

A FREEWAY WORLD SERIES?

By TOM VERDUCCI and LEE JENKINS

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SEC FOOTBALL

Nobody Does It Better

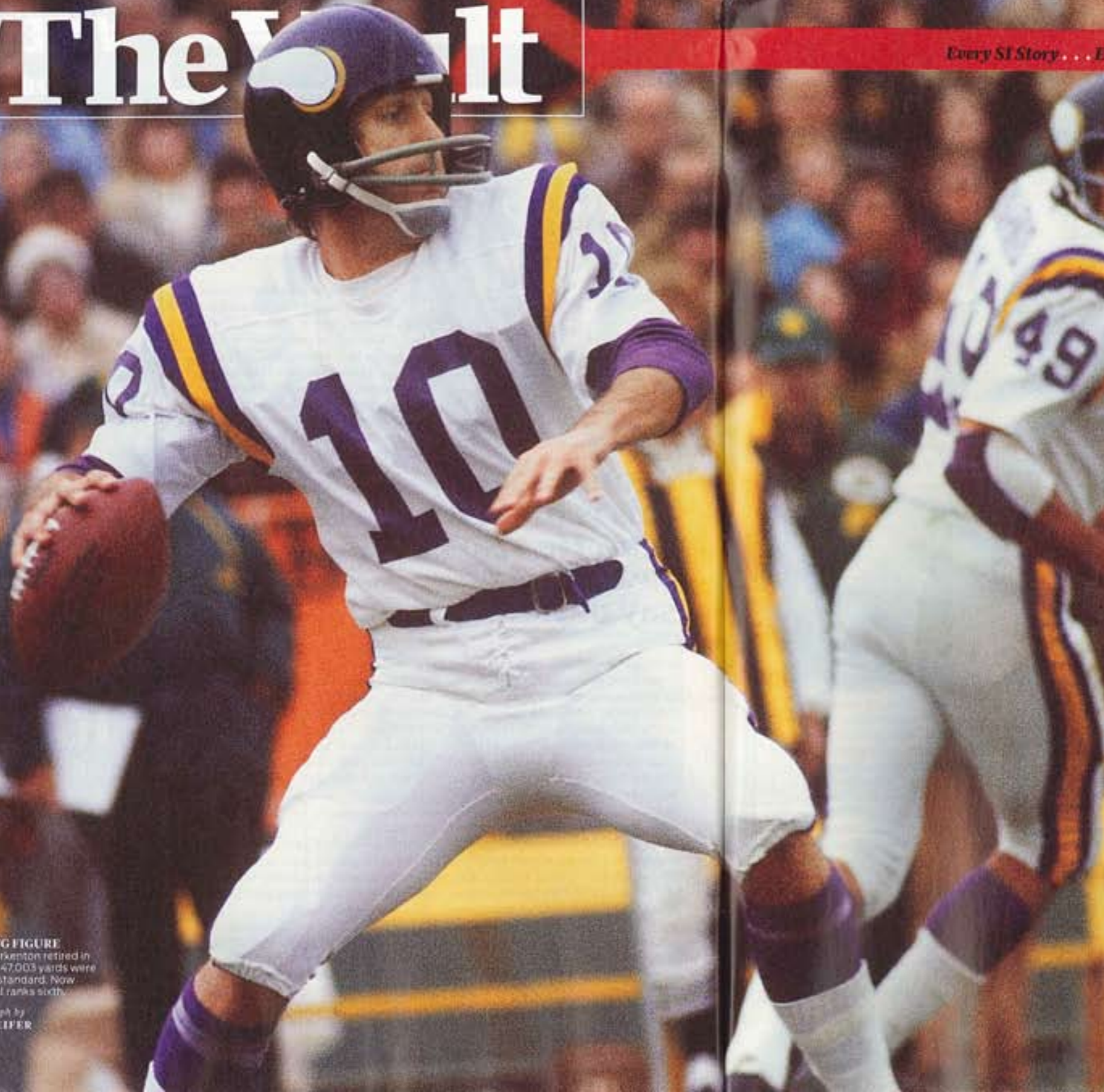
The Nation's Toughest Conference

By JOHN ED BRADLEY

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Tim Tebow led No. 1 Florida to a 13-3 victory over LSU



PASSING FIGURE
When Tarkenton retired in 1976, his 47,003 yards were the NFL standard. Now that total ranks sixth.

Photograph by
NEIL LEIFER

EXCERPT | Nov. 10, 1975

Fran the Man

The Vikings had a great, grizzled QB in the 1970s too

Minnesota was 7-0, and 35-year-old Fran Tarkenton was en route to his only MVP award when Dan Jenkins filed this story.

He throws footballs at a mattress in his attic, he eats chili before a game, he says what he thinks, and a lot of people do not like the fact that he sometimes runs into remote corners of neighboring states before he connects on another touchdown pass for the Minnesota Vikings. But Fran Tarkenton is, and Fran Tarkenton does, and whether any of the old-timers are going to be able to stomach it or not, Fran Tarkenton is on the verge of proving that he might be the greatest pro quarterback who ever drew back an arm.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Baugh. Graham. Unitas. All that stuff. But Fran Tarkenton looks better now in his 15th season than ever before. His Vikings are the only undefeated team in the NFL, and he is getting ready to break every meaningful record available to a passer. And he still hasn't come close to being seriously injured, despite those journeys into the unknown. Also, he hasn't always benefited from brilliant receivers, and he calls his own plays, and he can see the whole field better than anyone, and he has an amazing touch, and he can throw long and short and medium, and he's a leader, and he doesn't panic, and he can make things happen. The fact is, whether you like a scrambler or not, and whether or not you like a guy who throws a lot to his backs, and whether you don't accept a guy who has "never won the big one," Fran Tarkenton is going to own all these passing records, and the critics can just shut up.

With his 343rd career touchdown pass on Sunday night, the Colts' Peyton Manning passed Tarkenton for third place on the alltime list.

Online Cover Gallery

This Week in SI



1963

Texas QB Duke Carlisle ran the hoary (even then) split T option superbly in a win over rival Oklahoma, and the Longhorns replaced the Sooners as the nation's top-ranked team.



1980

All-Star guard Paul Westphal had high hopes when Phoenix traded him to Seattle. But he played just 36 games due to a foot injury, and the Sonics finished last.



1995

In his first playoff series Ken Griffey Jr. hit five homers, and the Mariners—aided as well by ace Randy Johnson, who went 2-0—rallied from two games down to beat the Yanks in five.