There's also the cyclical nature of the game. Each draft tends to have a concentration of good players at a certain position.

CINCINNATI (AP) -- Youth and inexperience have taken over the most important position in the NFL.

Ten starting quarterbacks this season have been in the league one year or less, with five teams letting rookies run the show. It's an unprecedented move in the NFL, where experience is a favored trait for those who handle the ball most.

No more.

"One of the most astounding statistics that I've seen in football in the last 25 years is the amount of young quarterbacks that are now playing early, but playing well," said Jon Gruden, a former coach and current television analyst.

Never have so many teams taken chances with so little experience at quarterback.

The starting 10 quarterbacks with one year or less in the NFL is the most since 1950, according to STATS LLC. That's the year that the league absorbed three teams from the All-America Football Conference, including the Cleveland Browns with Otto Graham.

This year's group of up-and-comers includes rookies Robert Griffin III in Washington, Andrew Luck in Indianapolis, Ryan Tannehill in Miami, Brandon Weeden in Cleveland and Russell Wilson in Seattle. They join second-year starters Andy Dalton in Cincinnati, Blaine Gabbert in Jacksonville, Jake Locker in Tennessee, Cam Newton in Carolina and Christian Ponder in Minnesota.

The previous high mark was eight in 2000, a young quarterback group that included Donovan McNabb, Jeff Garcia, Daunte Culpepper, Cade McNown, Shaun King, Tim Couch, Ryan Leaf and Akili Smith.

Before that, there were no more than six such QBs starting their teams' season openers, a measure of how much things have changed. Instead of drafting a quarterback and letting him sit and watch for a season, teams are throwing them right in there.

"They're committing to them, they're going right off the bat," Rams coach Jeff Fisher said. There's nothing more valuable, as far as a young player's concerned, than playing experience. There's that old saying that the difference between an average player and a good player is about 1,000 to 2,000 snaps, so how do you get it?"

By playing them. Right away.

Seahawks coach Pete Carroll learned at Southern California that sometimes it's better to play a talented younger player than sitting them.

"The kids were so good and talented that letting them sit on the sideline and not letting them play was a mistake," said Carroll, who is getting Wilson ready to start. "And we learned that if

you engage guys early and gave them chances and gave them things that they were good at, they would progress faster."

A big part of the new equation is the way pro-style offenses have proliferated in college, allowing quarterbacks to learn the things they'll be doing in the NFL. They're more ready to move right in.

Last year, Dalton took the Bengals to the playoffs as a rookie, fitting nicely into a West Coast-style offense that was like the one at TCU.

"Things are starting to get similar," Dalton said. "The NFL is opening a little more with the spread offenses. A lot of what we're doing here, I was doing in college. It's just different terminology. It makes the transition easier."

Gruden, whose brother Jay is the offensive coordinator in Cincinnati, isn't surprised that the transition is getting easier for quarterbacks.

"College football is changing dramatically," Gruden said. "There's a lot of no-huddle offenses. There's a lot of check-with-me at the line of scrimmage.

"Coaches are demanding more and more from these quarterbacks at a high tempo. They are coming into the league much more accomplished in terms of throwing the football, recognizing defenses. And with this 20-hour-a-week schedule (restriction) in college football, the quarterbacks have taken charge of their football teams in the offseason."

The Bengals are a good example of the evolution in how teams handle quarterbacks. During their 24-year stretch without a winning record from 1991-04, they drafted quarterbacks from very different styles - David Klingler prospered in the run-and-shoot at Houston, Akili Smith scrambled a lot at Oregon - and tried to change them into drop-back passers.

Didn't work.

By contrast, Dalton was able to make the switch smoothly even though his offseason was wiped out by the NFL lockout. The reason? The Bengals picked him in the second round because they knew their current offense fit him.

"When I first sat down with the playbook, I was like, `We did that, we did that, we did that,'" Dalton said. "All that was new was the words."

The league's nature probably plays into the youth movement as well. Dalton and Cam Newton both made the Pro Bowl as rookies last season, an unprecedented success story that makes other teams less reluctant to go young.

For example, the Colts took Luck out of Stanford with the first overall pick last April and installed him as the replacement for Peyton Manning, a huge burden for such a young player.

"Everyone knows when you go with a rookie quarterback, it's difficult," owner Jim Irsay said. "But there have been some cases like Andrew Dalton last year played pretty well."

Everyone has noticed.

"It's such an instant-gratification league," Dolphins receiver Brian Hartline said. "They see one team do it and then every team wants to do it - the copycat league. Look at Cincinnati in particular. He changed Cincinnati into a playoff team in one year.

"Did he have help? Absolutely. But your gunslinger is taking you to the playoffs from being low in your own division. Aaron Rodgers had the pleasure of sitting behind Brett Favre, but in this day and age you don't have too much of that."

There's also the cyclical nature of the game. Each draft tends to have a concentration of good players at a certain position. For the last couple of years, there's been an abundance of quarterbacks available to a league eager to build franchises around them.

"I think if you look back at the drafts, there may have been a period of a couple years there where the quality of quarterbacks and the quantity of quarterbacks maybe wasn't as good," Gruden said. "Maybe there were a couple down years, and those are cycles sometimes."

Right now, it's a boom cycle.

"It's maybe a little coincidence with the situation a lot of teams happen to be in, too," Titans coach Mike Munchak said. "I don't know if this has ever happened before, this many young guys at the same time breaking in. But I guess it's good for the league to see how these guys develop."