276 yards and no mistakes. Dallas outrushed St. Louis 250-44 and coasted to a 45-10 win.

A 3-0 record compiled against a weak schedule set the Cowboys up for a Monday Night date in Washington.

The Cowboys got 103 rushing yards from Hill and took a 7-0 lead into the fourth quarter. Staubach had been knocked out and veteran Craig Morton was in. After the Redskins tied the game 7-7, Morton made the fatal mistake—he threw a Pick-6 deep in his own end. In a wild final 2 ½ minutes, Dallas managed to get down to the Washington four-yard line and faced a 4<sup>th</sup>-and-goal. Morton's short pass to Garrison was complete, but he was tackled a yard short of the goal line. The Cowboys lost 14-7 and, at least for now, were still the second-best team in their own division.

If Monday Night in Washington had been a defensive battle, the road trip to face an excellent Los Angeles Rams' team would be a shootout. The problem is that Staubach also threw three interceptions, Dallas lost a couple of fumbles, and they lost the football game 37-31.

After two straight losses to contenders, a home game with the lowly New York Giants was a welcome respite. Hill ran for 123 yards. Dallas let New York hang around into the third quarter before Staubach threw consecutive TD passes that blew it open and led the way to a 45-28 win.

A late afternoon game in Philadelphia should have been more easy pickings. But the Cowboys dug a 10-0 hole early. They committed four turnovers and collected none. The surprise 30-16 loss left them at 4-3. Dallas was in trouble.



They also had a tough game waiting at home, in the playoff-bound Cincinnati Bengals. The Cowboys met the urgency of the moment. Staubach went 14/19 for 209 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. Jordan intercepted three passes. The 38-10 win was easily Dallas' best game of the season to date.

The Bengals were situated right in between a schedule spot that was otherwise the Giants and Eagles. Dallas made their return trip to New York. The Cowboy D forced six turnovers, including two interceptions by Waters, and won 23-10. In the home game with Philly, Dallas again dug themselves a 10-0 hole and Staubach would be intercepted three times. But this time, the Cowboy ground attack got ginned up. They ran for 286 yards and pulled away to win 31-10.

We had reached Thanksgiving, and Dallas was 7-3. They were tied for first with Washington in the NFC East and tied for the wild-card with the Atlanta Falcons. The final four weeks would be an intense race for the playoffs.

Given that, having to play the Miami Dolphins on Thanksgiving was less than ideal. The Dolphins were the defending Super Bowl champs, and en route to a repeat title. Dallas fell behind 14-0 in the first quarter, and then Miami's ruthless defensive efficiency just took over. The Cowboys couldn't run the ball and they couldn't get it downfield in the passing game. They lost 14-7. Washington and Atlanta both won on Sunday. With three weeks left, Dallas was on the outside looking in.

A must-win visit to Denver against a pretty good Bronco team had its challenges. The offensive line didn't clear the way for a running game, nor did they protect Staubach, who was sacked seven times. But Roger made big plays. He went 14/28 for 240 yards and stayed away from mistakes. Pearson caught four balls for 93 yards. It was enough to churn out a 22-10 win.

While the Redskins won to keep the NFC East lead, the Falcons lost. Dallas was back into a tie for the wild-card spot. And as far as Washington goes, they were on their way to Texas Stadium for a high-profile late Sunday afternoon showdown.

The game was tight for the first half and Dallas led 3-0. In the second half, the Cowboy offense got rolling. Hill would ultimately clear the 100-yard mark on the ground and run for a couple touchdowns. Staubach would spread the ball around and go 16/25 for 223 yards. The defense kept dominating. The only Redskin points came on a blocked punt long after the affair was settled. Dallas won 27-7.

There was one game left, with Dallas and Washington both tied at 9-4 and having split head-to-head. Atlanta lost again and was 8-5. The tiebreaker system of the time had net point production much higher than is the case today. The good news for Dallas is that their position in this tiebreaker was commanding. Even if they lost, it would be almost impossible to slip behind the Falcons. And so long as they took care of their own business, they would likely hold the edge on Washington.

The season finale was in St. Louis. In the second quarter, Staubach broke a 3-3 tie with a 28-yard touchdown pass to Pearson. A subsequent field goal made it 13-3 at the half. Dallas was now in control, and they didn't let up. Newhouse ran for 124 yards. Pearson's five catches went for 140 yards. Staubach threw two more touchdown passes in the second half. The Cowboys coasted to a 30-3 win and secured the NFC East crown.

Thanks to the way the postseason hosting rotation fell this year, the points differential tiebreaker meant the road to the Super Bowl would run through Texas Stadium.

Los Angeles came in for the final game of Divisional Round weekend. The Cowboys were surging, having won their last seven games, and that momentum stayed with them. Hill ran in from three yards out to start the scoring. Pearson caught a short TD pass from Staubach. A field goal gave Dallas a commanding 17-0 lead in the second quarter.

The Rams punched back, but the Cowboy defense made stops when they had to. L.A. got two field goals before the half and another early in the fourth quarter. But there was no two-point conversion in the NFL until 1994, so the 17-9 Cowboy lead was still a two-possession margin.

Even so, Los Angeles got in the end zone to cut the lead to a point. Dallas was deep in their own end. It was time for one more big play. Staubach and Pearson hooked up on an 83-yard touchdown pass. That was the dagger and the Cowboys ultimately closed out a 27-16 win.

Minnesota was up next. Could Dallas take out 12-2 teams in back-to-back weeks? The answer to that would be no. The Cowboys couldn't get the running game going and Staubach was intercepted four times. The game was still competitive into the fourth quarter, and they only trailed 17-10. It was similar to 1972, when Dallas had only trailed Washington by seven points in the final period. But, like '72, the fourth quarter saw a collapse. The Vikings tacked on ten points and sent the Cowboys home with a 27-10 loss.

Dallas had reached a point in their development where any year that didn't end in the Super Bowl felt like a disappointment. But this was still four straight years of reaching the NFC Championship Game.

## 1974

The 1974 Dallas Cowboys season was the odd sock in the Staubach years. It was the one time the Cowboys failed to make the playoffs.

Roger had a down year, at least by the Hall of Fame standards the quarterback would set throughout his career. Staubach's 7.1 yards-per-attempt was good enough, ranking ninth among starting QBs. But his 53% completion rate was 14<sup>th</sup>, and his 4.2 interception rate was unusually high for him, ranking 12<sup>th</sup>.

All decline is relative though, and the Dallas offense was still a good one. Drew Pearson was an emerging star at wide receiver, and the 23-year-old made All-Pro with 62 catches for over 1,000 yards. Golden Richards was a big-play threat and Billy Joe DuPree was a tight end who could stretch the field.

Calvin Hill continued to be the focal point of the Cowboy running game, going for 844 yards and punching a Pro Bowl ticket. He got help from up-and-coming Robert Newhouse and veteran Walt Garrison. The offense line was keyed by a Pro Bowl right side, guard Blaine Nye and tackle Rayfield Wright. The Dallas offense ultimately ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the 26-team league for points scored.

Defensively, the Cowboys had a couple of good young defensive linemen with Harvey Martin and Ed "Too Tall" Jones at the ends. Lee Roy Jordan was a veteran Pro Bowler at linebacker, and Cliff Harris also got Pro Bowl recognition at the free safety spot. The Dallas defense wasn't great, but it was respectable, at 10<sup>th</sup> in the league for points allowed.

A late afternoon kickoff in Atlanta opened the season. The Falcons had contended to the bitter end for a playoff berth in a race that involved Dallas in 1973. But Atlanta would collapse this season and the Cowboys got that rolling. A 411-108 edge in total yards was led by Staubach going 13/27 for 252 yards. The final was 24-0.

On a Monday Night visit to mediocre Philadelphia, Dallas led 7-0 in the third quarter and was on the doorstep of adding more. Then the Eagles returned a fumble 96 yards for a touchdown. On a night when Pearson caught ten balls for 161 yards, and Dallas generally outplayed Philly, they dropped a 13-10 decision

It got worse at home against a New York Giants team that was awful. While Staubach went 20/37 for 256 yards and Pearson's six catches netted 116 yards, Staubach was also sacked six times and threw three interceptions. Dallas didn't run the ball and lost turnovers 5-4. They suffered a terrible 14-6 defeat.

And now they had defending NFC champion Minnesota coming to town. The Vikings had come here and beaten Dallas 27-10 in the previous year's NFC Championship Game, and they took a 20-7 lead after three quarters in this one. Hill would rush for 95 yards and Dallas rallied to take a 21-20 lead. But Staubach also threw four interceptions and that was too much to overcome. A late Minnesota field goal sent Dallas to a third straight loss.

The St. Louis Cardinals would emerge as a contender this year and were off to a 4-0 start. Oddsmakers weren't sold yet, and still made Dallas a (-3.5) favorite on the road. Staubach would play well, going 19/29 for 236 yards. Pearson would have a big game, catching eight passes for 118 yards. Dallas would rally from a 28-14 deficit to tie it at 28-all. But the defense gave up big plays in the passing game, and once again, a fourth-quarter field goal sent the Cowboys to defeat, 31-28.

A 1-4 start is alarming even in our modern circumstances. In the world of 1974, it was cause for an all-out fire alarm in Big D.

Rematches were ahead with the Eagles, Giants, and Cardinals, and the Cowboys had already reached the must-win point. They trailed Philly at home, 24-17 in the third quarter. But they were controlling the ground game, with Hill on his way to 140 yards. They were pressuring the quarterback, getting six sacks. Staubach was playing mistake-free football and the tide turned in a 31-24 comeback win.

On the road in New York, Dallas was facing an old friend. Craig Morton had been Staubach's predecessor at starter until midway through 1971, and his backup the last two seasons. Morton was now with the Giants. The Cowboys got a short touchdown run from Garrison and a 32-yard Staubach-to-Pearson connection staked Dallas to a 14-0 lead. They intercepted Morton three times and churned out a 21-7 win.

St. Louis came to Texas Stadium on the first weekend of November. A clean game with no turnovers either way saw Dallas trailing 14-7 in the fourth quarter. A 12-yard TD run from Hill tied it. This time, the late field goal went the Cowboys' way. They won 17-14 and were back to even at 4-4.

Dallas moved past the .500 mark by muscling up against San Francisco. The Cowboys enjoyed a 221-64 edge on the ground. 132 of those yards came from Hill and he scored the go-ahead touchdown in a 20-14 home win.

The Washington Redskins, along with the Cardinals, were who the Cowboys had to catch. Or, they at least had to catch one of them to have any hope of the playoffs. A road trip to D.C. for a late Sunday afternoon kickoff would begin a three-week stretch where they would play the 'Skins twice.



But it couldn't have gone worse. Dallas trailed 28-0 by halftime. Forced out of the running game, Staubach was erratic, going 16/38 for 174 yards. He was sacked five times. The Cowboys tried to rally, but the deficit was too big in a devastating 28-21 loss.

Dallas came back home to beat mediocre Houston 10-0 behind a 214-26 advantage on the ground. They were 6-5. St. Louis was leading the division at 9-2 and out of reach. Washington was 8-3. Catching the Redskins wouldn't be easy, but at the very least, they were coming to Dallas for Thanksgiving.

This would be one of the historic games in the long Cowboy tradition of hosting the late afternoon game on Turkey Day. They were trailing 16-3. Staubach was knocked out of the game. For one day, Longley was a star. He went 11/20 for 203 yards and two touchdowns. His 50-yard strike to Pearson in the fourth quarter pulled out a 23-17 win and kept Dallas' season alive for the moment.

The Cowboys were only a game back of the Redskins, but the tiebreakers were still working against them—those division losses to the Giants and Eagles early in the year were still taking a toll. So, Dallas needed to win their last two, and Washington had to lose their last two.

Lowly Cleveland came in for a late Saturday afternoon game. Staubach struck quickly, with touchdown passes of 35 and 41 yards to Richards. Staubach would finish 14/24 for 230 yards and three TDs. The Browns closed to within 20-17, but Dallas was also running the ball, to the tune of a 252-87 rush yardage edge. They pulled back away to a 41-17 win.

On Monday Night, Washington was on the road against the NFC West champion Los Angeles Rams. The Redskins fell behind early, giving hope to Cowboy fans. But the Rams had nothing to play for, the Redskins had everything, and Washington rallied to win 23-17. Dallas' string of eight straight playoff appearances was over.

They went on to close the year at Oakland, where the Raiders had the best record in the NFL. Staubach made some big plays throwing for 266 yards. But he was also erratic, at 17/39, and forced to play from behind, in a 24-9 hole. Dallas ultimately lost 27-23.

The final record was 8-6. If the second wild-card had been around, Dallas would have gotten a third game with Washington. But by the standards of 1974, they were done.

## 1975

The 1975 Dallas Cowboys not only got back on track, but they reached a Super Bowl and began another string of postseason appearances that would last even longer than the one that ended in 1974.

There were a lot of changes in store for the 1975 season. Dallas was moving forward without key veteran contributors in running back Calvin Hill and defensive tackle Bob Lilly. The latter retired, while the former went to the fledgling World Football League. With the personnel changes, twelve rookies would make the Cowboy roster. Head coach Tom Landry also made a big strategic change. He instituted the shotgun offense. Today, it's a standard base formation. Back then, it was a novelty.

The quantity of rookies might have been historic, but the biggest contributors were still the proud veterans. Roger Staubach was 33-years-old, and the future Hall of Fame quarterback had another Pro Bowl season. His 57 percent completion rate ranked sixth in the league, while his 7.7 yards-per-attempt was a stellar third. A 17-16 TD/INT ratio, with a 4.6 interception rate was a little high, but in this era, the latter stat still ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among starting quarterbacks.

Staubach's prime target was a rising young star in Drew Pearson, who caught 46 passes and averaged nearly 18 yards per catch. Jean Fugett at tight end was a reliable option underneath.

The running game shifted to a more fullback-centric approach in Hill's absence. Robert Newhouse ran for 930 yards, and his 34 receptions were third on the team. Halfback duties were split between Preston Pearson (no relation to Drew) and Doug Dennison. While Preston Pearson was a reliable receiver out of the backfield, both halfbacks were held to fewer than four yards a carry.

Offensive tackle Rayfield Wright, another future Hall of Famer, anchored the line. The defensive side of the trenches had the best player in that famed rookie class—tackle Randy White, destined for Canton himself. Harvey Martin was a quality pass rusher at end, getting 9 ½ sacks.

The back seven was anchored by Pro Bowl free safety Cliff Harris and veteran middle linebacker Lee Roy Jordan. The 34-year-old intercepted six passes.

All in all, Dallas wasn't dominant, but they were balanced. In a 26-team league, they finished eighth in points scored and ninth in points allowed.

The season opened with a late Sunday afternoon home game against the Los Angeles Rams. The Rams had reached the NFC Championship Game in 1974, and were headed for a 12-2 season this year (the schedule didn't expand to 16 games until 1978). One of those losses came right here in Big D. The Cowboy defense held the Rams to 20 passing yards. They intercepted three passes, including two by Mel Renfro. Dallas built an 18-0 lead, allowed a meaningless touchdown late in the game and won 18-7.

A challenging early home sequence continued with a visit from the St. Louis Cardinals. Dallas, aided by a 97-yard kickoff return from rookie Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson, took a 28-17 lead. The Cardinals rallied to tie it 31-31 and force overtime.

But Staubach was having a big day. He went 23/34 for 307 yards. Billy Joe DuPree, a young tight end, caught six balls for 100 yards. The last one was a TD pass in overtime that won it, 37-31.

Dallas went on to Detroit, where the Lions were opening the brand-new Silverdome on Monday Night Football. A mediocre team, the Lions hung with the Cowboys and only trailed 15-10 after three quarters. But with Drew Pearson having a big night—six catches for 188 yards—Dallas dominated the fourth quarter and ruined Opening Night in Detroit, 36-10.



The Cowboys didn't play well in the Meadowlands against a bad New York Giants team, and they trailed 7-6 in the fourth quarter. What they were doing was running the ball. A 196-96 edge in rush yardage was ultimately decisive. Staubach flipped a short touchdown pass to Fugett and Dallas escaped, 13-7.

Riding high at 4-0, a visit from the lowly Green Bay Packers, seemingly light-years away from the glorious Vince Lombardi era that ended just seven years earlier, looked like easy pickings. The Cowboys ran the ball well, with Preston Pearson gaining 101 yards and Newhouse going for 92. But they didn't take care of the football—four lost fumbles and five turnovers overall. Dallas blew a 17-9 lead and suffered a 19-17 upset loss.

A visit to Philadelphia, another bad team, also turned into a struggle. Dallas didn't run the ball well and trailed 17-10. Staubach bailed them out by going 27/49 for 314 yards. Roger found Drew Pearson on a touchdown pass to tie the game and a field goal delivered a 20-17 win.

The calendar flipped to November and Dallas was starting to struggle. Three straight games against poor competition had resulted in two narrow escapes and a loss. Now, the Cowboys were going to Washington for a late afternoon date with the Redskins. George Allen's Redskins had made the playoffs each of the last four years and were again in the hunt.

Dallas built a 14-3 lead. But the national television audience would see a classic game. Washington rallied to tie it 17-17. The Cowboys got six turnovers, one of which was a Pick-6 by Harris that put them up 24-17. But the Redskins were carving up the Dallas pass defense. Washington tied the game 24-24 and then won in overtime, 30-24.

The Cowboys were still 5-2, but in a tight race with both St. Louis and Washington in the NFC East. They needed to get back on track.

A Monday Night home date with the subpar Kansas City Chiefs seemed like the right recipe. But the Cowboys were sloppy, losing five fumbles. They blew a back-and-forth game, 34-31. With the record at 5-3, it might not have been time for panic, but there was certainly urgency in the air.

The next game was on the road against a terrible New England Patriots team. Staubach played efficient football and went 10/14 for 190 yards and no interceptions. Dallas enjoyed a rushing yardage edge of 171-99, and they built a 34-17 lead. The Patriots made a late push, but this week's 34-31 final saw Dallas end up on the right side.

A balanced running game continued to work at home against Philadelphia, to the tune of 205 yards. Preston Pearson added four catches for 109 yards and the Cowboys won 27-17. Normally, this would be the point that Dallas would look ahead to their customary Thanksgiving feast. But 1975, along with 1977, saw the league give St. Louis the late afternoon Turkey Day spot. It wasn't until 1978 that the Cowboys' Thanksgiving date became permanent.

The Sunday after Thanksgiving was a windy day in Big D for the rematch with the Giants. Staubach found Fugett for a 54-yard touchdown pass and Dallas built a 14-3 lead after the first quarter. Then, they just salted it away, with no one scoring the rest of the way.

At 8-3, Dallas was playing well again, and the race for the playoffs was red-hot. St. Louis was also 8-3, while Washington was 7-4. The Cowboys had games with both in the immediate future. The next two weeks would decide their fate.

The road trip to St. Louis could not have been a bigger disaster. Dallas dug themselves a 28-3 hole, thanks to two long touchdown passes. The final score of 31-17 was deceptively respectable. The Cardinals were in first place. The Redskins won to pull even with the Cowboys at 8-4.

Stakes for Washington's visit to Dallas could not have been higher—the winner was going to the playoffs, the loser was going home. Whomever won would be a game ahead with one to play. A Redskin win would secure a head-to-head sweep, while a Cowboy win would ensure that they could still take the tiebreaker based on division record.

The game was on Saturday afternoon in the late time slot. Dallas fell behind 10-0, marking five straight quarters of poor play in the season's most important games. Staubach turned it around by finding Golden Richards on a 57-yard touchdown pass. Roger then ran for a TD to get a 14-10 lead by halftime.

That 14-10 score held through the third quarter. Dallas added a field goal in the fourth quarter. Moreover, the Cowboys were crushing the 'Skins on the ground, 20-8. Eventually, Washington broke. A short TD pass from Staubach extended the lead to 24-10. Defensive back Charlie Waters sealed it with a Pick 6. The 31-10 win was sending the Cowboys back to postseason play.

There was still hope of winning the division, but Dallas needed help, and with only four teams per conference in the playoffs, there was no first-round bye at stake. Staubach was dealing with some aching ribs, so Landry let him rest in the final week. It proved a wise decision. St. Louis won anyway. And the Cowboys, behind backup Clint Longley, making his only career NFL start, beat the lowly New York Jets in old Shea Stadium, 31-21.

Dallas was 10-4 and playing well. They were still an eight-point underdog at top-seeded Minnesota. The Vikings had gotten an MVP year from Fran Tarkenton and were the two-time defending NFC champs. The divisional playoff game was the early afternoon kickoff on Sunday.

After a scoreless first quarter, the Cowboys trailed 7-0 at halftime. They shifted momentum in the third quarter, getting a tying touchdown run from Dennison, and then a fourth-quarter field goal had Dallas ahead 10-7. But Minnesota drove for a go-ahead touchdown. The Cowboys got the ball on their own 15-yard line with 1:51 left for their final chance.

Staubach was having a good day, finishing at 17/29 for 246 yards and no mistakes. He made two epic throws on this drive. The first one came on 4<sup>th</sup>-and-16 to keep the season alive and get the team to midfield. The second was **the play this game is remembered for**.

Drew Pearson ran a deep route in the final seconds. Near the goal line, he and Minnesota corner Nate Wright fought for position. Pearson won that battle and caught the football for a stunning touchdown. Viking fans argued for offensive pass interference. But to no avail. Dallas had a stunning 17-14 win.

Feeling the momentum, the Cowboys went to Los Angeles to meet the Rams for the NFC Championship. Dallas struck first when Staubach threw an 18-yard touchdown pass to Preston Pearson. It was the start of a pattern. Preston Pearson would catch seven passes for 123 yards. Three of those would be for touchdowns. One of those would be in the second quarter, along with a short Staubach-to-Richards TD pass. The Cowboys were up 21-0 by halftime.

Dallas just kept pounding away. They won the rush yardage battle 195-22. Preston Pearson's third touchdown blew it open in the third quarter. The lead rose to 34-0. Much like the season opener, L.A. didn't score until the issue was long decided. With Staubach going 16/26 for 220 yards, this one ended 37-7.

The Cowboys were in the Super Bowl for the first time since their championship season of 1971. Facing the defending champion Pittsburgh Steelers, Dallas took a 10-7 lead into the fourth quarter. Staubach would go 15/24 for 204 yards. But in this game, Roger was also making mistakes. He threw three interceptions, while the Dallas defense couldn't come up with a takeaway. Even though the secondary only allowed nine completions, they went for 209 yards. Dallas fell behind 21-10, tried to rally, but came up short in a 21-17 defeat.

1975 was still a comeback year for the Cowboys. They had returned to the playoffs, and this started a nine-year string of consecutive postseason appearances.

## 1976

The 1976 Dallas Cowboys overcame adversity and were in position to go after that coveted second championship ring of the Staubach era. But a crucial regular season loss was followed by playoff disappointment.

Cowboy success in 1976 started with the league's fifth-best defense. Defensive end Harvey Martin had 14 ½ sacks. Strong safety Charlie Waters was a playmaker and a Pro Bowler. Free safety Cliff Harris got All-Pro honors. There were emerging stars like Ed "Too Tall" Jones up front and Bob Breunig at linebacker, combined with old vets, such as middle linebacker Lee Roy Jordan.

Staubach continued to lead the offense. Roger finished in the top eight among NFL QBs for both completion percentage (56%) and yard-per-attempt (7.4). His 14-11 TD/INT ratio doesn't look great by modern standards, but being intercepted just 3.0% of the time in the world of 1976 meant you ranked fourth in the league for avoiding mistakes.

Staubach's prime target was All-Pro receiver Drew Pearson, who caught 58 passes for 860 yards. Tight end Billy Joe Dupree was a Pro Bowler who caught 42 balls, and whose 16.2 yards-per-catch was exceptional for his position. Scott Laidlaw added 38 catches out of the backfield.

Where Dallas struggled was running the football. Even with an offensive line that had a Pro Bowl right side, in guard Blaine Nye and tackle Rayfield Wright, the running game did not emerge. Doug Dennison's 542 yards led the team, and Robert Newhouse added 450. Both were below four yards per carry. It's a key reason the Cowboy offense, while good, settled for being 10<sup>th</sup>-best in a 28-team league for points scored.

Dallas opened the season at home against the lowly Philadelphia Eagles. A couple of early Cowboy drives ended up with field goals, but they opened it up in the second quarter. Laidlaw would finish with 104 rushing yards on the day. Staubach went 19/28 for 242 yards and Dallas coasted home to a 27-7 win.

Another bad opponent in the New Orleans Saints was up next. Any problems with the running game still remained in the distant future. The Cowboys outrushed the Saints 198-69. Staubach went 15/22 for 239 yards and made no mistakes. The defense got five sacks. And Dallas got an easy 24-6 win.

The first real test came when the playoff-bound Baltimore Colts came to Dallas for a late afternoon marquee event. The Cowboys got outrushed in this one, 184-92. But Staubach outplayed the eventual MVP, Baltimore quarterback Bert Jones. Staubach went 22/28 for 339 yards, two touchdown passes and no interceptions. In a back-and-forth affair, the Cowboys got the last word with a field goal and a 30-27 win.

Another soft spot in the schedule was up, with road trips to play a Seattle Seahawks franchise in its first year, followed by the New York Giants. Newhouse had a big day in Seattle, rushing for 120 yards. Even though the Cowboys spotted the Seahawks, looking for their first franchise win, a 13-0 lead, Dallas took the lead by halftime and won 28-13. In the Meadowlands against the Giants, Staubach threw a 40-yard touchdown pass to DuPree that helped put Dallas up 17-0 by half. Playing a consistent, clean game, the Cowboys won 24-14.

At 5-0, another big game in the late Sunday afternoon window was up. Dallas would play the St. Louis Cardinals. Playing on the road, Dallas seemingly did everything they needed to do to win. They outrushed the Cardinals 151-90 and won turnover margin 4-1. Staubach, while a somewhat erratic 21/42, still threw for 250 yards. But the Dallas secondary was carved up by St. Louis quarterback Jim Hart and they took their first loss of the season, 21-17.

A home game with the mediocre Chicago Bears would prove a surprising turning point for the Dallas offense. They continued to play well, and the running game continued to perform well. They outrushed the Bears 241-93. But Staubach was knocked out, with a broken bone in his hand. Danny White came off the bench and played reasonably well. The Cowboys won 31-21. Staubach would come back the following week. But he really wouldn't be the same, and the ripple effect extended to the rush offense.

In the meantime, Dallas had to go to Washington. The Redskins were a perennial contender, back in the hunt this year. The defense had to step up and they did. The Cowboys held the 'Skins to just 88 yards rushing, and the offense simply avoided mistakes. Dallas' 20-7 win was comfortable.

The Giants made their return trip to Dallas. The offense bogged down, and the Cowboys were outrushed 186-96. They never found the end zone. But they got three field goals, and the defense delivered another masterpiece. Dallas escaped with a 9-3 win.

A Monday Night home game with an awful Buffalo Bills team was more the same. The Cowboys couldn't run the ball. Staubach was erratic. But he made some big plays, with Pearson catching nine balls for 135 yards. It was enough for another escape, 17-10.

But the luck ran out in Atlanta. Playing another poor team, the Cowboys again did not run the ball, and this time they didn't protect Staubach. He was sacked four times and threw three interceptions. Dallas led 10-0 in the fourth quarter, but the defense finally broke. The Cowboys lost 17-10.



The record was still a healthy 9-2, and prior to 1978, the regular season schedule was only 14 games. Dallas was being chased by St. Louis, who was 8-3, with Washington trailing at 7-4. The Thanksgiving Day showdown with the Cardinals would be massive.

This time, the Cowboy defense kept the St. Louis passing attack under control. Staubach ran for one touchdown and passed for another. The special teams came up with a blocked punt that produced a safety. It was enough to fight out a 19-14 win. The division wasn't formally clinched, but Dallas had a two-game lead on both rivals with two weeks to go.

Staubach played his best game post-injury in Philadelphia, going 23/40 for 259 yards with no interceptions. The Cowboys cruised to a 26-7 win and locked up the NFC East. Now, it was about securing playoff position. At 11-2, Dallas led the pack for the 1-seed going into the final week. The Minnesota Vikings were in hot pursuit at 10-2-1.

The Cowboys had a difficult finale, hosting the Redskins, who needed to win to edge out the Cardinals for what was then a single wild-card spot. Playing in the late afternoon TV window, it was known that Minnesota had won earlier in the day.

Dallas clung to a 14-13 lead after three quarters. But they again were not controlling the ground game. They weren't protecting Staubach, who was sacked five times. When Staubach did throw, he was awful—5/22 for 91 yards. Dallas collapsed in the fourth quarter and lost 27-14. Minnesota got homefield advantage. The Cowboys would get a home game in the Divisional Round, but had to settle for the 2-seed.

It turns out, even homefield wouldn't save Dallas against the Los Angeles Rams. The Cowboys only ran for 85 yards. Staubach threw three interceptions. Once again, the defense kept them in it, and got three picks of their own. The special teams came through, with Waters blocking a punt to set up one touchdown. And, trailing 14-10 late in the game, Waters did it again—a blocked punt set up the Cowboys on the Ram 17-yard line. But they couldn't finish the job, with a fourth-down pass to DuPree coming up less than a yard short of the marker. The next time Los Angeles had to punt they took no chances and just took a safety. The season ended with a 14-12 loss.

An offseason to heal was what Staubach's hand needed. And the organization was ready to make some big moves that would get them back on top.

## 1977

Tom Landry coached a lot of excellent teams. The 1977 Dallas Cowboys were his best, and the one who gave the legendary coach a second Super Bowl ring.

Staubach was 35-years-old, but still playing at a Pro Bowl level. He posted an 18/9 TD-INT ratio, completing 58 percent of his passes and 7.3 yards-per-attempt. While those numbers don't stand out in our modern era, in the more defense-friendly world of 1977, they were near the top of the league.

Staubach's favorite target was All-Pro wide receiver Drew Pearson, who caught 48 passes for better than 18 yards a pop. Preston Pearson (no relation) was a reliable pass-catcher out of the backfield, with 46 receptions. Billy Joe DuPree was a good tight end.

But Dallas had thrown the ball well in 1976, but it was the lack of a consistent running game that kept them out of the Super Bowl. The front office made a big move by trading up in the draft and selecting Heisman Trophy-winning running back Tony Dorsett. It was a trade that paid off in spades. Dorsett ran for over 1,000 yards, averaging almost five yards a pop and began a Hall of Fame career.

Dorsett got reliable help from Robert Newhouse, who ran for over 700 yards. What makes each back's performance even more impressive is that no one on the Dallas offensive line had a Pro Bowl year. Herb Scott at guard and Pat Donovan at tackle were both 24-years-old and starting to emerge, but it was the skill position talent that ultimately fueled the Cowboy offense to be the second-best in the NFL.

Harvey Martin had a dominating year at defensive end. His 20 sacks—a statistic compiled in retrospect, as they weren't formally counted until 1982—got him Defensive Player of the Year honors.

Martin was joined on the defensive front by Pro Bowl tackle Randy White, who picked up 12 ½ sacks of his own. The secondary had hard-hitting Pro Bowl strong safety Charlie Waters. And free safety Cliff Harris intercepted five passes and was chosen for 1<sup>st</sup>-team All-Pro. The Dallas defense as a whole ranked eighth in the league for points allowed.

The season opened with a big battle against the Minnesota Vikings. The Vikes had won three of the last four NFC titles, including in '76. The Dallas defense went on the road and stepped up. They intercepted Fran Tarkenton three times, including two by Harris. They forced five turnovers overall. Playing in a September rain, the Cowboys went to overtime and won 16-10.

Dallas came home for some lighter fare against bad teams in the New York Giants and Tampa Bay Buccaneers. The Cowboys forced five more turnovers against the Giants. Staubach went 18/29 for 235 yards. It was 28-0 by the second quarter and ended 41-21. Against the Buccaneers, linebacker Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson got the party started with a 79-yard Pick-6. Dallas outrushed Tampa 205-76, Staubach played well, and the result was a 23-7 win.

Riding high at 3-0, the Cowboys got set for games with the St. Louis Cardinals and Washington Redskins.



Dallas trailed 24-16 in St. Louis after three quarters. In the era before the two-point conversion, this was a two-score deficit. But Dorsett was having the best game of his young career. He rolled up 141 yards on 14 carries and a touchdown run cut the margin to 24-23. Staubach then threw a TD pass to Golden Richards to win it, 30-24.

In a late afternoon home date with the Redskins, the Cowboys trailed 16-14 at the half. Kicker Efren Herrera came through with a couple of long field goals in the third quarter to get the lead. The Dallas defense was shutting down Washington's running game. In the fourth quarter, the game broke open. Staubach threw a 59-yard TD strike to Drew Pearson and the Cowboys won 34-16.

The run of NFC East opponents continued with a trip to mediocre Philadelphia. A ten-point favorite, the Cowboys might have had an emotional letdown after the Cardinal and Redskin wins. Staubach was sacked five times and the offense struggled. But the defense played well and forced three turnovers. Waters blocked a punt for a touchdown. Dallas got out of town with a 16-10 win.

The lull continued for at least a quarter against the mediocre Detroit Lions at home. It was in the second quarter, leading 3-0, that the Cowboys snapped back to life. Staubach threw touchdown passes to DuPree and running back Scott Laidlaw. It was 23-0 by halftime and ended in a 37-0 whitewash.

Dallas was 7-0 and halfway through what was then still a 14-game regular season schedule. The road trip to New York was a little sluggish. The Cowboys didn't run the ball well. But they didn't turn it over, they played dominant defense, and the special teams produced a touchdown. The result was a 24-10 win.

St. Louis came in for a Monday Night Football appearance. The Cowboys led 17-10 in the fourth quarter. But they gave up two TD passes to the potent Cardinal passing game, led by Jim Hart. A 24-17 loss ended the undefeated season.

And the road didn't exactly get easier with a late Sunday afternoon road date in Pittsburgh. The Steelers, the NFL's dominant franchise of the 1970s, weren't having a vintage year. But all struggles are relative and this was still a team that would ultimately make the playoffs and was playing desperate here in the latter part of November. Dallas led 13-7, but their rush defense got pummeled to the tune of 264 yards. The game went awry and ended in a 28-13 loss.

The two-game losing streak had tightened the NFC East. Dallas was 8-2, with St. Louis giving chase at 7-3, and Washington at 6-4. Another late Sunday afternoon game, this one with the Redskins, now loomed exceptionally large.

Dallas trailed 7-0 at the half on a day where windy conditions made passing difficult. But the defense locked in. Staubach threw a short TD pass to Richards that tied it in the third quarter. A touchdown run from Dorsett in the fourth quarter won it 14-7. The Cardinals also lost. The division race wasn't over, but at 9-2, the Cowboys had a two-game lead with three weeks to go.

They were also well-situated to earn the top seed in the NFC. The Los Angeles Rams were at 8-3. While the tiebreaker situation wasn't locked in, it was at least favorable to Dallas. Minnesota was 7-4, but with a head-to-head win in hand, the Cowboys were close to at least wrapping up the 2-seed.

Dallas took care of the latter at home against Philadelphia. Leading 17-14 after three quarters, Dorsett took off on an 84-yard touchdown run. The rookie went off for 206 yards and keyed a massive 268-72 edge on the ground. The 24-14 win ensured that the divisional round playoff game would be at home.

A Monday Night visit to San Francisco offered the chance to secure the 1-seed. The 49ers were not a good team, but they engaged the Cowboys in a back-and-forth shootout. Staubach went 14/19 for 220 yards and made no mistakes. In a 7-7 tie, he threw a 36-yard TD pass to Preston Pearson. At 14-14, Staubach hit Dorsett on a 20-yard scoring toss. With a 28-21 lead, Staubach found Butch Johnson from 22 yards out. A 42-35 win ensured the road to the Super Bowl was coming through Dallas.

Over in the AFC, the Denver Broncos had also secured homefield advantage. A potential high-profile season finale between the Cowboys and Broncos was now a little tuneup for the playoffs. Dallas won 14-6 and closed out a stellar 12-2 regular season.

The playoff journey began on the day after Christmas with an early afternoon kickoff against the Chicago Bears. The Cowboys were a hefty (-11) favorite. A short touchdown run by backup running back Doug Dennison gave them an early 7-0 lead. In the second quarter, Staubach threw a 28-yard touchdown pass to DuPree. A field goal made it 17-0 at the half.

Getting a lead helped take Chicago's MVP running back, Walter Payton, out of the game. Payton was held to 60 yards on 19 carries. Dorsett and Newhouse shared the load in a balanced attack that produced a 233-81 rush yardage edge. But the real story was turnovers. Waters intercepted three passes. Dallas turned Chicago over seven times in total. A pair of Dorsett touchdowns made the score 34-0 by the end of the third quarter and it ended 37-7.

Minnesota upset Los Angeles in a mud-drenched game later that day, so it was the Vikings who came to Big D for the NFC Championship Game. It was a great time for football in the Lone Star State. Dallas was a double-digit favorite in this New Year's Day game. The following day, the top-ranked Texas Longhorns were playing for the national championship in the Cotton Bowl.

Staubach tossed a 32-yard touchdown pass to Richards in the first quarter. A missed PAT kept it 6-0. Newhouse ran in from five yards out to make it 13-0 in the second quarter. The Vikings launched a couple of drives, but red-zone stops from the Cowboys forced field goal attempts. Dallas countered with a drive of their own that ended in a short field goal, and it was back to 16-6 by the half.

Minnesota was playing without Hall of Fame quarterback Fran Tarkenton, and it was left to Bob Lee to try and rally the team in the second half. But Dallas was stuffing the Viking running game, while getting another balanced effort from Dorsett and Newhouse. They forced four turnovers. A scoreless third quarter passed, before an 11-yard touchdown run from Dorsett in the final period secured the 23-6 win.

Even though the University of Texas would fall apart the next day, the great football fans of Dallas were still going to the Super Bowl.

Denver had held serve in the AFC, setting up a big storyline. Craig Morton was the quarterback in Denver. While the years since 1971 could have left no serious person in doubt that Staubach was substantially better, this was still a big revenge opportunity for Morton.

This was also the first Super Bowl ever played at the New Orleans Superdome. Dallas was a (-6) favorite, and their defense was peaking in the postseason. That would become even more apparent today. The Cowboys grabbed a 10-0 lead behind a short touchdown run from Dorsett, along with a field goal. Another field goal in the second quarter made it 13-0 at the half.

In the meantime, the Cowboy defensive front was making life miserable for Morton. Martin and White spent the late afternoon and early evening in the Bronco backfield. The result was a deluge of turnovers—eight in all, a Super Bowl record to that point.

Denver got a field goal in the third quarter. Dallas responded when Butch Johnson made a spectacular catch of a 45-yard touchdown pass from Staubach. Johnson's outstretched catch left him with broken ribs. The Broncos finally got in the end zone to make it 20-10.

In the fourth quarter, Dallas was driving again and looking to put this one to bed. Landry dialed up some trickery. Newhouse got the handoff and threw a 29-yard touchdown pass to Richards, who made a nice over-the-shoulder grab himself. It was 27-10, and that was where it ended.

The Cowboys were champs. For the first—and thus far only—time in Super Bowl history, game MVP honors were shared. Martin and White were co-MVPs for the dominance of the line of scrimmage.

## 1978

The 1978 Dallas Cowboys made a strong run at a repeat bid, with a second half surge and a run through the NFC playoffs. In the end, the push for two in a row came up just short.



Dallas' championship of 1977 was built on defense, and the '78 team continued to be stingy. There were first-team All-Pros in Randy White up front and Cliff Harris at free safety. There were Pro Bowlers in end Harvey Martin, linebacker Thomas Henderson and strong safety Charlie Waters. Collectively, they ranked third in the NFL in points allowed.

Roger Staubach was still going strong, submitting a Pro Bowl season with 3,190 yards and 25 touchdown passes. He was surrounded by more Pro Bowl talent at the skill spots, from Tony Dorsett in the backfield to

Tony Hill at receiver to Billy Joe DuPree at tight end. It's no surprise the Cowboy offense was the NFL's best at lighting up the scoreboard.

Dallas opened the season at home on Monday Night Football. The Baltimore Colts, led by MVP quarterback Bert Jones were in town, but it was never a game. The Colts would collapse this season and it started in Big D in front of the national audience. Staubach was 16/22 for 280 yards and four touchdown passes. Dorsett carried 15 times for 147 yards and also took a 91-yard TD pass from Staubach. The final was 38-0.

Dorsett ran for 111 yards at the lowly New York Giants and defensive back Bennie Barnes intercepted two passes to key a 34-24 win. Dallas then lost its first game the year at the Los Angeles Rams, a consistent playoff team out of the NFC West. Staubach threw four interceptions in the 27-14 loss.

The Cowboys returned to form by beating the St. Louis Cardinals 21-12, with Dorsett rushing for 154 yards and fullback Robert Newhouse getting two fourth-quarter touchdowns to beat back a surprisingly stiff challenge from a poor team. Dallas then went to the Washington Redskins on Monday Night Football and in an ugly offensive showing, lost 9-5. The Redskins were flying high and would start 6-0. The Cowboys were starting to fall behind in the NFC East.

Staubach was locked in for a home victory over the Giants, going 17/32 for 246 yards and three touchdown passes. The Cowboys went to St. Louis and again the Cardinals gave the champs a tough challenge. Staubach needed to hook up with Hill twice in the fourth quarter to tie the game before kicker Rafael Septien won it in overtime with a 47-yard field goal, 24-21.

Dallas had their first meeting with the Philadelphia Eagles on October 22. The Eagles were pushing toward their first playoff trip of the Super Bowl era, and their defense was ready to play. The Cowboys were able to survive a tough 14-7 fight. Then a real bump in the road game.

Thursday Night Football was an innovation in 1978 and the first such meeting came when Dallas hosted the Minnesota Vikings. The Vikes were a playoff perennial and would be so again this year, but this was an exceptionally mediocre team in Fran Tarkenton's last year. They didn't look it in Dallas on this night though. The Cowboys committed four turnovers, lost the battle in the trenches and lost the football game, 21-10.

One week later, Dallas played another future playoff team, the Miami Dolphins, on the road. The Cowboys turned it over five times, fell behind 20-3 and couldn't dig out of the hole, losing 23-16. Over the last two games, Dallas lost the turnover battle by a combined nine-zip and the record was down to 6-4.

Their backs to the wall, head coach Tom Landry and his team came out with a vengeance against the Green Bay Packers, running over a decent team for 313 rush yards as Dorsett and Newhouse ran wild. The result was a 42-14 road win. Dorsett piled up 152 yards the next week in a 27-7 win over New Orleans.

Some momentum was restored and with the Redskins sliding, the Cowboys were right in the thick of the NFC East race. The two rivals met on Thanksgiving Day with their records at 8-4 and first place on the line. A dominating rushing performance again turned the game Dallas' way.

As the nation ate turkey, the Cowboys got a huge game from their third running back, Scott Laidlaw, who carried 16 times for 122 yards. Dorsett was not forgotten, going for 72. The defense shut down the good Washington runners, John Riggins and Mike Thomas and the result was a 37-10 Dallas blowout. In spite of the midseason hiccup, Dallas was again in first place.

The Eagles were still giving chase and a road trip to Philly awaited in the season's penultimate game. Dallas took care of playoff-bound New England 17-10, behind 243 passing yards from Staubach. When the Eagles lost in Minnesota it meant the Cowboys had clinched the division. They also had at least the #2 seed wrapped up.

Dallas still won in Philly, forcing five turnovers and taking a 31-13 win. There was a chance at the 1-seed, but the Rams would need to lose. Perhaps given that, Landry decided not to play Staubach in the season finale at the New York Jets. It didn't matter—backup Danny White delivered a win and Los Angeles closed out a victory to set the playoff bracket.



The Cowboys drew the Atlanta Falcons in the divisional round. The Falcons were in the playoffs for the first time ever, and had won a thrilling wild-card game over the Eagles. Atlanta didn't flinch at the sight of the defending champs. They led 20-13 and then knocked Staubach out of the game with a concussion. Dallas was on the ropes.

It was the unheard of skill position players, White and Laidlaw, who delivered. Laidlaw established the ground game, while White completed 10/20 passes for 127 yards. The Cowboy defense forced Falcon quarterback Steve Bartkowski into an 8/23 for 95 yards showing and two second-half touchdowns gave Dallas a 27-20 win.

Now it was on to Los Angeles for a showdown NFC Championship Game. The defenses stayed in control, with a scoreless first half. Dallas got a 7-0 lead in the third quarter and also recovered a Los Angeles fumble inside the red zone. The Cowboys were running the ball—Dorsett finished with 101 yards—while the Rams could not. Dallas was also getting turnovers—they intercepted LA quarterback Pat Haden three times. Eventually that all added up.

Staubach threw two fourth-quarter touchdown passes and Haden broke his thumb. Vince Ferragamo came in and Dallas picked off the backup two more times. The last one saw Henderson, whose flashy lifestyle and persona gave him the nickname “Hollywood”, take it 68 yards to the house and flip the ball over the goal post to celebrate. The final was 28-0 and Dallas was going back to the Super Bowl.

The game with the Pittsburgh Steelers was a battle to see which franchise would be the first to win three Super Bowls. This one wasn't meant to be for Dallas. After a back-and-forth first half, the Cowboys were hurt by a key dropped pass in the end zone, a key turnover and a questionable pass interference call. They fell behind 35-17 and though Staubach rallied them to within 35-31, a final onside kick was covered by the Steelers. The repeat bid was over.

Even with the end of the drive for two straight titles, the 1978 Dallas Cowboys were an outstanding team. What's most surprising is that their time going to Super Bowls was done for a while.

## 1979

Staubach was 37-years-old in 1979, but there was no slippage in his game. He threw for over 3,500 yards, posted a TD/INT ratio of 27-11 and made the Pro Bowl. Other Pro Bowlers included wide receiver Tony Hill and the left side of the offensive line, Pat Donovan and Herbert Scott.

The Cowboy attack got further support from explosive 25-year-old running back Tony Dorsett and wide receiver Drew Pearson, each of whom were 1,000-yard players, even if they didn't make the Pro Bowl. Dallas scored the fifth-most points in the NFL in 1979.

Defensively, the Cowboys were starting to slip. When they won the Super Bowl in 1977, the defense had been far and away the best in the game. Dallas' defense was still very good in 1978 when they reached the Super Bowl before losing to the Pittsburgh Steelers. This year, the defense was decent, but at 12<sup>th</sup> in the league, it wasn't a dominant force anymore.

There were still good individual players, starting with 1<sup>st</sup>-team All-Pro Randy White on the defensive line, along with fellow Pro Bowlers Harvey Martin at defensive end, linebacker Bob Breunig and free safety Cliff Harris.

But the flaws in this unit became quickly exposed at the St. Louis Cardinals to start the season. Dallas gave up 237 yards rushing and needed Staubach to throw for 269 yards and lead a drive to beat a bad team with a late field goal, 22-21.

Dallas then went to San Francisco, where the 49ers won just two games in the first year of Bill Walsh's rebuilding project. Dorsett couldn't get the running game going, and Staubach again had to carry the offense. He threw for 259 yards and a pair of second-half touchdown passes in an unimpressive 21-13 win.

A late Sunday afternoon home game with the playoff-bound Chicago Bears was up next. The running game got rolling, as Dorsett waged battle with another future Hall of Famer, Chicago's Walter Payton, each going over 100 yards. Staubach again was the difference-maker late. He threw three touchdown passes and the last one was a 22-yarder to Hill in the fourth quarter to win it, 24-20.

Dallas was still not playing to expectations and that could be measured by their performance against the Las Vegas spread. If you were betting the Cowboys and giving the points, you'd lost all three bets. That turned into an actual on-field loss the next Monday Night in Cleveland. The Browns were a decent team, growing into a contender and the Cowboys played poorly in a 26-7 loss, turning it over five times.

The winning ways returned the next at home with the lowly Cincinnati Bengals and the first point spread cover finally came too. Dorsett ran for 119 yards and Dallas covered a (-10) line in a 38-13 win. The win started a strong stretch for Dorsett. He ran for 145 yards in a 36-20 win over the Minnesota Vikings, then rolled for 103 more in a 30-6 Sunday night blowout of the Los Angeles Rams. Dorsett churned for 111 yards as Dallas beat St. Louis 22-13.

Everyone in the NFL was ready for Dallas' October 28 visit to Pittsburgh. Not only was it a Super Bowl rematch of the previous year, but the teams had also played in the Super Bowl following 1975 and were without question seen as the best two teams in the NFL. Even though Dorsett and Staubach were both shut down in a 14-3 loss, there didn't seem a lot of reason for alarm.

But Dallas turned in a shaky performance against a subpar team in the New York Giants. They trailed 14-6 on the road in the fourth quarter before Staubach first hit Pearson on a 32-yard touchdown pass and then led a drive for a winning field goal. The Cowboys were 8-2, but not looking good. And it caught up to them the next three weeks.

The Philadelphia Eagles were on the rise in the NFC East, having made the playoffs in 1978 and challenging for the division title this year. They came to Big D on a Monday Night and jumped to a 24-7 lead. Staubach did what he does best and rallied the troops. It started with a 75-yard strike to Hill and was followed with a 2-yard scoring pass to tight end Billy Joe Dupree. But the Cowboys lost three fumbles, the Eagles made no mistakes and the visitors pulled back away for a 31-21 win.

Another NFC East challenge, the Washington Redskins, were up next. Staubach played horribly, throwing three interceptions and the team lost two more fumbles. Dallas trailed 24-6 after three quarters and lost 34-20.

The losing streak against up-and-coming hopefuls continued when the Houston Oilers arrived to play the Thanksgiving Day game. The Oilers had reached the AFC Championship Game the year before and had the league's best running back. Earl Campbell would win the MVP award in 1979 and Houston was hungry to knock off their more heralded in-state rival.

Staubach threw a 56-yard touchdown pass to Pearson to get the scoring going in the first quarter. Campbell countered by rumbling 61 yards to tie the game. Dorsett would be quiet with 54 yards, while Campbell made a loud statement with 195 yards. Dallas turned it over three times, Houston did not make mistakes. And the Cowboy secondary gave up a fourth-quarter touchdown pass that was the killer blow in a 30-24 loss.

Dallas was now in a three-way dogfight for the NFC East title. The Cowboys and Redskins were each 8-5, giving chase to the 9-4 Eagles. In the race for the wild-card spots, the Bears were also in the mix at 7-6.

Staubach answered the bell when the Giants came to Dallas the next week, throwing three touchdown passes to Pearson in an easy 27-7 win. Dallas then went to Philadelphia for the season's penultimate game. It was a windy Saturday afternoon and Dorsett was not able to run. But the Cowboys pieced together a running game through the work of rookie running back Ron Springs and fullback Robert Newhouse. They fought out a 24-17 win behind 185 rush yards as a team.

The NFC East was now a three-way tie at 10-5, and the Bears were giving chase at 9-6. The way the tiebreakers fell, the division title was simple—Dallas' home game with Washington was for first place. Each team had tiebreakers on Philadelphia. The Cowboys' victory over the Bears in September had at least ensured them a wild-card spot.

I'm a partisan Redskins fan and the events of December 16, 1979 remain among the most painful in my sports existence, so there's only so much I can do in giving voice to them here. Dallas trailed 17-0 in the first half and 34-21 in the fourth quarter. I can say this—it was one of the many great performances of Staubach's career. He led a pair of late drives for touchdowns and stole a 35-34 win. The Cowboys were division champs. The Eagles and Bears were wild-cards. The Redskins were out (by losing a divisional game they slipped behind the Eagles in the tiebreakers).

1979 was a very balanced year in the NFC, and Dallas' 11-5 record was good enough to make them a #1 seed. The opponent in the divisional round was the Los Angeles Rams. While the Rams had been a consistent contender for most of the 1970s, this 9-7 team was clearly the weakest of their playoff teams—which Dallas had no trouble dispatching in 1975 and 1978.

Furthermore, the #2 seed in the NFC was the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. While the Bucs were also 11-5 and had Doug Williams at quarterback, they still weren't far removed from being an expansion team. Everything was all set up for Dallas to return to the Super Bowl in Staubach's final year and get another crack at beating the Steelers.

That's what makes the ending so surprising. Staubach did not play well against Los Angeles, going 12/28 for 124 yards. He still rallied his team, turning a 14-5 deficit into a 19-14 lead late in the game. Then a 50-yard touchdown play off a tipped pass gave the Rams a 21-19 upset. Dallas had lost as a (-8.5) home favorite.

## CONCLUSION

Staubach was offered a two-year contract by the Cowboys, but decided to retire. He had suffered several concussions in his career and had been warned by doctors that the next one could be life-altering. He wisely decided to preserve what has been a bright career as a businessman who remains enormously popular in the Dallas area. Even with the tough loss to end it, the 1979 Dallas Cowboys remain a testament to his comeback skills and resourcefulness.

