

Third time's a charm: Colts QB Manning again wins NFL MVP award

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NEW YORK -- Peyton Manning can tell Brett Favre to move over and make room for him atop the roster of NFL Most Valuable Players.

For the third time, Manning won the award from The Associated Press, tying Favre as the only players in that elite category.

The Indianapolis Colts' quarterback was a landslide winner Friday in balloting by a nationwide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters who cover the NFL. Manning also was the league MVP in 2003, when he shared it with Tennessee Titans quarterback Steve McNair, and in 2004.

Favre, then with the Green Bay Packers, took MVP honors in 1995 and 1996 before sharing it with Detroit Lions running back Barry Sanders in 1997.

"I know it's an individual award, but ... truly, in my opinion, a team award," said Manning, who received 32 votes, far ahead of Miami Dolphins quarterback Chad Pennington (4) and Atlanta Falcons running back Michael Turner (4). "It's been the most rewarding regular season that I've been a part of in my 11 years, and I have to believe a lot of the other players and even coaches might feel the same way."

This has been an unusual season for the Colts, who normally have the AFC South title just about clinched by Thanksgiving. Manning had two operations on his left knee in the preseason, cutting into practice time, blunting his usual precision as a passer and, eventually, leading to a 3-4 start.

From there, with Manning getting sharper by the week, the Colts won nine consecutive games to secure a wild-card berth and a Saturday night meeting with the San Diego Chargers. In that streak, Manning is 209-of-290 passing for 2,248 yards and 17 touchdowns, with only three interceptions. He extended his NFL record with his ninth 4,000-yard season and finished with 27 touchdown passes, 12 interceptions and a 95.0 passer rating.

Manning called the award emblematic of what others, including Colts owner Jim Irsay, president Bill Polian and coach Tony Dungy, did to help rally the team from a 3-4 start to make the playoffs for a seventh straight season.

"I really accept this award on behalf of the team and the organization because there is no way we would be in the playoffs and bounced back without those three people creating a winning environment," Manning said after receiving the award.

"It's just been different," Manning said. "It's been an entirely different season. I think the one thing that's been inaccurate is that the seasons we were starting out 13-0, 8-0, 7-0, that it was easy. So all of a sudden this year, we are 3-4 and now things are hard. Believe me, it's never easy to win a game. I've never taken for granted winning a football game."

Indianapolis coach Tony Dungy said several times that he favored Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison for MVP -- he tied with Minnesota Vikings RB Adrian Peterson with three votes. But after Manning's flawless work in the second half of the season, Dungy, while admittedly biased, changed his mind.

"I said after we left Pittsburgh (on Nov. 9) that I would vote for James Harrison," Dungy noted this week. "If I was voting today, I'd vote for Peyton Manning."

A vast majority of the voters did.

Also receiving votes were Chargers QB Philip Rivers (2), Titans rookie RB Chris Johnson (1) and Cardinals QB Kurt Warner (1).

"I'm honored to receive this award because of the number of other worthy candidates who had some great years," Manning said. "It was just fun for me, truly, to watch them. I'm just glad to be a part of it."

Giants QB Eli Manning, the MVP of last February's Super Bowl, praised his older brother's fortitude.

"To be able to come back and play the way he has, especially the last nine or 10 weeks where they have been winning and getting into the playoffs, I'm very proud of him and the season he has had," he said.