

TOP 20 WRs

1. [Carl Pickens](#) - With a full season under Bruce Coslet's offense, Pickens will have a shot at topping his 1996 numbers of 100 receptions and 12 touchdowns. [Darnay Scott](#) hasn't shown he can take the pressure off him yet though, so Pickens will continue to be the centerpiece of an offensive juggernaut. Cincinnati's offensive line is finally meshing, which will give this seasoned route runner an opportunity to take advantage of the mediocre defensive backfields in the AFC Central. Watch him use his breakaway speed to embarrass the restructured secondaries of Pittsburgh and Baltimore.
2. [Jerry Rice](#) - It's not easy to rank him No. 2, but his numbers dropped slightly in 1996 and [Steve Young's](#) health is the hottest topic outside of Evander Holyfield's ear. [Rice](#) can still turn a short slant into a 75-yard TD, but he had eight scores last season, seven shy of his 1995 total. No one knows if [J.J. Stokes](#) or [Terrell Owens](#) can handle the other receiver slot, so Rice's workload could increase, making his numbers go through the roof. With a still-iffy running game to contend with and **Brent Jones** in decline, the Niners could turn Rice into a one-man offensive show. He's durable and competitive enough to carry the offense by himself.
3. [Cris Carter](#) - You won't find a more reliable receiver inside the red zone, or a better package of route-running, hands and concentration. He will take the ball away from defensive backs and surprise them with a long gain after burning them on out patterns. His 1996 totals (96 catches, 10 TDs) weren't as impressive as his 1995 numbers, but he should become the ultimate safety valve for a young [Brad Johnson](#). He could approach the 15-TD plateau again. He's played for 11 years, but is still in top form.
4. [Tim Brown](#) - Could be rated higher, and is by many who feel [Jeff George](#) will help him. But George has to prove he can excel in Oakland's pro-style offense after posting great Fantasy totals with his run-n-shoot crew of receivers in Atlanta. Brown will approach 90 catches and 10 TDs again no matter how George does. He explodes out of his cuts, has devastating speed and superior body control. Should get off

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to a fast start as George tries to prove himself early.

5. [Michael Irvin](#) - He's a top-shelf Fantasy receiver when he's on the field, but his off-field troubles are making it hard to put him in the Top-5. He recently announced that he will be returning this season and he will be a bigger part of the offense with **Jay Novacek** gone. He will also benefit from the [acquisition of Anthony Miller](#) and exploit defenses which can no longer focus on him alone. Should total 100 receptions and maybe 10 TDs if his helmet still fits.
6. [Herman Moore](#) - Could slip as the Lions offense becomes more dependent on [Barry Sanders](#). Should still use his size and athleticism to become the team's top third-down threat now that **Brett Perriman** has left for Kansas City. Will still be Detroit's No. 1 option, but his TD totals may suffer. Scored just twice in the Lions final seven games of 1996.
7. [Isaac Bruce](#) - He just keeps getting better, and could really take advantage of the Rams projected improvement on offense. With **Orlando Pace** giving [Tony Banks](#) time to throw, and [Lawrence Phillips](#) and [Eddie Kennison](#) emerging as alternate offensive options, Bruce could face more single coverage and increase his yards per catch as well. Had 119 catches in 1995, and led the NFL in receiving yards with 1,338 in 1996. May not score over 10 TDs as St. Louis develops a well-balanced attack.
8. [Terry Glenn](#) - He caught 90 passes last year, and the scary part is that he missed one game. He still isn't a polished route-runner. [Drew Bledsoe](#) has made lesser talented receivers look good, so he could help Glenn put up some awesome numbers in 1997. Most of Glenn's catches are on straight and fly patterns, so look for him to become increasingly dangerous as his techniques improve. Don't forget, "she" will have something to prove in two meetings against Bill Parcells' Jets.
9. [Robert Brooks](#) - He's returning from a knee injury that forced him to miss the last nine games of the 1996 season. Should reclaim his role as [Brett Favre's](#) favorite target and approach the 90-reception mark. But with **Antonio Freeman** emerging beside him, he may not score more than 10 TDs.
10. [Joey Galloway](#) - After two seasons of having Rick Mirer adversely affect his totals, "Cab Galloway" will often show that he's faster than a New York taxi during rush hour. He seems to have a great rapport with [John Friesz](#), who will take a quick three-step drop and then find Galloway three steps ahead of a slower defensive back. Galloway has great concentration and makes terrific adjustments to poorly

thrown balls. Could finally have the 90-catch season he's capable of, as Seattle moves him outside. He is still developing, and will post monster numbers when he refines his routes.

11. [Tony Martin](#) - He will still be San Diego's top offensive weapon, and he will still be a top TD threat. The Chargers are expected to falter this season, so Martin could post high totals as San Diego plays catch-up. If they continue to win, he'll be one of the reasons why. A smart receiver with blurring speed, he finds a way to get open and gain extra yardage.
12. [Michael Jackson](#) - He's certainly a thriller. Jackson seems to score every time he touches the ball. Had 14 TDs last year, and scored nine times despite toatling only 44 receptions the year before. But you just know [Vinny Testaverde](#) can't repeat his 1996 performance, and Jackson's totals will come down as Testaverde expectantly crashes.
13. [Antonio Freeman](#) - If Brooks is slowed by the after effects of his knee injury, Freeman will take over as Favre's favorite longball target. Even if Freeman remains Green Bay's No. 2 receiver, he is a brilliant speedster who can separate from defensive backs with shocking bursts before taking it all the way. He's a threat to score 15 TDs as long as he plays with Favre. A deep threat who benefits from the Green Bay system. He probably would not fit in elsewhere.
14. [Irving Fryar](#) - Like a fine bottle of wine, Irving seems to be getting better with age. Totaled 88 receptions and 11 TDs at age 35. Tough receiver who is willing to risk his body over the middle. Combines great hands with still-unreal speed. He worked well with [Ty Detmer](#) last season, and should easily approach 90 catches again if Detmer wins the starting job this year.
15. [Keyshawn Johnson](#) - Quickly showed his worth as a physical, fearless goal-line receiver in his rookie year. [Johnson](#) scored eight times, and also displayed flair for the long gainer. Not intimidated by the game's defensive backs, he can easily improve on his 1996 totals of 63 catches and eight TDs. But remember, he plays for the Jets, who are still a laughingstock until Parcels can show the world differently. Bad luck always strikes the green and white, so be superstitious.
16. [Brett Perriman](#) - He is usually passed over by many Fantasy owners, who usually end up losing games to players who have drafted him. As a No. 2 receiver in Detroit, he easily approached 100 receptions on a consistent basis. He is in a position to take over as [Kansas City's No. 1 receiver](#), and

Elvis Grbac will quickly find out why Perriman is one of the premier third-down receivers in pro football. He's smart and tough, and should still have a good season in KC.

17. [Bert Emanuel](#) - Well-rounded receiver who will make the adjustment and benefit the most from Atlanta's new multiple-look offense. The Falcons will be designing shorter patterns for their wideouts, and Emanuel is explosive enough to turn short hitches into 50-yard scampers. Fluid receiver who will still catch 70-plus balls in a more conventional offense.
18. [Marvin Harrison](#) - He has shown an ability to run crisp routes, and he can get deep quickly with a good burst off the line. Had 64 catches and eight TDs in 1996, but needs to become more physical. Must learn to break tackles better.
19. [Chris Sanders](#) - Needs to succeed more on shorter routes, but he is a super threat to score on fly patterns. Has the potential to become a good No. 1 receiver, but lacks consistency. But when Steve McNair chooses to go deep, he'll look for Sanders.
20. [Jimmy Smith](#) - Can he do it again? Finally emerged to have an 86-catch, nine-TD campaign. He's a burner with great desire, but Smith has been bothered by injuries. Is he really that good?

Rating the Rest

Jake Reed is a towering target who is good for at least 70 receptions and eight TDs ... **O.J. McDuffie** offers consistency and posts good totals ... **Curtis Conway** numbers will sink as a result of playing with Mirer ... Kennison could have a very productive season ... **Willie Green** could become one of **John Elway's** favored targets ... **Keenan McCardell** is still improving ... **Andre Reed** is slipping **Henry Ellard** doesn't score often enough anymore ... **Chris T. Jones'** value is rising quickly ... **Charles Johnson** may finally make an impact in Pittsburgh ... **Frank Sanders** is an improving youngster who displays toughness and tenacity ... Cincinnati's Darnay Scott is inconsistent, but will get you TDs ... San Francisco's Terrell Owens could beat out J.J. Stokes for the No. 2 spot opposite Rice.

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