

TOP 20 RBs

1. [Barry Sanders](#) - Sanders leads the list this season over Emmitt Smith for two reasons: 1. A fresh offensive scheme under new head coach Bobby Ross. 2. Sanders will become the goal-line terror that Wayne Fontes could never turn him into. Ross will give Sanders the ball more often inside the five-yard line, and he will score more points than ever before. He scored 11 touchdowns in 1996 while racking up 1,553 total yards. His 5.1 yards-per-carry was also very impressive.
2. [Terrell Davis](#) - If you were lucky enough to get Davis last year, you were pleasantly surprised by this breakthrough back. Davis has a rare combination of speed and power. His knack for finding the end zone (15 TDs, 13 rushing) makes him a top pick. He used his elusiveness to rush for 1,538 yards last season, his second straight year over the 1,000-yard mark.
3. [Curtis Martin](#) - Martin has the tools to dethrone all the above RBs. He has speed, vision, quickness and great instincts. New head coach Pete Carroll will depend on him in goal-line situations and he may score more TDs than last season (17). As New England's feature back, Martin will carry the load on the ground and in the air. Fantasy Note: This season he'll run more between the tackles and less to the outside. He should be an even more durable back in 1997.
4. [Emmitt Smith](#) - Smith is a can't-miss pick, but falls off this season only because of the troubles in Dallas and the emergence of Davis. He has been and will continue to be Dallas' go-to guy. But he won't score as much this season because the Cowboys line isn't what it used to be. He rushed for 13 TDs last season and caught three passes for TDs. He amassed 1,204 yards on the ground. If you have a chance to select Smith, make sure you do a lot of thinking first. He may not be the Fantasy franchise player he was in the past.
5. [Terry Allen](#) - Allen is a tough, instinctive runner who keeps himself in great shape. He has a lot of speed and acceleration for a guy who had major knee surgery on both legs. His one weakness may be as a receiver. The Redskins don't throw the ball to him very often. Last season he lead

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the NFL with 21 TDs and collected 1,286 yards.

Washington's offensive line is improving, so Allen may have another great season. Teams in the NFC East like to keep the ball on the ground.

6. [Ricky Watters](#) - Not your prototypical runner, but gets the job done and is spurred on by his emotions. Watters is one of the more durable backs in the league, carrying the ball for a league-leading 353 times in 1996. He tallied 1,411 yards and 13 TDs in another disappointing season in Philly. As the main focus of the Eagles offense, Watters should post similar numbers in 1997. Always a receiving threat, he caught 51 passes in 1996.
7. [Jerome Bettis](#) - If you like smash-mouth players, nobody beats Bettis. He'll run you over rather than take the long route to the end zone. It was a place he found 11 times last season as Pittsburgh's featured back. He totaled 1,431 rushing yards. At 243 pounds, Bettis is one of the league's larger backs. His one weakness is his pass-catching abilities. The Steelers won't throw the ball to him that much.
8. [Marshall Faulk](#) - Faulk deserves this spot solely based on his abilities. He has been plagued by injuries over the last two seasons and has seen his numbers drop. But if he can stay healthy he'll post Emmitt-like numbers with lots of receiving yards to go along with them. If you're looking for a multifaceted back, Faulk is your man. He has great hands and feet, which can go a long way in the NFL. He has the potential to be a top Fantasy back with his all-around skills.
9. [Eddie George](#) - He was underrated coming out of college, but he has turned into a stud in the NFL. He has all the right equipment to be the most dangerous back in the league. George can catch the ball as well as Faulk and can run like Bettis. His 4.6 speed takes him outside the tackles but his 6-3, 232 pound frame can keep him between the pipes as well. He rushed for 1,368 yards as a rookie and scored eight times. Look for his numbers to improve.
10. [Dorsey Levens](#) - Levens emerged as a great Fantasy player towards the second half of 1996. The decline of [Edgar Bennett](#) gave Levens more opportunities to shine in the post-season, where the most talented players get noticed. At 6-1 and 235 pounds, Levens is big back with soft hands. He should dethrone Bennett as the starter for the Super Bowl Champions, but make sure you're aware that the ex-FSU back is still lurking in the background.
11. [Larry Centers](#) - Centers plays on a team with very little offensive talent. So expect him to contribute largely to Arizona's output again. He is probably the best pass-

catching back in the game, which is good for Fantasy teams. His 99 receptions netted him 766 yards and he had another 425 yards on the ground. Nothing will change this season in Arizona.

12. [Adrian Murrell](#) - With the worst team in the league last season, Murrell gained 1,233 yards (4th in the AFC) and scored six TDs. This year Bill Parcells returns to New York, and we all know how much Parcells loves to run the ball. Murrell will see more action as the team's featured back if he gains the confidence of his new coach. If he re-assumes the role of third-down back he'll gain more receiving yards as well.
13. [Bam Morris](#) - After sitting out the first six games of the season, Morris went on to lead the AFC in rushing games in which he started. He took over for the aging [Ernest Byner](#) and had 737 yards and 4 TDs on the ground and 242 yards receiving with one TD. There's no question he'll beat out Byner in training camp, but he'll need to keep his nose clean if he hopes to remain in the NFL.
14. [Natrone Means](#) - Means is big enough to be a premier goal-line back. Fantasy definition: Touchdowns. But he has light feet and the Jaguars prefer to give him the ball in first-down situations. He should get the ball more than [James Stewart](#) but keep Stewart's presence in mind when drafting. If Means doesn't prove himself in training camp, something he has a hard time doing, we may see a two-headed monster in Jax.
15. [Chris Warren](#) - After signing a big contract in 1996, Warren appeared to lose the fire. He missed two games due to injury and then shared carries with an emerging [Lamar Smith](#). He still rushed for 855 yards and five TDs. If he regains his burst between the tackles, he could be a top-five pick once again. But Smith could continue to see an increased workload.
16. [Anthony Johnson](#) - If [Tim Biabutuka](#) is still slowed by his 1996 knee injury, Johnson will get the call and his numbers shouldn't surprise anyone this year. As Biakabutuka's substitute he rushed for 1,120 yards and six TDs. Look for him to get the ball more in goal-line situations as he proves to be a solid inside runner. His versatility will keep him in games - he's a solid pass catcher (26 catches, 192 yds.).
17. [Raymont Harris](#) - [Rashaan Salaam](#) has been a major disappointment for Chicago and Harris will jump into the forefront. Over the last eight games of the 1996 season he rushed for over 100 yards three times. He closed with 748 yards rushing and used his good pass-catching skills to

amass almost 300 yards receiving. He'll be pushed by Salaam in training camp but should emerge as the starter after a couple of games.

18. [Karim Abdul-Jabbar](#) - Jabbar isn't flashy but he carries the ball enough to be productive. His 11 TDs as a rookie are impressive but Miami is increasingly becoming less-reliant on the ground game. He may see the 1,000 yard plateau again if he can remain healthy, a tough task considering his sub-200 pound frame.
19. [Mike Alstott](#) - **Warrick Dunn** will see plenty of third-down action but Alstott is a versatile enough runner to carry the rest of the load. He had a good rookie season and surprised many Fantasy owners with six combined touchdowns. He caught 65 passes for 557 yards, posting wide receiver-like numbers. At 6-1, 244 he is a better running back than a fullback and will see more action as a runner in 1997.
20. [Lawrence Phillips](#) - Phillips was a major disappointment last season to Fantasy owners who drafted him high. With a year of seasoning and a new coach (Dick Vermeil) who loves the ground game, Phillips could turn into the player he is supposed to be. He gained 632 yards last season and caught only eight passes. If he stays out of trouble he'll remain a Top-20 RB.

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