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All about No. 81 -- Moss vs. T.O.



Oct. 12, 2007
By Lesley Visser
CBS Sports

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Any football fan can't wait to see No. 81 vs. No. 81 Sunday -- Terrell Owens against Randy Moss. The debates will be endless -- is Randy more athletic? Is Terrell tougher? Has Randy fit in with the Patriots? Is Terrell finally at peace with the Cowboys?

I decided to call the original 81, Russ Francis, the All-Pro tight end with both the Patriots and the San Francisco 49ers. For those who don't remember, Russ was the No. 1 pick of the Patriots in 1975, played with the Patriots for six years, then went to the 49ers where he started in San Francisco's Super Bowl win over Miami in Super Bowl XIX.



Randy Moss gets kudos from another No. 81, former Patriots and 49ers tight end Russ Francis. (US Presswire)

"Any player will tell you that his number means everything to him," said Francis, who flies a plane with the serial number 81. "I think Randy Moss is better than Terrell Owens, but that's because he plays for my team. But as someone who played with Jerry Rice, I can tell you that Randy Moss can do almost everything that Jerry did. Sometimes Randy makes a move, and I can't believe he's wearing the same number I did -- I could never do some of the things he does."

There are many great players who wore the same number, take 80 for example. Jerry Rice, the greatest receiver who ever played, had competition early from Steve Largent (when Rice went briefly to the Seahawks he asked Largent if he could borrow No. 80 and Largent agreed). James Lofton wore number 80 with distinction, as did Cris Carter.

Who was the greatest quarterback to wear No. 12? Was Troy Aikman a better No. 8 than Steve Young?

Back to No. 81. Are both Terrell Owens and Randy Moss a lock for the Hall of Fame? Do you think their personalities should have anything to do with it?

"I think both Randy and Terrell were immature when they started," Francis said, "but I think they've both grown up. And there's something to be said about

playing with the Patriots. I don't think Tom Brady would stand for anyone being a jerk. One thing I learned in San Francisco was that Joe Montana, Jerry Rice and Ronnie Lott expected you to act like a professional."

As for being 81, Russ said all players are wedded to their number.

"When I was with the Patriots, my roommate was Darryl Stingley (the great receiver whose career was cut short by a devastating injury). He never called me by my name, he always called me No. 81."

Take No. 88. John Mackey and Lynn Swan and Michael Irvin are all in the Hall of Fame, three completely different players. Who do you like? And let's not forget Marvin Harrison, whose numbers might be greater than Irvin's, but is he a better receiver? And don't we wish we had all these players on our Fantasy team.

Personally, I have to go with Irvin. He was one of Aikman's two or three favorite players on a team of Hall of Famers. He was never afraid to go across the middle and he treated every practice like a game.

"That's what separates good from great," Francis said. "I saw Jerry Rice every day in practice and you would have thought he was in the NFC Championship (Game). The way he practiced is the way he played on Sunday."

Although they won't admit it, both Owens and Moss will be aware of each other on Sunday. Remember Antonio Freeman, No. 86, the great receiver with the Green Bay Packers? He told me that when he played Miami, he was always aware of Oronde Gadsden, No. 86 for the Dolphins.

"I remember one game he had like two or three touchdowns," Freeman said. "I was devastated."

When I told Oronde, who's as modest as they come, he said, "Yeah, but I think it was preseason."

Terrell Owens, in his first game against Randy Moss, caught 5 passes for 55 yards (Week 4, 2003), but Randy Moss had one of the greatest games of his career with three touchdown passes from Gus Frerotte.

Come Sunday, it will begin again, so pull up a chair and enjoy.

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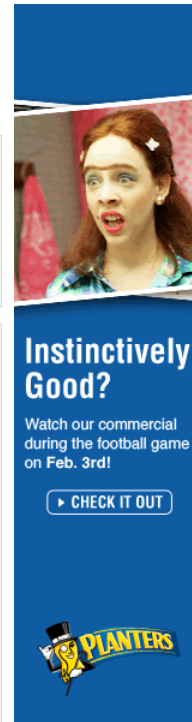
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