

VSiN **PRO**

NFL BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION UPDATE



RELOADED & READY

POST-PRESEASON UPDATES ON EVERY TEAM

OUR PRO GUIDE INCLUDES

- PLAYERS TO WATCH
- HOST BEST BETS
- WEEK 1 BETTING SYSTEMS

VSiN

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VSIN STAFF/CONTRIBUTORS

COVER: James Coleman
LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Matt Devine
SENIOR EDITOR: Zachary Cohen
MANAGING EDITOR: Adam Burke

WRITERS and EDITORS:
 Steve Makinen, Mike Somich and Matt Youmans

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS USED THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE

ATS – Against the Spread • Avg - Average • CL – Closing Line
 DC - Defensive Coordinator • Def - Defense • Dog - Underdog
 Eff Strg - Steve Makinen Effective Strength Rating • Fav - Favorite
 FT – Final Total • HC - Head Coach • H2h – Head-to-Head • L - Losses
 L# - Last number of games • LY – Last Year • MOV – Margin of Victory
 O - Over • OC - Offensive Coordinator • Off - Offense • OL – Opening Line
 OT – Opening Total • Opp – Opponent • O/U – Over/Under
 PA - Points Against • Pct - Percentage • PF - Points For • PPG - Points Per Game
 PYPG – Passing Yards per Page • RS - Returning Starters
 RYPG – Rushing Yards per Game • SM BR - Steve Makinen Bettors' Rating
 SM PR - Steve Makinen Power Rating • SU - Straight Up • TO - Turnovers
 TYPG – Total Yards per Game • U - Under • W - Wins • YPP – Yards per Play
 YPPT – Yards per Point • YPR – Yards per Rush

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AFC WRITEUPS

by Adam Burke

NFC WRITEUPS

by Zachary Cohen

We are simply stoked for the start of the 2024 NFL season. VSiN was recently re-acquired by Musburger Media, led by Brian Musburger and Bill Adeo, which means that we are back to doing what we do best - giving our listeners, readers, and subscribers an unfiltered view of all things sports betting. We are The Sports Betting Network, after all.

We are confident that our football season offerings are going to be the best in the business and that includes our “Updated” 2024 NFL Betting Guide. Our original season preview came out June 27 and a couple of things have happened since then, as teams have navigated the preseason and betting markets have matured.

In this Guide, you will read:

- AFC Team Updates and Contest Strategies from Adam Burke
- NFC Team Updates from Zachary Cohen
- Matt Youmans and Bookmakers on Super Bowl LIX
- Steve Makinen’s Week 1 and NFL Betting Splits systems
- Mike Somich on setting reminders for in-season bets
- **More than 60 Best Bets from VSiN hosts and contributors!**

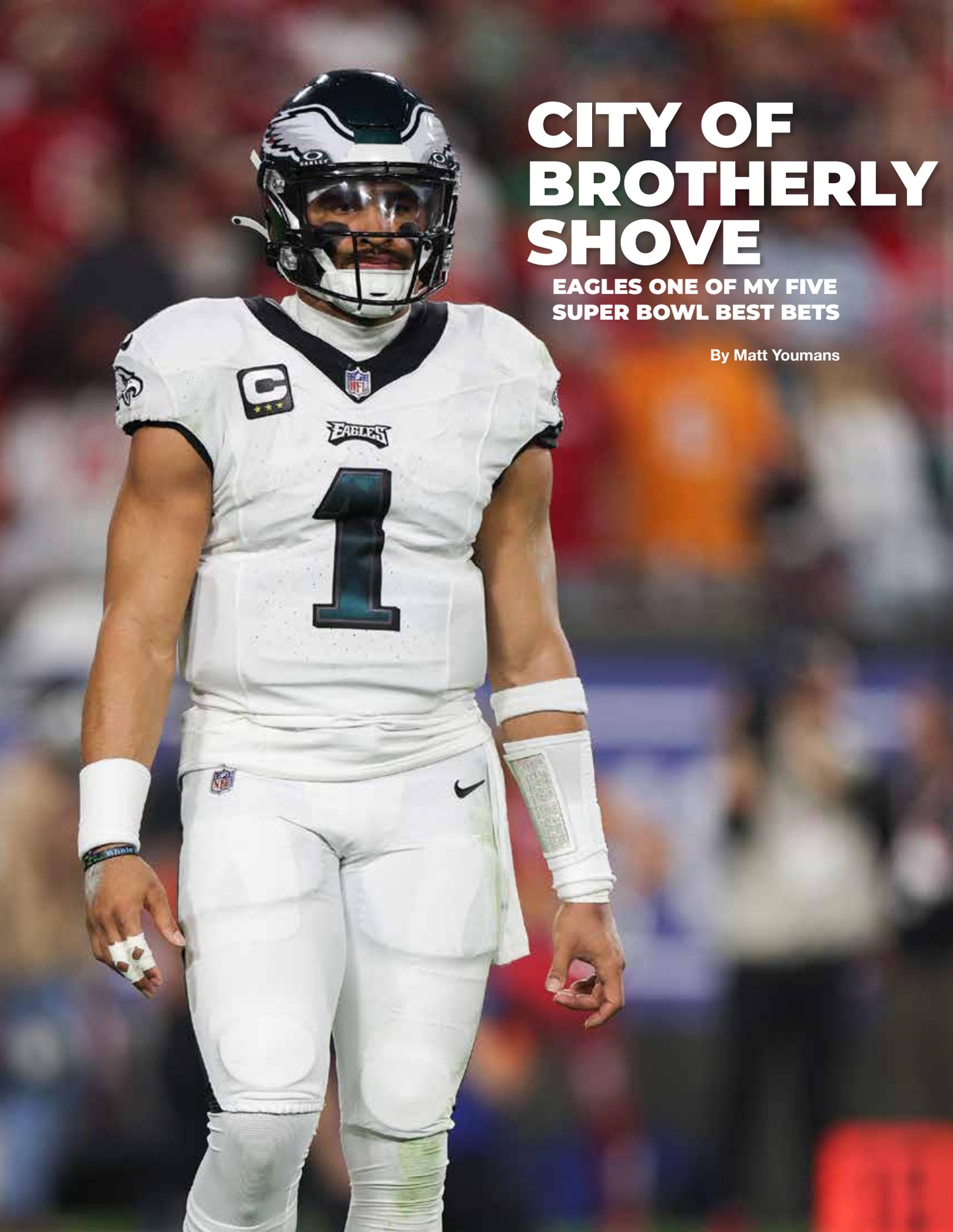
This Guide is meant to work in tandem with the one from June, which you can download at [VSiN.com/betting-guides](https://vsin.com/betting-guides), as it is a post-preseason update with some fresh best bets. The deep dives and the features in that one still carry a lot of weight as we head into the season.

Aside from this Guide itself, we’ll have weekly best bets on college football and NFL from Matt Youmans, Wes Reynolds, Steve Makinen, Jonathan Von Tobel, Mike Somich, Tyler Shoemaker, Adam Burke, Zachary Cohen, and Dave Tuley posted on the website, so we’re ready for football season and you will be, too.

Best of luck on the gridiron and keep it locked in right here at VSiN, The Sports Betting Network.

Adam Burke
Managing Editor, VSiN.com
aburke@vsin.com
[@SkatingTripods](#) on X





CITY OF BROTHERLY SHOVE

**EAGLES ONE OF MY FIVE
SUPER BOWL BEST BETS**

By Matt Youmans

It's obviously tempting to envision the Chiefs as a dynasty in the making. Tom Brady and the Patriots are in the past, and Patrick Mahomes' time is now and in the future. With three Super Bowl wins in six years as a starting quarterback, Mahomes is on a fast track.

Two of Kansas City's recent titles came at the expense of the San Francisco 49ers, including a 25-22 overtime win in Las Vegas in February.

So it's no surprise which two teams top the Super Bowl futures board this season — the Chiefs (+500) and 49ers (+550), according to odds at Circa Sports.

"It's just so hard to three-peat, and there could be some complacency as the back-to-back champions," Red Rock sportsbook director Chuck Esposito said. "Mahomes wants to be like Brady and win more Super Bowls, but the AFC is a much tougher road. In the NFC, it looks like it's the 49ers and everyone else."

It's rarely as easy as it seems on paper in August. Objects in the rear-view mirror are closer than they appear, right? The 49ers needed some luck against Green Bay and Detroit to survive last season's road to the Super Bowl. The Chiefs had to go through Buffalo and Baltimore to get to Vegas.

Mahomes was forced to overcome halftime deficits — 10 points against Philadelphia in 2023 and seven points against San Francisco this year — to win the past two Super Bowls. He also had to come back from a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit to defeat the 49ers for his first title in 2020.

As of now, the value on Super Bowl futures is not with the Chiefs or 49ers. It's no problem for bookmakers to take plenty of action on the favorites at low odds. Sharp bettors should be thinking about beating the favorites with longer shots at double-digit odds, and here are my five best bets:

EAGLES (14-1)

The first step for Philadelphia is to win the division. On May 1, I played the Eagles at +135 to win the NFC East, but that price has flipped to the -120 range. This team is loaded and set to take the next steps for another Super Bowl run, so this is my best bet.

Jalen Hurts is the real deal. Two years ago, the Eagles' quarterback emerged as an MVP candidate by accounting for 35 total touchdowns while posting a 14-1 record as a starter. He led Mahomes 24-14 at halftime of Super Bowl LVII. Mahomes worked his magic, of course, and the rest was history. Last season resulted in a hangover for Hurts and a team that fell apart down the stretch.

After hitting a speed bump, Philadelphia can return to its 2022 form. The Eagles had a significantly productive offseason by adding running back Saquon Barkley, improving the defensive secondary and strengthening the coaching staff with new coordinators Vic Fangio (defense) and Kellen Moore (offense). All of the changes, except for the retirement of center Jason Kelce, are for the better.

"We have seen a lot of sharp money on the Eagles, and I can see why," Esposito said.

BENGALS (12-1)

Only two quarterbacks have knocked off Mahomes in the postseason in Kansas City — Brady in 2019 and Joe Burrow in 2022 — and both games were decided in overtime. Burrow and the Bengals lost their next game, a Super Bowl thriller against the Rams. Burrow probably remains the biggest threat to Mahomes in the AFC.

Cincinnati is the top candidate to climb the ladder from worst to first in any division this season. The Bengals, off of a 9-8 finish, get a last-place schedule that will help their ascent in the chase for home-field advantage. Burrow appears to be fully recovered from a season-ending wrist injury, and he seems ready to turn the clock back to 2022, when Cincinnati finished 12-4 and won the AFC North by 2.5 games over Baltimore.

LIONS (12-1)

I'm not completely buying into Detroit as a potential Super Bowl champ. It's one of those cases where I need to see coach Dan Campbell and quarterback Jared Goff get the Lions over the top before I'll believe it. The NFC title game in San Francisco was an epic collapse. So while I'm not making this bet, many others are making the bet.

"The most (Super Bowl) tickets are on the 49ers and the third-most tickets are on the Chiefs," Esposito said. "The second-most tickets are on the Lions."

Similar to the Chiefs and Eagles, the Lions have an offensive line that ranks among the NFL's elite, and that's a solid foundation for a title team. I do give Detroit a slightly better shot than the Packers (18-1), so the Lions make this list.

JETS (20-1)

One New York team has legitimate title hopes, and it's definitely not the Giants. The Jets are hoping for much better injury luck this season after Aaron Rodgers' first season with the team ended disastrously in Week 1. At 40, Rodgers remains an elite quarterback, and he's behind a stronger line and supported by plenty of playmakers, such as running back Breece Hall and wideout Garrett Wilson.

Rodgers has not returned to the Super Bowl since winning it with the Packers in 2011. If he gets there again, the New York defense will be a big reason. The Jets ranked No. 3 in total defense last season, allowing 292 yards per game, and the defense will be elite again this season. I bet the Jets at +210 to win the AFC East largely due to the defense.

The strength of the AFC makes the Jets a risky bet, but I would rather take a shot with Rodgers than with teams like the Bills, Dolphins, Ravens and Texans.

RAMS (30-1)

Matthew Stafford and the Rams beat Burrow and the Bengals 23-20 for the title in 2022, and the Rams should be good enough to make the 49ers sweat in the NFC West. I bet both Los Angeles teams Over 8.5 wins, but the Chargers' challenging path in the AFC makes the Super Bowl an unrealistic goal.

"The Rams have a top-five offense and a top-five head coach in Sean McVay," said handicapper Jeff Petch, who won last season's Circa Friday Football Invitational. "Stafford, in my opinion, is the best quarterback in the NFC."

DraftKings offers the best number on the Rams, much better than the 23-1 at Circa. It's always important to shop for the best price and find the teams with the most realistic shot to beat the favorites.



UPDATED

VSIN EXPERT

BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

EAGLES TO WIN SUPER BOWL (14-1)

Two years ago, Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts emerged as an MVP candidate by accounting for 35 total touchdowns while posting a 14-1 record as a starter. He led Philadelphia to a 24-14 lead at halftime of Super Bowl LVII. It was not a fluke. Hurts is the real deal. Of course, the Eagles lost the title game to the Chiefs, and last season resulted in a hangover for Hurts and a team that fell apart down the stretch. I'm expecting 2024 to look a lot like 2022 for Philadelphia, which had a productive offseason by adding running back Saquon Barkley, improving the defensive secondary and strengthening the coaching staff with new coordinators Vic Fangio (defense) and Kellen Moore (offense). On May 1, I bet the Eagles at +135 to win the NFC East, but that price is long gone. I believe in this team enough to bet on Philadelphia to get back to the Super Bowl and close the deal this time.

BENGALS TO WIN AFC NORTH (+160)

A last-place schedule will help the Bengals climb the ladder from worst to first in the division. It's not as if Cincinnati, which finished 9-8 last season, has a long way to go. While the AFC North is arguably the NFL's toughest division, the Browns and Steelers have serious concerns at the quarterback position. The Bengals' only concern with quarterback Joe Burrow is his ability to stay healthy. Burrow appears to be fully recovered from a season-ending wrist injury. I expect the Ravens to take a step back in the regular season, and this could play out similar to 2022, when Cincinnati finished 12-4 and won the division by 2.5 games over Baltimore.

49ERS UNDER 11.5 WINS (-130)

When there is drama in training camp, it's typically a bad sign for what's to come, and the 49ers have been unable to solve the contract hold-in by leading receiver Brandon Aiyuk. If Aiyuk is not on the field, the offense is likely to sputter. The brief action that quarterback Brock Purdy got in the preseason was unimpressive, and Purdy is operating behind a line that rates as mediocre. Almost seven months after the 49ers blew a Super Bowl they should have won, the hangover still lingers. It's going to be difficult to replicate last year's 12-5 finish. San Francisco will face a tougher schedule than it did last season, and the rest of the NFC West is no joke with the Rams, Seahawks and Cardinals seemingly on the rise.

COWBOYS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-180)

While playoff wins have been hard to come by for the Cowboys, regular-season success has been routine. Dallas won 12 games in each of coach Mike McCarthy's past three seasons. McCarthy's luck is about to run out. The Cowboys are weaker on the offensive line and quarterback Dak Prescott has fewer playmakers to work with this season. Aside from linebacker Micah Parsons, there is nothing elite about the Dallas defense. It's a top-heavy roster with Parsons, Prescott and receiver CeeDee Lamb all chasing top-of-the-market contracts. The Eagles will return to superiority in the NFC East, and the Cowboys could slip to third in the division if the Commanders turn into a surprise team as many expect. This finally should be the end for McCarthy.

BRONCOS OVER 5.5 WINS (-130)

After watching all of the preseason games and reviewing each team, I have changed my opinion a little on a few teams. The Broncos will be better than the betting market suggests. Denver's two-deep roster is not highlighted by stars, but it's more talented than initially thought. I'm not buying all the hype on rookie quarterback Bo Nix, who was impressive against backups in two preseason games, but he doesn't look overwhelmed after starting 61 college games at Auburn and Oregon. Sean Payton, who led the Broncos to a 7-4 record in their final 11 games last season, is a coach who deserves the benefit of the doubt. It's not easy to find at least six wins on Denver's difficult schedule, but Payton will probably overachieve with an underrated team.



GIANTS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (NO -470)

It would be surprising if the Giants don't finish last in the division and I'll be absolutely stunned if they reach the playoffs. The media will make quarterback Daniel Jones the fall guy, but the truth is the organization has numerous problems and Jones has been set up to fail. New York (6-11 last season) probably has a seven-win ceiling and a floor of rock bottom. The Patriots and Panthers are the only teams in the league that appear to be obviously worse than the Giants, so lay it and wait five months to cash what should be a no-sweat bet.

PATRIOTS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (NO -1,000)

Even with Bill Belichick calling the shots, New England finished with only four wins last season. Now, with a coaching downgrade to Jerod Mayo and a quarterback situation that's a chaotic mess, the Patriots must deal with a tougher schedule. How is this team getting to five or six wins? I normally would not suggest a play with this price tag, but the Circa Sports line is a bargain compared to what DraftKings is offering on this (-1,800) and the bet is 99% to win.

WES REYNOLDS

COLTS UNDER 8.5 WINS (-115)

Colts General Manager Chris Ballard elected to basically run it back with his roster from last season being that they were technically one play away from winning the AFC South and making the playoffs. However, they were fortunate to be in that position considering they went 6-2 in one-score games before that finale against Houston.

From what little we saw of Anthony Richardson in the preseason, he is still a work in progress. The electrifying plays are there, as is the size and freakish athleticism. Nevertheless, he misses easy throws that the average NFL starter can routinely make.

Even with Richardson's continued development, the offense should still be above NFL average assuming Jonathan Taylor can stay healthy and the Colts stay committed to running the ball.

Defensively, the Colts ranked 28th in points allowed and defensive coordinator Gus Bradley's scheme is entirely too predictable. This team will find itself in quite a few shootouts where whomever is fortunate enough to have the ball last will win. Will the Colts have the same close game luck as last year?

Indianapolis also has to play three teams off bye weeks and two other teams with extra prep time off playing in Thursday night games. In all, the Colts face a -17 days net rest edge differential, which is the third-largest mark in the league this season.

COWBOYS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-180)

The Cowboys have won 12 games in three consecutive seasons, but yet they have more questions than answers this season. Dak Prescott is in a contract year, as is CeeDee Lamb, who has yet to report to camp. The Cowboys are also starting two rookies on the offensive line and have

little to no depth at the tackle positions. After a season in New England, Ezekiel Elliott is back at starting running back. At this point in his career, 'Zeke' is a goal line back.

The defense, under Dan Quinn (now the head coach in Washington), was able to play more aggressively because they could outscore teams. Mike Zimmer will employ more man coverage and they have the corners to play that scheme. However, the Dallas defense is +34 in turnover margin, so at least some regression should be coming.

With all the question marks on the roster, there is a potential for a sluggish start and the Cowboys always have the potential to be a bit of a national media circus. Philadelphia is also substantially improved and should live up to the hype that they failed to live up to last season.

BUCCANEERS TO FINISH LAST IN NFC SOUTH (5-1)

Last season, the Bucs sat at 4-7 heading into December. Then, they won five of six games to earn the NFC South division title and won a Wild Card Round playoff game against a DOA Eagles team before bowing out in Detroit.

Tampa had a great deal of fortune last year with injuries and turnovers, both of which should regress to the mean this season.

Baker Mayfield was on his fourth team in two years to start last season but finally found a home in Tampa as he posted career highs in total completions, completion percentage, passing yards, and touchdown passes. He was rewarded with a three-year contract extension. However, he now has to do it without Dave Canales as his offensive coordinator has now moved on to be Carolina's head coach.

While Mayfield still has offensive weapons with Mike Evans and Chris Godwin, he is also behind a young offensive line, and has a new offensive coordinator.

Atlanta has now emerged as the clear favorite in the South, Carolina should be improved, and New Orleans still has arguably the best defense in the division. Meanwhile, Tampa does have to play a first place schedule including games at Detroit, vs. Baltimore, at Kansas City, vs. San Francisco, and at Dallas.

It does not take much to go worst to first or first to worst in this division.

PAULY HOWARD

PATRIOTS ALT UNDER 5.5 WINS (-190)

This is the worst team in the league by a wide margin. During Bet Bash, Under 3.5 at +300 odds was hit heavy by many in attendance, and I agree with it. You can't ask this team to get to six wins with horrible skill position players and a rookie quarterback that isn't ready. The Patriots just traded Judon, and the team's schedule is brutal. Also, AFC East quarterbacks are elite and the Pats face Burrow, Purdy, Stroud, Williams, Lawrence, Richards, Herbert and Murray. I love this Under.

MITCH MOSS

WEEK 3 - LIONS VS. CARDINALS OVER 50

I'm high on the Lions this year. I bet them to win the NFC at +600 and the Super Bowl at 12-1 earlier in the summer. Their offense is loaded across the board. While the defense should be improved this year — especially the secondary — it could take some time before we see it. Arizona had one of the best running games in football last year once Kyler Murray returned. Trey McBride closed the season as one of the best tight ends in the league, and Marvin Harrison Jr. should be an electric and prolific weapon as a rookie. So, the Cardinals offense is solid. On the other hand, Arizona's defense is putrid on paper. All three units rank at, or near, the bottom of the league per various people who do such rankings. Also, 51 is a key number with totals, and I expect the game to close higher than what is currently available at DK. Both teams could be in the 30s.

COMMANDERS OVER 6.5 WINS (-120)

I'm a believer in rookie QB Jayden Daniels. I bet him to win OROY (+800). He'll enter the league playing under a revamped coaching staff in Washington D.C. People still mock Dan Quinn after his Atlanta Falcons blew a 28-3 lead in the Super Bowl to the Patriots, but his overall resume spanning a decade is no laughing matter. From being the defensive coordinator with the "Legion of Boom" in Seattle, to running a Dallas defense that produced 26 turnovers in 2023, 33 in 2022 (1st in the league), and 34 in 2021 (also 1st in the league), Quinn will take the reins of a team that had the worst turnover differential in the NFL last year. Going back to 2011, 14 teams led the league in turnover margin or were tied for the league lead. Eleven improved in that category the following year. The Commanders play the Giants twice, Arizona, Cleveland, Carolina, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Tennessee, New Orleans, among others. Getting to seven wins is worth a bet to me.

JETS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (30/1) & TO WIN AFC (15/1)

Both numbers are available at the Westgate as of this post. I wasn't expecting to add any conference or Super Bowl futures this late in the season, but both of these numbers were too good to pass up. I don't have super high expectations for Aaron Rodgers, but this is a playoff team if he stays healthy and plays average-to-above-average football. The offensive line has a chance to be much improved, and I love their weapons. The defense is loaded at every single level. That unit will carry the team to wins if/when the offense is struggling. It'll travel in January, and throw the fear of god into their opponents.

STORMY BUONANTONY

BRONCOS ALTERNATE OVER 6.5 WINS (+160)

There has been a lot of love for Bo Nix in the Offensive Rookie of the Year market, shifting from 18/1 in our initial NFL betting guide to 11/1 for the refresh. That said, none of that love has translated to much of an adjustment on the Broncos season win total Over 5.5. While I agree this roster doesn't exactly scream "world beater" I think they can and should be able to win 6-7 games and the plus-money option on the alternate Over 6.5 wins is calling my name. Denver got off to a 1-5 start to last season, got embarrassed defensively against Miami 70-20, Russ struggled to cook Top Ramen and the Broncos still found a way to claw out eight wins in Sean Payton's first season. As my colleague Michael Lombardi pointed out during our show recently, Denver was 0-6 last season when they turned the ball over 2+ times, but were 8-3 in games they had one or no turnovers. That's a big part of the Broncos' story. So with Payton getting his guy in Nix, who was the most efficient QB in college football history last season (also had 51 total TDs and three INTs), the offense should operate at a higher clip. Yes I know Denver plays in a division with the 2X defending Super Bowl champion in it and faces the AFC North this season, BUT there's a lot of winnable games on that schedule as well.



LOWEST SCORING TEAM: PATRIOTS +320 & GIANTS 10/1

I can see the Patriots & Giants in a competition this season for the #1 overall pick in next year's draft. And while the prices are the same in the "fewest wins" market as they are for "lowest scoring team," I'm taking wins/losses out of the equation and directly fading these offenses. Last year both of these teams were bottom three in the NFL for points, points per game, offensive EPA and yards per play, with the Pats tying the Panthers as the league's worst offensive unit. Let's start there in NE where things could get worse before they get better, even with a new OC and QB. Jacoby Brissett was so bad this training camp & preseason that head coach Jerod Mayo started openly saying rookie Drake Maye had potential to win the starting job despite comments all offseason about the importance of not rushing his development plan. That's telling. They're also largely devoid of talent at the skill positions and have been experimenting with several OL combinations throughout camp. It doesn't make matters better for the Pats, they'll also be facing one of the league's most difficult schedules top to bottom. While New England is a favorite in this market for a reason, I also like the potential value on the NYG at 10/1. If one of these bets wins, you're taking home a profit overall. As I stated in the last version of the guide, I have zero faith in Daniel Jones. The Giants literally were more productive scoring with Tyrod Taylor and Tommy DeVito than Jones prior to his injury last year and not even stud rookie WR Malik Nabers will turn that pumpkin into a carriage. After 10 years of trying to improve the offensive line, there's nothing firm that tells me this is the year the attempted improvements will take hold. Oh, and their top scoring threat, Saquon Barkley, is now playing for a division rival.

KELLEY MIDLIN' BYDLON

SEAHAWKS +200 TO MAKE PLAYOFFS

SEAHAWKS +350 TO MAKE PLAYOFFS AS A WILDCARD SEED

I'm buying on upside with the Seahawks this season in the weaker NFC. I expect Mike Macdonald to have a major impact on this team immediately, and in particular on defense. I bet him 20-1 to win Coach of the Year and think it's still a good bet at current numbers around 12-1. Yes, their travel/schedule and offensive line is a concern to me, but I think if the line can play close to league average, this could be an elite offense this season. They were a top 10 offense in early down efficiency a season ago, and a change at head coach could help on third and fourth down. I also love the addition of OC Ryan Grubb who will likely look to have three WRs on the field often like he did at Washington. With DK Metcalf, Tyler Lockett and Jaxon Smith-Njigba posing major threats through the air, it should open some running lanes for Kenneth Walker III as well. I think there is a chance they threaten the 49ers for the division, but it's more likely they end up as a wildcard seed.

PATRIOTS MOST REGULAR SEASON LOSSES +400

PATRIOTS LAST WINLESS TEAM +600

Have you heard anybody else say the Patriots are going to be bad this season? Yeahhhhh, you've heard a lot of people say it, and I think they're all right. This defense might still be pretty good, even with the loss of Matthew Judon to ATL, but man it is hard to find much to get excited about at all on the offensive side of the ball. Worst record, last winless and Under win total are all good bets on the Pats this season.

ANTHONY RICHARDSON MVP 40-1

Here's a fun long shot bet for the season and the only bet I'm interested in making with the Colts. I saw enough out of Richardson in his brief

playing time last season, to believe he has a VERY high ceiling. And if he plays to that level this season, the Colts could easily find themselves in the AFC playoff picture. But if he doesn't, I don't trust the rest of this team to be good enough, consistently, for me to buy in on a division price, or Over their win total. I'll aim high because if we are talking about an 11+ win Colts team with a healthy Richardson, it's hard for me to imagine him not being a part of the MVP conversation.

GILL ALEXANDER

STEELERS ALT SEASON WIN TOTAL UNDER 8 WINS +110

STEELERS ALT SEASON WIN TOTAL UNDER 7.5 WINS +155

Hold on a sec, I'm being told that Mike Tomlin has never had a losing season as a head coach in the NFL. Well that seems like something that someone should really publicize. Nonetheless, this is the year that streak ends!

How many reasons can I give you to support this position?

The Schedule

The Steelers close the season with a gauntlet of eight games: vBAL, @CLE, @CIN, vCLE, @PHI, @BAL, vKC, vCIN. I'm not sure that you can come up with a more difficult flurry of games if you were given a clean palate and the task to come up with one. That near half-season stretch doesn't include earlier games: @ATL, @IND, vDAL, and vNYJ. Good luck.

2023 record in games decided by seven or fewer points: 9-2

Pittsburgh's 10-7 record last year was a mirage to begin with. Even if you believe that 9-2 SU in one-score games is the product of some Tomlin magic, you have to concede it's much more the product of simply being on the right side of season-long variance. Okay, you don't have to concede this. I'm just telling you that you're smarter if you do. The performance in this subset is unsustainable and likely to regress to mean in 2024.

Opponents' QBs

Last year the Steelers faced Dorian Thompson-Robinson, Will Levis, Gardner Minshew, Bailey Zappe, and Tyler Huntley, not to mention Jake Browning twice (instead of Joe Burrow). They went 4-3 in those games. Seven games against backups. SEVEN. That's not happening again.

Your QBs

The Steelers enter the season under center with some combination of the corpse of Russell Wilson and Justin Fields, who when last seen in preseason was busy not seeing a wide open receiver downfield for a sure TD. In other words, vintage Fields. This situation is what I like to call suboptimal.

I could go on with things like unsustainable red zone performance on defense last year, the hallmark of my Alt Season Win Total Under bet that cashed on the Giants, written up in this space last year, but I don't want to look any more stupid on the off chance that Tomlin has a VSin subscription, reads this, gets that leader amongst men expression on his face that can't be quantified and rallies the troops to extend his insane streak.

Seriously though, that's not gonna happen. Because 17 years in a row without a losing season is one thing, but 18 in a row is just ridiculous.





DUSTIN SWEDELSON

LAST WINLESS TEAM: PATRIOTS (+475)

Let's not overthink this. This team actually got worse coming off a four-win 2023 campaign. They're the underdogs in every game in 2024. The spread isn't less than a field goal until Week 17. Jacoby Brissett hasn't won a road game since Week 1 of 2022 and New England starts with three of their first four at the Bengals, at the Jets and at the 49ers. Week 2 hosting Seattle could throw a wrinkle into this plan, but if the Seahawks take care of business, and they should, the next spot where they could potentially win is Week 9 at Tennessee. By then they should already be the last winless team. Last season's last winless team, Carolina, picked up their first victory in Week 8.

JOSH ALLEN MOST INTERCEPTIONS (10/1)

There is more pressure on Josh Allen's arm to make plays than ever before. The Bills have removed his go-to reliable weapons and have left him with Curtis Samuel, Khalil Shakir and rookie Keon Coleman at wide receiver. That's a significant downgrade on the outside for a QB who still turned the ball over through the air regularly even when he had Stefon Diggs and Gabe Davis. Allen has the most interceptions in the NFL over the last five seasons (66). He finished second in INTs the last two years (three-way tie in 2022), averaging 16 INTs per season over the last three combined. Because he will be asked to do even more this year, more turnovers feels inevitable.

JETS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (20/1)

This feels like one of those bets where we will know very quickly if it has a chance or not. No bet comes without risk, and I understand those who see all of the warts that make up the 2024 New York Jets and want to back away, but 20/1 doesn't match the potential of this roster. They have longer odds than several teams that have just as many issues as they do. Give me the upside that Aaron Rodgers can be 75% of what he used to be, that the additions and depth on the offensive line keep him healthy and that defense continues to perform as an elite unit.

JAGUARS WIN AFC SOUTH (+300)

The overreaction on the Jaguars has gone too far. Yes, they absolutely crumbled down the stretch last year, losing five of their last six, but they still almost won the AFC South in Week 18 and then addressed a lot of needs this offseason. Center Mitch Morse and DT Arik Armstead bring leadership, track records of winning and improve their line of scrimmage play. Brian Thomas Jr. and Gabe Davis should provide big-play potential through the air. And they improved their secondary by adding Darnell Savage and Ronald Darby. I like backing a team that has done this before, has something to prove and wants to wash away the taste of last year from their mouths at a big number.

STEVE MAKINEN

COLTS UNDER 8.5 WINS

There will be a few teams across the league this year in which a second year quarterback and coach team up to try and build upon successful rookie campaigns. Often this brings about the end of the "honeymoon", as things get a bit more real as opponents know more about the coaching style and system. The team that I figure to be most negatively affected in that situation this year is Indianapolis, who comes back with HC Shane Steichen and QB Anthony Richardson to build upon what was a noteworthy 9-8 season. The Colts were one of my winning wagers last year, as they went Over a rather low season win total. I liked what Steichen brought to the table and figured that QB Gardner Minshew would see the bulk of the action in Richardson's rookie year. That of course happened, but only because the rookie suffered a season-ending injury in the season's fifth game. They would go on to lose their next three to drop to 3-5 and at the time I was just about ready to tear up by wager ticket. However, Minshew steadied the ship and opened up the passing game, and the defense improved in the season's second half. The relief QB is now gone, and Steichen faces the pressure that all rookie coaches do in their second seasons. Indy also won six of its nine games by eight points or fewer and 35 of the L47 teams that did so dropped, by an average of 3.1 wins per season. I don't see this as a playoff team this season, as they are at best the #3 team in the AFC South, and also with Richardson likely to struggle after his injury and not gaining much experience last year. Let's go Under with the Colts as they struggle to a 7-10 type of season.



PATRIOTS OVER 4.5 WINS

One of the strangest changeover systems I have come across in studying NFL teams from one season to the next reads as follows: Teams that won five or less games, NONE by double-digit margins, have shown significant improvement in the follow-up campaign. In fact, since 1993, there have been 52 such teams, and 50 of them IMPROVED the next season, by an average of 3.9 wins per season, including one by as many as 10 games. Why is it strange? Well, it basically says that the team was so bad that it basically can only go up from here. New England is one of the teams affected by this angle in '24, as is the team I'm next to unveil, Washington. For the Patriots, the room for quick improvement is immense. They lost eight games by single-possession score margins while only scoring 13.9 PPG. The offense can best be described as dysfunctional with QB Mac Jones under center. With rookie QB Drake Maye still battling Jacoby Brissett for the starting spot, it is an upgrade regardless of who wins. The other thing that figures to give this franchise an immediate boost is the changing of head coaches. While it may seem crazy to think that letting go of the league's most successful coach ever in Bill Belichick, the changeover to rookie HC Jerod Mayo should give this team a breath of fresh air after things had clearly gone sour following the departure of QB Tom Brady a few years ago. If that weren't enough, this team had terrible turnover luck last season. With a pretty solid defense ready to go and an offense that couldn't be nearly as bad, wipe the slate completely clean for New England in 2024.

NFL WEEK 1 LAS VEGAS (+3.5) VS. LA CHARGERS

Admittedly, I am in the boat of believing that the Chargers will be a better team with HC Jim Harbaugh in '24, so much to the point that I made their season win total a best bet in our initial betting guide. However, I have two separate systems that make them a play against in Week 1 versus the Raiders. First, divisional road underdogs of 6.5 points or less are on a 17-13 SU & 21-8-1 ATS (72.4%) run since '13. Second, Week 1 favorites playing in a revenge spot from a loss the prior season are just 17-24 SU & 15-26 ATS (36.6%) over the last 12 seasons. The last time these teams met back in December, the Raiders hung 63 points on the Chargers. Ironically, it was in a second half of a season in which the LA defense was otherwise quite strong. The magnitude of that loss had to have a lot to do with the Chargers moving on from Brandon Staley and bringing in Harbaugh. Fans of the franchise are excited about the change, but they will barely recognize a number of players who have been brought in to replace aging stars. The schemes will also be very different as Harbaugh figures to rely more on a run-based attack rather than putting everything on QB Justin Herbert. The Raiders played some pretty inspired football down the stretch for interim HC Antonio Pierce and as such he was named the permanent choice to lead this team into '24. He turns to QB Gardner Minshew to lead the offense, after Minshew, who has had an up-and-down (mostly up) career, nearly led the Colts to the playoffs a year ago. This is a tough spot for a favorite to be in. While it can be argued that revenge is a good motivator, there is enhanced pressure of being placed as a favorite over a team that you lost to last time out. Let's go with the Raiders in a down-to-the-wire contest.

MATT BROWN

KEON COLEMAN OVER 625.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-112)

As of this writing, Keon Coleman ran a route on 100% of the first-team dropbacks during the first two preseason games. Does Coleman have

some flaws? Sure. But he's going to be on the field a ton with Josh Allen, on a team without a true #1 wideout with the departure of Stefon Diggs. Sixty-three different players surpassed this yardage total in 2023, with several players getting there while only having 75-80 targets. Most projection systems have him well clear of the 625 number with conservative target projections close to 100. Jaxon Smith-Njigba cleared the 625 yardage mark last season as a rookie, despite being the clear No. 3 option in the passing game. Coleman might be the #2 to Dalton Kincaid, but there will be plenty of targets and yards to go around for Allen, who has thrown for at least 4,200 yards in each of the last four seasons.

PATRIOTS LAST WINLESS TEAM (+500)

PATRIOTS WORST REGULAR SEASON RECORD (+350)

My affinity for fading the 2024 Patriots has no bounds. This is the least talented team in the NFL by a decent margin. They've got a new head coach. They will eventually be breaking in a rookie quarterback. The offensive tackles graded out 55th and 79th (out of 81 qualifiers) by PFF last season. The defensive line is a mess. They lack a true #1 wideout. The other three teams in the division are all betting favorites to make the playoffs. The list goes on and on.

Then there's the schedule. They're currently underdogs in all 17 games, with only one game listed as closer than a 3-point spread. There's only one winnable game in the first eight (Week 2 at home against the Seahawks), and if they can't steal that one, they're staring down the barrel of 0-8 before heading to the next winnable game on their schedule. Week 9 on the road against the Titans could be a win, but what if Will Levis is good? Sure, there are second half games against the Bears, Colts, Cardinals, and Chargers, but player for player, all of those squads are better. I don't think we're talking 0-17 or anything as the defense does possess some talent and will keep some games close enough to squeak out. But anything exceeding four wins seems highly unlikely without some wackiness occurring.

MIKE SOMICH

KEON COLEMAN OVER 4.5 TDS /

DALTON KINCAID OVER 750.5 RECEIVING YARDS

I threw both of these together because the handicap is very similar. Where there is chaos there is opportunity and, oh boy, is there ever chaos in the Buffalo pass catching room. With Diggs and Davis leaving, 241 targets, 15 touchdowns and over 1,800 of the 4,300 passing yards walked. The question is who fills the void.

From a touchdown perspective, I love Keon Coleman, he's a big body wide receiver with a massive catch radius. He plays well off script and fits Josh Allen's redzone style to a tee. He should get plenty of looks near paydirt and for the Bills to be the Bills, he needs to cash in.

Yardage wise, Kincaid jumps out. Last year, in 91 targets, he recorded 675 yards. He comes into the season as the most reliable and trusted target for Allen. If he lands an additional 30 of the 241 targets that need to be spread out, he should eclipse the 900-yard mark.

CHARGERS UNDER 8.5 WINS

Let's buck the trend on this one. Yes, Harbaugh is a massive coaching upgrade. Yes, the schedule is not hard. I totally understand the case for the Over, but let's just look at this roster.

It's bad. Like bottom five NFL bad outside of the QB position.

The backfield is a recycled group of injured Ravens, the pass catching group features *checks notes* nobody and the defense is a year older with their star pass rusher already banged up. Add that to the fact that the Broncos and Raiders are better than last year and this is an easy button to click while going against the grain.

EXACT SUPER BOWL RESULT: CHIEFS BEAT LIONS, 40-1

Let's have a little fun with a sprinkle on a longshot result.

The Chiefs are better than last year. Let that sink in. By year end, they will be a top five offense once again with better tackle play and a wide receiving core that compliments each other. They also could run the last 11 games on their schedule and end up with the top seed in the AFC.

In the NFC, I've got the Lions power rated as the second best team, but I like them more than the 49ers to make the Super Bowl. Everyone is back on the offensive side of the ball and it is not illogical to expect year-two leaps from Gibbs and LaPorta as well as St. Brown to continue to improve. Defensively, they addressed the secondary that should improve as the season runs its course.

With both live for the one seed in their conferences, let's swing away at 40-1!

BEN WILSON

WEEK 2: SEAHAWKS -2.5 AT PATRIOTS

Part of the reason why I advocated for Mike Macdonald as a COY bet in the original NFL guide was because of the Charmin soft schedule Seattle gets out of the gate. It's always risky to make assumptions in the NFL, but I'd be stunned if Seattle didn't take care of business Week 1 at home against Denver and rookie QB Bo Nix in his debut. Cincinnati is likely to be the top survivor selection in Week 1 as the largest favorite on the board at home against New England. Assuming both those results hold, the Week 2 line in Foxborough has a great chance of crossing through the key number of 3 and rising to 3.5 or 4. It's an outstanding matchup in general for Seattle with how Macdonald frequently used simulated pressures and disguises to wreak havoc on young, inexperienced opposing offenses in his time with Baltimore. Young and inexperienced is a kind way to describe the anemic New England offense heading into 2024, and it's why putting Seattle in pocket before Week 1 gets underway is a smart way to start your Week 2 portfolio.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

WEEK 1 - BENGALS/PATRIOTS UNDER 43

Between the Patriots being almost last in the NFL in points per game and points per play last year and the fact they didn't really improve the offense this offseason, I'm not sure they're going to really improve on last year's average of 36.8 combined points per game. Also in consideration here is the Ja'Marr Chase contract situation for the Bengals, because as Chad Ochocinco indicated, "Ja'Marr won't touch the field" until his contract is resolved. Even if Chase is happy and in the lineup, my T Shoe Index only projects 39.5 points in this game, so I love getting above key numbers of 41 and 42 here.

JOE CERAULO

SEAHAWKS OVER 7.5 WINS (-140) & TO MAKE THE PLAYOFFS (+185)

The Seahawks exceeded expectations last year, going Over their total of 8.5, despite missing the playoffs. I see this offense looking more like the 2022 playoff team, than last year's third-place squad. We should expect a HUGE jump in performance from second-year wideout Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and the offensive line should improve as well. If they get just average play from the O-Line, and first-year head coach Mike Macdonald works his magic on a defense that ranked 30th last year, Seattle should absolutely be a wild card team in a wide-open, and frankly mediocre, NFC pool. The key for them is capitalizing on the early part of the schedule. A 4-1 record is well within reach in their first five games, and if they do that, we'll be in good shape for BOTH of these plays.

VIKINGS UNDER 6.5 WINS (+120) & ALT UNDER 5.5 WINS (+210)

Could this schedule be more brutal for Minnesota? From the looks of things, a 2-7 start may be their BEST-case scenario, and if they don't get by the Giants in Week 1, they could very well be winless until November! The worst part is that Sam Darnold has arguably his best situation to be successful that he's ever had at the pro ranks, but I don't trust his offensive line or defense to keep this team in games. With that schedule, not only do I LOVE the Under 6.5, but I'm also happy to play the alternate Under 5.5 wins at better than 2-1 odds.

STEELERS OVER 8.5 WINS (+125)

The Steelers won 19 games in the past two seasons with Kenny Pickett as QB1! If that isn't proof of "Mike Tomlin Magic," I don't know what is. Whether Tomlin lets Russ cook, or Justin Fields gets the job I feel he deserves, he'll have an upgrade at the quarterback position AND at OC with Arthur Smith's creative offense guaranteed to change the pace of what we've seen in Pittsburgh during Matt Canada's tenure. Yes, many projections give Pittsburgh the league's toughest schedule this year, but that doesn't worry me. They're going to surprise people with more divisional wins than expected (29-12-1 in their division since 2017), and outside of their own division, they actually draw some fairly favorable matchups with the likes of the Broncos, Chargers, Giants, Commanders and Raiders, among others (I don't rule out the Falcons and Cowboys as beatable foes). I'm not making the mistake of betting on Tomlin to have a losing record...not in this lifetime!



TEXANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+105)

If you think C.J. Stroud and company are going to regress after the additions of Stefan Diggs, Joe Mixon, Danielle Hunter and others, you must not think much of DeMeco Ryans! It only took one year but Stroud and Ryans have asserted themselves among the best quarterback / head coach duos that exist in the league today. In addition to a seemingly endless array of weapons on offense, this team will also boast one of the league's most feared pass rushes. Yes, the first-place schedule is much tougher than last year's last-place schedule, but that comes with the territory of being one of the best teams in the league, and they'll respond to the increase in competition just fine.

LIONS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+135)

It's Dan Campbell's world, and we're all just living in it. With all due respect to what the Packers did in the second half of last season, and on Wild Card Weekend, they're still not up to Detroit's level in terms of talent (or toughness). The Lions offense can get so creative with their weapons, they have a top-tier offensive line, they retained one of the best offensive minds in the league in OC Ben Johnson, their defense appears to be vastly improved, AND they have an incredibly favorable schedule, with 14 of 17 games being played indoors this year. The stars appear to be aligning for Detroit after they seemed to be 30 minutes away from an NFC championship the last time we saw this team.

JARED GOFF TO WIN MVP 27-1 (NOW 25-1)

Given how high I am on the Lions, it makes sense I view Goff as a legitimate contender for the MVP award this year, no? The two key factors here for Goff are the return of Ben Johnson and 14 of those 17 games coming indoors, with the only potential for serious weather appearing to be Week 16 in Chicago. After finishing top-four in yards, yards per game (among QBs who played at least half their team's games) and touchdowns a year ago, the only thing left for Goff to do would be get the one seed. Nine of the past 11 MVPs played on the top seed in their conference, so if Detroit overtakes San Francisco for that top spot, that would help Goff's case immensely.

SUPER BOWL LIX: RAVENS OVER LIONS (75-1)

I know...I'm crazy for not having the Chiefs in here. It's hard to imagine the Super Bowl without a certain Patrick Mahomes in it, but I'm going to take a chance, be bold, and say Lamar Jackson finally gets to hoist the Lombardi Trophy this year. Make no mistake though, if Mahomes, Steve Spagnuolo and company do make it to the big game, my money will be on them just like it's been in ALL FOUR of their appearances. Back to Baltimore though, since I've already stated all the things I love about Detroit this season. Jackson's coming off his SECOND MVP award, but after losing the conference championship at home last season, he may be entering the 2024 campaign with a bigger chip on his shoulder than ever before. With Derrick Henry beside him in the backfield, there'll be less pressure on Jackson to use his legs, and I love the emergence of Isaiah Likely in this offense as one of Jackson's favorite targets, behind Mark Andrews and Zay Flowers. The offensive line will be much better than people expect, and first-year coordinator Zach Orr's defense will pick up where they left off a year ago. Orr's defense will be VERY similar to the top-ranked scoring unit that Mike Macdonald led, and the Ravens, once again, will be the most complete team in football this year, except this time, they'll get the job done.

WILL HILL

STEELERS WORST RECORD +3100

When you have two quarterbacks, you have no quarterback and the Steelers certainly have two quarterbacks. Justin Fields and Russell Wilson were available for virtually nothing for a reason this offseason. Anyone who cites Tomlin's track record of winning records is dismissing the luck factor. Last year Pitt went 5-1 in the division and swept the Bengals and Ravens. But they didn't face Joe Burrow and instead they got to face Jake Browning twice, along with Tyler Huntley and Dorian Thompson-Robinson. They start their season at Atlanta and at Denver, against a Broncos team that looks perhaps better than expected, in a place that's tough to win in September. If they don't bank wins early, the gauntlet that is their second half schedule will have them picking in the top five, with an outside shot at being the worst team. Tomlin has certainly overachieved with middling talent the past few years, but this is still a coach that has lost home playoff games to Blake Bortles and Baker Mayfield, and also lost a playoff game to Tim Tebow. Tomlin gets a whole lot of credit for a coach who hasn't won a playoff game since 2016. This is the year that the luck runs out.





JETS +1500 LAST UNDEFEATED TEAM

The Jets start out with a tough game in San Francisco, but the Super Bowl hangover is one trend that has been consistent through the years. If the Jets can win (or tie) that game, the path is certainly there. After the 49ers, the Jets have games against the Titans, Patriots, Broncos and Vikings. They then host the Bills before playing the Steelers and Patriots again. This team won seven games with quarterbacks who may never play again in the NFL. The Rodgers decline is overstated as he was playing with a fractured thumb in 2022. The talent will match the hype this year, so 15-1 is a good number considering the schedule after Week 1.

JARED SMITH

CHARGERS UNDER 8.5 WINS (+135)

Harbaugh took over as GM, along with former Ravens front office guru Joe Horitz, and mismanaged a dire cap situation. Veteran presences on offense like WR Keenan Allen, WR Mike Williams, RB Austin Ekeler, and TE Gerald Everett are all gone, leaving the Chargers with the worst skill position group in the NFL. On defense Khalil Mack returns along with his 17 sacks from last season, but six were in one game against Aidan O'Connell who was making his NFL debut, and four others came against Zach Wilson and Bailey Zappe. At 33 years old, I question how productive Mack can be. Joey Bosa also returns on a restructured deal. When healthy he is elite, but he has only played 14 combined games in the last two seasons. These moves send a clear signal that Harbaugh will implement a culture built around running the football and playing defense, which might work in the Big Ten but not in the modern NFL. Justin Herbert has the physical tools to be an elite passer in this league but he is now wearing Harbaugh handcuffs, not to mention new OC Greg Roman made the Ravens offense look pedestrian with Lamar Jackson. Since 2000 this is the second highest preseason win total for a team following a season of five or less wins. There have been 15 other teams with a win total of 8+ after five or less wins the prior year, and 11 of the 15 teams stayed Under their season total the following season. Sell the Chargers.

WEEK 1 - RAIDERS/CHARGERS UNDER 42.5

This will be as much of a home game for the Raiders as it will be for the Chargers, so the crowd won't be much of a factor for either side. I'm very down on the Chargers skill position group this year and I expect Jim Harbaugh to lean on the running game, especially early in the season. They might not have much choice because they lost virtually all of their offensive production from last year. This is a subpar skill position group and Justin Herbert missed most of preseason with a foot injury. I would be surprised if the Chargers offense was in sync from the start. Meanwhile the Raiders offense has identity problems as well with the very average Gardner Minshew getting the nod at QB1 after getting pushed by Aidan O'Connell in camp. The identity in Vegas this year will be built around culture and defense under Antonio Pierce. They might have the best defensive line in the NFL adding Christian Wilkins to pair with Maxx Crosby. Divisional Unders in Week 1 are 11-3 over the last two seasons. Expect this to be a cagey affair.

TIM MURRAY

EAGLES TO WIN NFC EAST + OREGON TO MAKE CFP (+140)

The Eagles odds to win the NFC East have been on the move all throughout the offseason. After collapsing following a 10-1 start to last season (finished 11-6 and lost to Tampa Bay, 32-9, in the playoffs), Philadelphia made much needed upgrades to the offense, coaching staff, and secondary. The Eagles acquired RB Saquon Barkley via free agency and traded for WR Jahan Dotson. Dotson, a 2022 first round pick, was clearly not in the plans for the new coaching staff in Washington. Philadelphia sent a third-round pick and a pair of seventh-round picks to the Commanders in exchange for him. Dotson will fit in as the third receiver for the Eagles behind A.J. Brown and DeVonta Smith. Additionally, the Eagles added WR Parris Campbell in free agency and former Florida State WR Johnny Wilson in the NFL Draft. The Eagles hired Kellen Moore as its offensive coordinator and Vic Fangio as defensive coordinator. Lastly, Philadelphia spent its first two picks in the draft on secondary help. Former Toledo DB Quinyon Mitchell and former Iowa DB Cooper DeJean should make an immediate impact for the Eagles.

From a schedule standpoint, defending NFC East champion Dallas will face a first-place schedule while Philadelphia will play a second-place schedule. Philadelphia's unique opponents are Green Bay, LA Rams, and Jacksonville while Dallas will play Detroit, San Francisco, and Houston. Based on preseason win totals, the Eagles face the ninth easiest schedule while Dallas faces the 22nd easiest.

As mentioned prior, the price on Philadelphia to win the NFC East has been on the move all throughout the offseason and currently sits at -125 at DraftKings Sportsbook. I got a little creative with this bet and added Oregon to make the College Football Playoff (-300) to make it a cross sport parlay. The Ducks are loaded headed into the 2024 season and I fully expect them to make a run in the College Football Playoff. Oregon should be a favorite in every game this year (Oregon is currently -1 vs. Ohio State on Oct 12).



JALEN HURTS TO WIN NFL MVP (14-1)

In 2022, Jalen Hurts finished second in MVP voting to Patrick Mahomes. The Eagles went 14-1 in Hurts' 15 starts two seasons ago. He threw 22 touchdowns with just six interceptions and rushed for 760 yards and 13 scores. Last year, the Eagles dropped six of their final seven games and Hurts threw 15 interceptions, third-most in the NFL. Philadelphia upgraded its offensive coordinator replacing Brian Johnson with Kellen Moore. Moore guided the Cowboys to the top offense in 2019 & 2021 (total yards). Additionally, the Eagles upgraded the running back room with Saquon Barkley and added depth at wide receiver trading for Jahan Dotson during training camp. Not to mention, the trio of WR AJ Brown, WR DeVonta Smith, and TE Dallas Goedert are back for another year. Philadelphia will obviously miss future Hall of Fame C Jason Kelce but Cam Jurgens will slide over to center with hopefully a minimal drop off. Lastly, as stated above, the Eagles schedule is quite manageable this year. With the Eagles the favorite to win the NFC East and upgrades on the offensive side of the ball, Hurts is in line to be back in the MVP conversation in 2024.

GREG PETERSON

FEWEST WINS: GIANTS 10/1

The Giants have a quarterback in Daniel Jones that must now shoulder the workload in leading the offense with running back Saquon Barkley gone despite four straight seasons of passing for 15 touchdowns or fewer.

The NFC East has two clear favorites in the Dallas Cowboys and Philadelphia Eagles that should sweep their series against the Giants, and the Washington Commanders, with Jayden Daniels at quarterback, have the talent to do so as well. Additionally, their cross-division games are against the AFC North and NFC South. In that batch of teams, only the Carolina Panthers present a game that they have a good chance to win, and that will be a game played in Germany, making for all sorts of challenges.

When the team made their surprise playoff run in 2022, their lone victory that came by more than 10 points was against the Jeff Saturday-coached Indianapolis Colts and in 2023, the team was exposed as having had good fortune in one-score games the season before. While the Brian Burns signing helps the defense, it wouldn't be enough to allow this team to hold in games with an offense that might be one of the least effective in the league.

ZACHARY COHEN

JARED GOFF TO LEAD NFL IN PASSING YARDS (11-1)

A lot of people are backing Goff to be the MVP of the regular season, but I'm going to simplify it a little and take him to lead the league in passing yards. Last year, only Tua Tagovailoa finished with more passing yards than Goff's 4,575 yards. However, Tagovailoa really did a lot of his damage in blowouts over bad teams. Goff was a little more consistent in piling up his yardage.

The reality is that my peers are onto something in backing Goff, who is set to play a dome-heavy schedule in 2024. He's a completely different quarterback when taken out of the elements. However, I'd rather play less favorable odds for him to just make a mark in a specific stats category, as MVP is still a narrative-driven award. I'm not sure people will get on board with him winning something that prestigious, even if he puts up MVP-

caliber numbers. He doesn't have the greatest reputation in the world, and his coaches get most of the credit for Detroit's team success.

ADAM BURKE

WILL LEVIS OVER 3,400.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

Levis started nine games during his rookie season and got to 1,808 yards, in a season where DeAndre Hopkins lapped the field on the Titans roster in receiving yardage. This year, D-Hop doesn't have to do it all on his own, as Tennessee brought in Calvin Ridley and Tyler Boyd. Not only that, but Levis was sacked 28 times in those nine starts. This season, he has the benefit of JC Latham at left tackle and veteran Lloyd Cushenberry III at center. Oh, yeah, and one of the best offensive line coaches to ever do it in Bill Callahan. And Bill's son, Brian, is the head coach, a guy who has worked with Joe Burrow, Matthew Stafford, and Peyton Manning, among others. This is the year Levis takes a huge leap.

DAVE TULEY

TEXANS 16-1 TO WIN SUPER BOWL

I first gave out this play at 22-1 on VSiN.com in my annual "too-soon" Super Bowl futures column after the last Super Bowl in February. I'd like to believe it's sharp action that has driven it down to the current price of 16-1 at Circa, and still playable in my opinion. When I wrote the piece, I pointed out that this would be an amazing story, as the Texans were basically one year removed from blowing the chance at the No. 1 overall draft pick. That cost coach Lovie Smith his job (well, that was never given as the official reason, but it didn't help, right?). The Houston organization recovered quickly by hiring DeMeco Ryans and then taking CJ Stroud with the No. 2 pick, and all he did was end up as Offensive Rookie of the Year.

For most of the season, it looked like the Jaguars would run away with the AFC South, but the Texans stole the division and routed the Browns 45-15 in the wild-card round (after not getting the respect they deserved as 2-point underdogs despite being at home) before being ousted by the Ravens in the divisional playoffs. I know several people who took a flier on the Texans this past season. They were live longshots (in my humble opinion) and certainly have the opportunity to take another step forward if Ryans can continue to improve the defense to go with the already high-powered offense. Tuley noted: The Texans are now +810 to win the AFC at Circa after being 12-1 in February.

COWBOYS 20-1 TO WIN SUPER BOWL

It's very trendy to knock the Cowboys' championship drought (their last Super Bowl title was in 1996 at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Arizona, when I was single, running around Phoenix and had Cardinals season tickets) and recent postseason woes (they were upset 48-32 as 7-point home favorites in the wild-card round last month). However, the fact remains that they were No. 1 in the NFL in scoring offense (29.9 points per game) and No. 5 in scoring defense (18.5 points per game), and they should be right there in the mix again.

Frankly, I'm surprised they're offered this high since they are such a public team overall (unlike the Texans above, with a much smaller fan base). I could make the argument, and I guess I am, that this is the better betting value just based on the fact the Texans' price is probably a little short just because of how far they've come in such a short time after being the longest odds on the board last season at a consensus 200-1.



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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

NFL CONTEST STRATEGY...

**2024
EDITION**

STRATEGIES

By Adam Burke

Football betting contests are all the rage these days, including big ones like the Circa Million and Circa Survivor, as well as the DraftKings Pro Football Survivor and Pro Football Pick 'Em, and Westgate SuperContest. Copycat contests have also sprung up at other sportsbooks and are also run by individuals using the same or similar rules.

Contest strategies can vary because everybody has a different way of trying to achieve the same goal. For the purposes of this strategy piece, I have split the tips and tricks into two categories - Pick 'Em and Survivor. You may have a different approach that you like, but I'll try to cover the bases on the main ones and shed some light on how to give yourself the best chance at cashing.

PICK 'EM CONTESTS

Think Circa Million, Westgate SuperContest, or Pro Football Pick 'Em here. These are contests in which you have to pick X number of games against the spread based on the rules that are provided and the lines that are available. The vast majority of contests like these are going to post lines on the same day and they will not move. They are referred to as "static" lines.

Here are some contest strategies in this type of pool:

PLAY THE "STALE" LINES

This is a really popular contest strategy. The NFL betting market is the most efficient one there is, so line moves should be taken seriously. If a contest line is -2.5 and the betting market line is -3.5, that creates a really good opportunity to take a favorable position in a contest setting because 3 is such an important number. The same is true of a number like 7, if a line is +7.5 in a contest and moves to +7 or +6.5.

Sometimes you'll get an even more obvious example like when a quarterback gets hurt on Friday or is ruled out. For example, if Trevor Lawrence got sick or hurt late on Thursday or Friday and was ruled out for Week 1, Miami would move from -3.5 to probably -9.5 or -10. Those opportunities will come up throughout the season for sure.

FADE THE CONSENSUS

A lot of people believe that the public is largely flipping coins when it comes to betting. They're going to win roughly 50% of the time and lose roughly 50% of the time. If you can isolate the sides that will be the most popular from a groupthink standpoint in a contest, it could be good to go against those teams.

It can create a two-point swing in a contest where there are a finite number of picks and a set number of chances to earn points. In something like the Circa Million, the maximum number of picks is 90, so these potential two-point swings can be extremely valuable. In larger pools, this could be a more useful strategy because there is more incentive in being creative and different because you can't just follow the masses and win all the same games they do and lose all the same games they do.

In smaller pools, this could potentially be less effective because it's more about racking up as many points as possible and not worrying so much about what others are doing.

PLAY ONLY HALF-POINT LINES

There is a lot of game theory that goes into contest participation. One element of that mindset is to only play games where a push is not possible. A push isn't a loss, but it isn't a win either. With most contest rules, a push is worth a half-point. There is often more equity in taking the chance at a full point, which can be guaranteed by playing games that have a half-point line and cannot tie.

The reason for this is what I mentioned above. In larger pools with a lot of entrants, a half-point isn't going to get you very far because others are also getting a half-point for being on the other side. Also, you'll get jumped by people who are getting full points. Sure, you'll move ahead of people that got zero points on games, but the juice isn't always worth the squeeze.

It is also important to point out that the time of year matters with these contests. If you need to jump over a lot of people later in the year, taking more chances is essential. That might mean picking some bad teams or playing only half-point lines in the spirit of game theory.

SURVIVOR CONTESTS

Survivor contests have really increased in popularity over the last few seasons because the concept is really simple. Just pick a team to win every week, but once you use them, you lose them. Some Survivor pools have wrinkles like picking against the spread or picking against a team only once, but the most prominent version just requires picking a team to win straight up week in and week out.

As simple as the concept itself is, the execution is not. Big favorites can and will lose and we'll see more than a few take out large swaths of the Survivor field during the upcoming season.

With my partner Marc Goldberg of Spooky Express, we made it to the final 15 in Circa Survivor last year with one of our entries and were able to monetize that position as surviving players positioned themselves as well as they could to spread out their interest. That is an entirely different discussion and was a foreign world that we got a crash course in navigating.

For now, let's focus on the start of the season and some tips and tricks to help you make a run.

CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR THE SEASON

Some contestants like to have the entire year planned out because you can only use each team once. That might mean staying away from division games or having to use a road team, so you study the schedule to find the best options on a weekly basis. Contestants will start with, say, Kansas City and find the game where they are going to be the largest favorite. At first glance, that looks like Week 5 at home against the Saints or Week 10 against the Broncos.

The 49ers host New England in Week 4. The Bengals have their biggest favorite role in Week 1 against the Patriots. A lot of people will be picking on the Patriots this season and with good reason.

Mapping out which teams will be available and when is something that a lot of Survivor contestants will do so that they have a plan. This comes from the mindset of needing to go 18-0 (or better if your contest has a Thanksgiving or Christmas wrinkle) to win and will be a route that many choose to take.

JUST GO 1-0

The other primary option is to just try to go 1-0 for 18 straight weeks and take whatever the best pick is that week and not worry about saving a team for later. What difference does it make if the Bills will be -14 against the Patriots in Week 16 if you don't make it that far? Why save a team if you need them right now?

The other advantage to this mindset is that holding off on the Bills until Week 16 is all well and good, but what if Josh Allen gets injured or if the Bills aren't in the playoff picture and are just playing out the season?

The only game that matters is the one coming up that weekend. Somebody could always get hurt or something could happen that makes a team much more attractive than they would have looked at the start of the season.

Also, you have to pick 18 (or more) of the 32 teams to win, so being able to "sneak" a lesser opponent through could create a huge advantage. That's true of both the 18-0 mindset and the 1-0 mindset, but sometimes it's easier to make that call while living in the present. On the other hand, you could get caught on a week where there aren't many big favorites and have to take a weak team because you didn't plan accordingly.

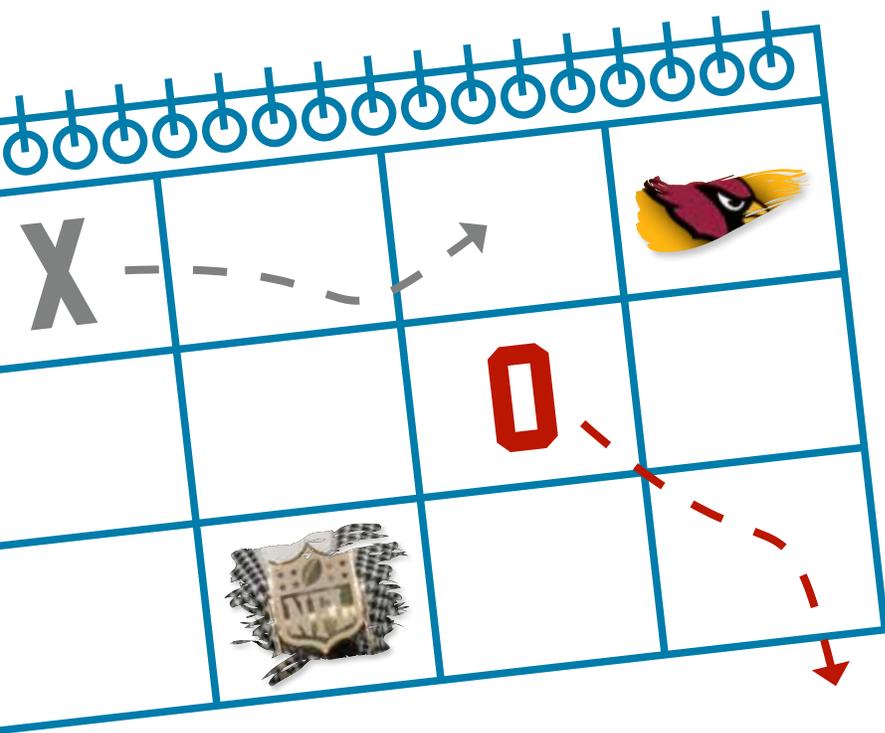
AVOID THE NO. 1 PICK

Upsets do happen. Remember back in 2021 when the Jaguars won 9-6 over the Bills as more than a two-touchdown underdog? How about when the Jets beat the Rams as a 17-point underdog back in 2020? How about the Dolphins in Week 17 over the Patriots getting 16 points back in 2019?

It is rare, but we'll probably get at least one underdog of 14+ points that wins this season (the Titans beat the Dolphins in Week 14 last year). Over the last 872 games with a line of -10.5 or higher, about 14% of those underdogs have won outright, including the Cardinals over the Eagles last season, a game I highlighted in this very column as a potential spot to save Philly!

Some Survivor players will shy away from the most obvious pick in hopes that the team slips up and goes down and a large chunk of the field gets eliminated. Not only could that mean staying alive while others falter, but it could also mean saving that team for a future game.

There is risk involved to say the least, but the reward could be really nice, especially if you like another team nearly as much. There is risk in each and every one of these strategies and maybe taking a hybrid approach is the way to go, but it all depends on the individual, the type of contest, the stakes, and the prize amounts.



NFL CALENDAR INVITES

By Mike Somich

Let's face it, no one loves calendar reminders. Every time one pops up it takes me back to my corporate America days grinding away with a loaded Outlook schedule. However, now that I've flipped to the sports gambling world, they are some of my favorite things to see.

Each year heading into the NFL season, I go through each team's schedule and pick out specific points in time where they have key moments. No team has a "balanced" schedule; there are going to be tough patches and cupcakes. Bad travel spots pop up. Teams will have players return and start to perform to the expected level. All of these things affect the futures, division odds and awards markets.

The problem, though, is that during the week-to-week grind of the college and NFL season with the NHL and NBA kicking off and MLB playoffs winding down, it's easy to miss an opportunity.

Insert calendar invites here!

At this point, I've got over 20 calendar invites just waiting to pop up on Monday or Tuesday mornings throughout the season with player or team-specific bets that I want to check up on. It is my way of being able to put my preseason opinions on in-season plays "on autopilot". With so much going on, I know I won't miss setups that I have identified before the season starts.

Of course not all of the invites will result in a bet, but for one minute of work, I can guarantee I will not miss or forget any of these set ups.

Here are a couple examples of the invites I am looking forward to the most!

ARIZONA CARDINALS

I like the chances for the Cardinals this season. The offense could be special with the addition of Marvin Harrison Jr. and a healthy Kyler Murray, which should help carry a defense that very well could stink. The preseason win total for them is 6.5 and heavily juiced to the Over. The apex moment in their schedule

is Week 6. They open at Buffalo, then host the Rams, Lions and Commanders before road tilts at San Francisco and Green Bay. They will be meaningful underdogs in 5 of those 6 games and 1-5 is the most likely outcome.

That is where my calendar invite pops up. The rest of the schedule includes home games against the Chargers, Bears, and Patriots, with road games against the Vikings and Panthers.

A 1-5 start will lower the market's value on a Cardinals team when really all they did was play to expectations and it could present an opportunity to get a 5.5 in-season win total. Worst case, it's 6.5 without the juice or a simple pass.

MVP MARKET

How about Patrick Mahomes? I have a ticket in on Jared Goff at a big number and I expect the Lions offense to start out hot. Mahomes is the other candidate that I'm interested in and he's got an invite in my calendar.

The Chiefs start out with Baltimore, Cincinnati and Atlanta - three likely playoff teams - before a pair of easier games and then their bye. After the bye is a visit to the 49ers. I've got an invite before and after the game. It's a marquee game so it could shift the market with a Chiefs win thus why I have it before, but a loss may be even better. Mahomes will jump up in price and Kansas City may not lose a game the rest of the way. The toughest two remaining games are at the Bills, a team I have serious concerns about, and the Texans in KC in December. There is a real chance the Chiefs finish 11-0 or 10-1 after that road tilt at San Francisco. If that's the case, Mahomes is a legit MVP target that you can add to the portfolio at the right price (Chiefs SB and AFC No. 1 seed would also be in play at the correct number).

Those are just two of the examples that I have set up. You can find similar linchpin moments for every team and some players. Injuries may happen, and your opinion of a team will shift, but it is always nice to see a calendar invite pop up. Even if you just laugh it off, it is a chance to see if you can attack a betting market.

DRAFTKINGS BETTING SPLITS SYSTEMS FOR 2024

By Steve Makinen

VSIN Pro Subscribers get access to our DraftKings Betting Splits, which update every 10 minutes with the most recent betting percentages.

With the NFL opening week nearly here, I will continue my preseason prep work with the DraftKings Betting Splits Systems, which we will track and qualify in the VSIN NFL Analytics Reports. If you missed my college football article on this subject a couple of weeks ago or haven't been following my DK Betting Splits work over the last couple of years, these systems, and the splits for that matter, have become quite popular with both VSIN Analysts and readers.

In short, the numbers that DK provides in this feed summarize the percentage of the money (handle) and the number of bets on each side of a wagering option for the games in most major sports. In preseason articles I published in the 2023 Football Betting Guides, I outlined systemic strategies for successfully using the DK Betting Splits Data developed for college and pro football in the 2022 season. I continued tracking and updating those systems so bettors could focus on the best ways to use the numbers. Here are the angles we will use during the 2024 NFL season.

Qualifying plays for these angles are listed by VSIN on the Analytics Reports each week. They are updated twice weekly, first on the initial Wednesday release and again on the morning of every Sunday slate of games.

One key concept readers need to consider when utilizing the systems is that not all of them rely on fading the public majorities. Some of them are built on the premise of getting behind the masses.

Here are the systems with updated language and records heading into the '24 season.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #1

Over the past two seasons, when more than 65% of the handle has been on a particular side of an ATS wager, this majority group is just 96-111 ATS (46.4%). The number for this supermajority in college football was closer to 80%. In other words, if you see 2/3 of the handle backing one side in an NFL game this season, it's consistently profitable to fade it.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #2

In NFL divisional games during 2022 and 2023, DK majority handle bettors were awful, as this majority group is just 71-100 ATS (41.5%). With the obvious generality that public bettors love favorites, it's clear

that they don't value the stakes of these rivalry games and what they mean for the competitors.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #3

Similarly to #2 above, in that same time span, when the majority number of bets staked its side in an NFL divisional game, this majority group is just 76-99 ATS (43.4%).

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #4

In NFL non-conference games of 2023, DK majority handle bettors were quite sharp, as this majority group was 41-29 ATS (58.6%). This is quite the opposite performance level of #2 above, and unfortunately for bettors, there are two fewer non-conference tilts than divisional contests for each team on the schedule every year. Of course, if strategically playing both spots according to these systems, every game in either situation is an opportunity.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #5

Since the start of the 2022 season, when the majority number of bets has backed road favorites for an ATS wager, these majority groups are just 80-105 ATS (43.2%). There are only 15 games or fewer each year when this group will back the home dog.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #6

When the majority number of bets was on road underdogs for an ATS wager, these majority groups have produced adequate records, 61-54 ATS (53%) going back to September 2022. This matches up somewhat with the logic I used in explaining some college successes. When the public goes "against the grain," they can do well.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #7

When the majority handle and the number of bets have backed a team in an ATS wager in the higher-profile, non-Sunday afternoon games over the last two seasons, these majority groups are just 61-81 ATS (43%) & 62-80 ATS (43.7%) respectively. This set of games includes all the Thursday, Saturday, Sunday night (SNF), and Monday night contests.

NFL DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #8

In another rare winning record, when the majority of the handle has backed the team with fewer season wins in a 2022 or 2023 NFL game for an ATS wager, this majority group was 56-40 ATS (58.3%). This has proven to be another situation in which going against the grain pays off.

DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #9

The average NFL total in 2022 was 44.2. Last year, it dropped over a point to 43.0. In games where the totals reached 46.5 or higher and oddsmakers thus expected them to be a little more explosive, the majority number of bettors rebounded incredibly in 2023. After going 28-53 ATS in 2022, they were 44-24 ATS (64.7%) last year! We'll see how that latter trend holds in 2024.

DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #10

When 56% or more of the handle has been on the Under in an NFL game total over the last 1-1/2 season, this majority group has been quite sharp, 59-42 ATS (58.4%). This number for a supermajority in the NFL is quite low, which is evidence of how rarely the betting public bets on the low side of a total. Incidentally, the same majority figure for the number of bets has also produced a 44-33 (57.1%) record.

DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #11

Quite the opposite of #9, the magic mark for a supermajority on the handle for betting Overs was 64% or higher, and this group performed miserably in 2022 & 2023 with a record of 86-123 (41.1%). This has been a long-standing belief to me, but when the Over looks too obvious, it usually loses. On the number of bets, this same supermajority percentage produced a slightly improved 87-104 (45.5%) record.

DK BETTING SPLITS SYSTEM #12

Call this one the Over trap, but when a supermajority (>=64%) of the handle has been on the Over, but DraftKings moved the opening total lower throughout the week, this majority group has lost big, going just 30-59 (33.7%) over the past two seasons. It was almost as if they were trying to bait more people into taking the Over. This is a classic example of those behind the counter being smarter than those trying to cash the tickets.

SEVEN SUCCESSFUL WEEK 1 NFL BETTING SYSTEMS

By Steve Makinen

The anticipation for the start of the NFL regular season grows every year, especially with sports betting becoming more mainstream. This season, bettors will again be looking for the best info to get their campaigns off to a profitable start. It's an ideal time to look closely at seven successful and consistent betting systems, looking exclusively at past Week 1 action. These angles consider line positioning, how the teams fared the previous year and transition into the follow-up season opener, and whether or not revenge is in play.

In analyzing these betting angles, you should note that every team, regardless of what happened last year or what player/coaching transactions they made over the offseason, is starting with a fresh slate. That can do wonders for a team. It wipes out any positive or negative momentum generated the prior season. All of this is tough to measure. Without any on-field action to observe, how can those setting the lines be expected to 100% accurately quantify the Week 1 chemistry of the teams? This, in turn, can be to the bettors' advantage.

Remember, the bookies' theoretical job is to get equal action on both sides of the wagering options in a game, not so much to pick the game. Naturally, there can be weak spots, and savvy bettors who are prepared with both knowledge of the teams and a powerful weapon like systems can be ready to take advantage. These seven systems will help you get prepared for NFL kickoff 2024.

BETTING SYSTEM #1

DIVISIONAL HOME UNDERDOGS ARE 18-9-2 SU AND 23-6 ATS (79.3%) IN WEEK 1 SINCE 2009 (WIN: +16.4 UNITS, ROI: 56.5%, GRADE 75)

2024 Potential Plays: INDIANAPOLIS

Analysis

Unlike some recent seasons, there are only three divisional contests on the NFL Week 1 slate. And only one of those games fits the bill for this very successful system. There isn't a whole lot more motivating than an opening week contest at home against a targeted team in the division. In most past cases, the road favorite in this scenario was a returning playoff team, while the home dog was an aspiring one. That is particularly true in this year's case, and the Colts figure to be plenty motivated after being eliminated by the Texans in the regular season finale last year.



Game #1: INDIANAPOLIS (+2) vs. Houston

The Texans kept the Colts out of the playoffs this past January. Although it's been nearly eight months since that game, you'd have to assume that there is a hunger to not only get off to a good start but to get the bitter taste of that loss out of their mouths.

The Texans are the favorites in the AFC South after winning a playoff game following that big Week 18 win vs. Indianapolis. Quarterback CJ Stroud is one of the league's leading MVP candidates and is a major reason the expectations are so high for the Texans in 2024. However, this will be a difficult spot for them, as the Colts are hungry and anxious to get their new era started with QB Anthony Richardson under center.

BETTING SYSTEM #2

HOME TEAMS PRICED IN THE RANGE OF +3 TO -3 IN WEEK 1 NON-CONFERENCE GAMES HAVE GONE JUST 5-15 SU AND 3-16-1 ATS SINCE 2015 (LOSS: -14.6 UNITS, ROI: -76.8%, GRADE 75)

2024 Potential Plays: AGAINST ATLANTA, AGAINST CLEVELAND

Analysis

In general, home teams have not fared well in Week 1 recently. Arguments have been made lately regarding the validity of home-field advantage overall. When you consider that there is an air of unfamiliarity that comes with playing an out-of-conference opponent in Week 1, perhaps that home-field edge is shrunk even further. Whatever the case, hosts have not been performing well in this scenario over the last decade. Last year, the two host teams were 1-1 SU and 0-2 ATS, including a 30-7 loss by the Steelers to the 49ers.



Game #1: ATLANTA (-3) vs. Pittsburgh

The Falcons are entering a new era, with QB Kirk Cousins coming from Minnesota. He will lead a talented offense featuring several recent top draft picks at the skill positions, notably WR Drake London, TE Kyle Pitts, and RB Bijan Robinson. The 2024 expectations are highly elevated, as the key QB position was believed to be what has held this team back from dominating the NFC South in recent years.

Their first test comes against a Pittsburgh team whose expectations are all over the map, according to a survey of the so-called experts. Head coach Mike Tomlin has never endured a losing season with the Steelers, but those in the know have legitimate concerns as the team works through a QB controversy between Russell Wilson and Justin Fields. One thing is always for sure with Pittsburgh: expect a gritty effort. This won't be an easy one for Cousins & Co.



Game #2: CLEVELAND (-2) vs. Dallas

The Browns will again hope to have QB Deshaun Watson for the full 17 games in 2024, as he remains one of the highest-paid players in the NFL. There is a lot of pressure on him to live up to that contract, particularly since Cleveland seems solid everywhere else on the roster. They are off an 11-6 season and will host a Dallas team that did one better last year at 12-5. The Cowboys have endured several key changes in the offseason, particularly on defense, and it remains to be seen how that unit responds. With former coordinator Dan Quinn and his schemes off to Washington, will this team be able to benefit from all the turnovers and defensive scores it has relied on in recent years? With Big D always a popular draw, the Cleveland Dawg Pound figures to be very fired up for this one. Historically speaking however, this has been a tough spot for teams to win and cover in.

BETTING SYSTEM #3

NFL OPENING WEEK ROAD TEAMS THAT WON BETWEEN 4-6 GAMES THE PRIOR SEASON ARE 52-21-5 ATS (71.2%) SINCE 2004 (WIN: +28.9 UNITS, ROI: 36.6%, GRADE 72)

2024 Plays: Play on ARIZONA, NEW ENGLAND, TENNESSEE, WASHINGTON

Analysis

Teams in the 4-6 win range usually qualify as potential bounce-back teams the next season, with the start of the new season offering fresh

motivation and momentum—in many cases, bad luck, injuries, or even tanking soured their records the prior season. Last year, there were three qualifying plays on this and those teams went 2-1 SU and 3-0 ATS, including outright upsets from the Rams and Raiders. As you can see, there are four qualifying teams for this angle in 2024.



Game #1: ARIZONA (+6.5) at Buffalo

Undoubtedly, Arizona was the team that most fans pegged as the worst in the NFL last season. While the Cardinals weren't as bad as a handful of other teams in the league in '23, there is still plenty of room to grow. With QB Kyler Murray under center in the back half of the season and recovering from injury, the team went 3-5 to finish 4-13 overall. The offense showed a lot of spark in that stretch with Murray, however, and is expected to get a big boost from the addition of WR Marvin Harrison, Jr., one of the top prospects ever out of college at the position. Still, they are a sizable underdog here for a reason. The Bills are again looking to get over the hump after yet another playoff disappointment last winter. They have "re-tooled" for '24, particularly on offense, where several of the most notable names like Stefon Diggs and Gabe Davis have left. Of course, this is QB Josh Allen's team, and they will only go as far as he takes them. However, this season-opening game looks easier on paper than in reality.



Game #2: NEW ENGLAND (+9) at Cincinnati

This game will be a popular Survivor Contest entry for many taking part, and we already have seen that this is Brent Musburger's Week 1 selection. However, the game doesn't figure to be as easy as the point spread might suggest. I've read several opinions on the Patriots this offseason suggesting they could be a team that rebounds well under new head coach Jerod Mayo. It's a huge task to take over for a legend like head coach Bill Belichick, but his departure, along with that of struggling QB Mac Jones, might be just what the doctor ordered to clean the slate in New England. Quarterback Joe Burrow returns for Cincinnati after missing most of the latter part of last season with an injury. With his return comes the return of lofty expectations in Cincinnati. If anyone is worried about unfamiliar territory, the Bengals have only been a favorite this large once since 2017.



Game #3: TENNESSEE (+4.5) at Chicago

I just spoke of unfamiliar territory regarding the line in the Bengals-Patriots game, but the same could be said about the Bears here as hosts in a game with a much smaller number. Chicago has only been a 4.5-point favorite or higher twice in their last 32 home games. There are two obvious reasons for the inflation. First, Tennessee is off a 6-11 season and could be in a rebuilding era under new head coach Brian Callahan. The Titans have turned the page to QB Will Levis. Second, Bears fans and the rest of the NFL are fired up about the potential that first NFL draft pick Caleb Williams brings to the franchise. After a volatile run with Justin Fields under center, Williams could be just the spark this team needs to climb a level or two.



Game #4: WASHINGTON (+4) at Tampa Bay

Another rookie quarterback takes center stage in a Week 1 contest at Tampa Bay. Jayden Daniels leads the Commanders into an intriguing matchup versus the Buccaneers. I use the word intriguing because of the addition of Daniels in Washington and because they begin a new era under head coach Dan Quinn, who enjoyed a fruitful run as defensive coordinator at Dallas. His defenses were electric there. Tampa Bay is the defending NFC South champ after going 9-8, but the experts behind the counter are a bit pessimistic about the chances of a repeat, dropping the season win total for the Bucs to 7.5. This looks like an uncomfortable line for a host team that won five more games last season.

BETTING SYSTEM #4

DIVISIONAL ROAD UNDERDOGS OF 6.5 POINTS OR LESS ARE ON A 17-13 SU AND 21-8-1 ATS (72.4%) RUN SINCE 2013. (WIN: +12.2 UNITS, ROI: 42.1%, GRADE 70)

2024 Potential Plays: CAROLINA, LAS VEGAS

Analysis

Again, there are just a few divisional contests on the NFL Week 1 slate, but two of those feature road underdogs we can focus on, and ironically, the two teams fitting the criteria for his long-running profitable angle also did so a year ago. A divisional contest in Week 1 pegs the urgency meter like nothing else, especially when a team is on the road and not expected to win. This system is a perfect example of how teams can quickly flush the struggles of the prior year behind and start fresh on opening weekend.



Game #1: CAROLINA (+3) at New Orleans

The Carolina offense was nothing short of woeful last year, but the team made a heavy offseason investment into improving almost all areas of that unit. The Panthers also changed coaches in the offseason, opting for Dave Canales, who comes over from Tampa Bay, where he served as offensive coordinator. The experts have to believe that things will be improved for the franchise in 2024, as after a 2-15 finish in 2023, they are just a short 3-point road dog to a New Orleans team that was 9-8 last year and underwent only modest changes. It is hard to lay points in Week 1 division games, as the motivation and momentum belong to no one.



Game #2: LAS VEGAS (+3.5) at LA Chargers

The last time these teams met in December, the Raiders hung 63 points on the Chargers. Ironically, it was in the second half of a season in which the LA defense was otherwise quite strong. The magnitude of that loss had a lot to do with the Chargers moving on from Brandon Staley and bringing in Jim Harbaugh.

Fans of the franchise are excited about the change, but they will barely recognize a number of players who have been brought in to replace aging stars. The schemes will also be very different as Harbaugh figures to rely more on a run-based attack rather than putting everything on QB Justin Herbert. The Raiders played some inspired football down the stretch for interim head coach Antonio Pierce, and as such, he was named the permanent coach to lead this team into 2024. He turns to QB Gardner Minshew to lead the offense after Minshew, who has had an up-and-down (mostly up) career, nearly led the Colts to the playoffs a year ago.

BETTING SYSTEM #5

LAYING BIG POINTS IS RARELY A GOOD IDEA IN A WEEK 1 NFL CONTEST, AS UNDERDOGS OF 6.5 POINTS OR MORE MIGHT BE JUST 10-30-1 SU, BUT THEY ARE 27-13-1 ATS (67.5%) IN WEEK 1 SINCE 2013 (WIN: +12.7 UNITS, ROI: 31.8%, GRADE 65)

2024 Potential Plays: Play ARIZONA, NEW ENGLAND

Analysis

There is a lot to be said about a team's ability to start over in the NFL, and with every Week 1 game comes a fresh slate. All that happened last year is forgotten as both teams go into these games with 0-0 records. In many cases, strange or fluky happenings from the past season caused these Week 1 lines to be inflated. Trust that the underdogs will show up and compete, regardless of what the records from the prior year indicated or the doom and gloom the talking heads are sharing about these franchises' prospects.



Game #1: ARIZONA (+6.5) at Buffalo

I wrote about this earlier in system #3, which focused on Arizona having the slate wiped clean following a 4-13 campaign a year ago. Here, the Cardinals are the beneficiaries of a Week 1 system that shows it has been dangerous laying big points this early in a season. With the preseason becoming less and less impactful every year, it seems we don't know nearly as much in reality about these teams as we read about.



Game #2: NEW ENGLAND (+9) at Cincinnati

This is another repeat game from our system #3 earlier. The Patriots aren't looked at highly in national media, but we have no idea the confidence or resolve they are bringing into the season in their locker room. In their first season post-Belichick, it will be an interesting story to follow all season. If this does end up being a much better team than the one that went 4-13 a year ago, it will make it a tough task for the Bengals to cover this massive line.

BETTING SYSTEM #6

OPENING WEEK HOME FAVORITES HOSTING TEAMS THAT WERE ABOVE .500 THE PRIOR SEASON ARE 48-27-5 ATS (64%) SINCE 2000 (WIN: +18.3 UNITS, ROI: 24.4%, GRADE 60)

2024 Plays: ATLANTA, CLEVELAND, DETROIT, KANSAS CITY, MIAMI

Analysis

Home favorites hosting a quality opponent are likely a strong team themselves, or at least expected to be much better, and opening the season provides extra motivation. However, after a 0-2 SU and ATS performance in two games last season, for 2024, there are a lofty five plays on tap.



Game #1: ATLANTA (-3) vs. Pittsburgh

This particular system will obviously clash with that in system #2 for the Falcons-Steelers opening Sunday contest. The logic here is that even though the Steelers are a returning plus-.500 team, the host Falcons are still favored for a reason. Actually, in the case of Atlanta, there are a lot of reasons, starting with the addition of QB Kirk Cousins, who brings a passing dynamic that this franchise hasn't had since Matt Ryan. There are certainly a lot of questions surrounding head coach Mike Tomlin's Pittsburgh team in 2024 as well. He has apparently opted to "let Russ cook" at quarterback for the opener. Is that the right move? Does the locker room support it?



Game #2: CLEVELAND (-2) vs. Dallas

Another system that conflicts with #2 above, with the Browns coming back off an 11-6 season and looking for more in 2024. The Cowboys have only been in Cleveland twice since the Browns' return to the NFL, winning easily in 2008 and 2016. Dallas was a prohibitive road favorite on both occasions. The Browns showed great balance on both sides of the ball in 2023. Head coach Mike McCarthy's team faces some obvious questions after yet another playoff disappointment last winter. Can Dak Prescott lead this team where it wants to go? Can the defense hold up after key coaching and player losses? We'll know a lot more after this one is over.



Game #3: DETROIT (-3.5) vs. LA Rams

We have a rematch from the playoffs of last winter set for Week 1. It wasn't easy for the Lions, but they won a postseason game for the first time in 32 years last January, edging the Rams 24-23. The rematch could be just as tough, as Detroit will not have the massive motivational edge it had in that playoff game. Head coach Dan Campbell's team is still at

home, though, and they are being looked at as one of the top teams in the NFC for 2024.

The Rams come off another wasted preseason in which the team seemingly could care less. Will head coach Sean McVay's team be able to bring it here when it counts? His defense moves on from longtime Pro Bowler Aaron Donald, who announced his retirement in the offseason. Detroit is on a current stretch in which it has averaged 31.5 PPG in its last 22 home contests.



Game #4: KANSAS CITY (-2.5) vs. Baltimore

The Chiefs are the defending Super Bowl Champions and once again are hosting the league's much-anticipated opening night contest. The opponent: the team they beat to reach the Super Bowl this past January, the Ravens. Last year, in this same game, the Chiefs endured a somewhat sloppy performance in losing late to the Lions. I would expect a far more focused effort from head coach Andy Reid's team this time around, as Baltimore, perhaps the Chiefs' biggest threat in the AFC, tends to bring out the best in them.

QB Patrick Mahomes is still here, TE Travis Kelce is still here, and most of what brought this franchise another title is back. They will be anxious to prove the naysayers wrong. There have been a lot of pundits thinking this could be the end of the run. On the other hand, Baltimore is back to the drawing board after coming up short once again despite being favored by 4.5 points in the AFC title tilt. Can head coach John Harbaugh's team muster up a winning effort in what figures to be an important game?



Game #5: MIAMI (-3.5) vs. Jacksonville

The Dolphins got to the postseason last year for the second straight season, only to endure a lackluster effort in a 25-7 loss at Kansas City. If that futile offensive effort proved anything, getting themselves into a more suitable postseason locale will be critical in 2024. In the last two years, the potent offense has flamed out at the end of the season. They have started fast in 2022 and 2023, getting off to 3-0 starts. In 2024, Miami will have to turn back a Jacksonville team that faded terribly down the stretch a year ago, falling from 8-3 to 9-8 in the season's final six games and eventually blowing the AFC South Division. Has the offseason been enough to wipe the slate for head coach Doug Pederson's team? They are facing a tough spot here against a team that put up 70 points in its only September home game last season.

BETTING SYSTEM #7

WEEK 1 FAVORITES PLAYING IN A REVENGE SPOT FROM A LOSS THE PRIOR SEASON ARE JUST 17-24 SU AND 15-26 ATS (36.6%) OVER THE LAST 12 SEASONS (LOSS: -13.6 UNITS, ROI: -33.2%, GRADE 63)

2024 Plays: Play Against LA CHARGERS

Analysis

This is a tough spot for a favorite to be in. While revenge is a good motivator, there is enhanced pressure of being placed as a favorite over a team you lost to last time. Last year, four qualifying plays went 2-2 SU and ATS, still a positive moneyline return in fading them in an "off year" for the system. In the case of this year's qualifying game, it is a divisional contest with enhanced stakes. We know that being a divisional favorite in Week 1 is also tough.



Game #1: LA CHARGERS (-3.5) vs. Las Vegas

This is a repeat team qualifier, as the Chargers were also a play-against option in #4 above. It seems that revenge isn't a good motivating aspect for teams in Week 1 of a season. For one, the slates are wiped clean. The Chargers even have a whole new coaching staff that could care less about what happened back in December. For two, the lopsided nature of that Raiders win that LA is looking to avenge makes it hard to believe that you'd want to lay more than a field goal with the Chargers.

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING	TEAM	POWER RATING
KANSAS CITY	30.0	LA CHARGERS	23.5
BALTIMORE	29.0	CHICAGO	23.0
SAN FRANCISCO	29.0	INDIANAPOLIS	23.0
BUFFALO	27.5	PITTSBURGH	23.0
DETROIT	27.5	TAMPA BAY	23.0
PHILADELPHIA	27.5	ARIZONA	22.0
CINCINNATI	26.5	LAS VEGAS	22.0
GREEN BAY	26.5	NEW ORLEANS	22.0
HOUSTON	26.5	SEATTLE	22.0
DALLAS	26.0	MINNESOTA	21.5
LA RAMS	25.5	NY GIANTS	20.5
NY JETS	25.5	TENNESSEE	20.5
MIAMI	25.0	WASHINGTON	20.5
ATLANTA	24.0	DENVER	20.0
CLEVELAND	24.0	NEW ENGLAND	19.5
JACKSONVILLE	24.0	CAROLINA	18.0



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BUFFALO BILLS

A rebuilt receiver corps takes up most of the spotlight in Buffalo, where QB Josh Allen will try to find some chemistry with Keon Coleman, Curtis Samuel, Marquez Valdes-Scantling, and Mack Hollins. TE Dalton Kincaid and Dawson Knox join Khalil Shakir as the holdovers and they could be the go-to guys, but somebody has to create more explosive plays.

Matt Milano's injury could be another setback for a defense that seems to have had no shortage of them in recent years, but at least it happened in the preseason and they can adjust easier as opposed to a midseason malady. Also, the Bills will roll with new DC Bobby Babich, who has been a longtime position coach. We didn't see much of the No. 1s in preseason, but the better players were instrumental in holding the Steelers to nine points. The Panthers game was film to burn and never speak of again..

What makes this season interesting for the Bills is that they have gotten very little publicity and attention, yet they're co-favorites with the Jets to win the AFC East and have lower Super Bowl odds. The Jets and Dolphins, meanwhile, have been talked about a lot.

SUPER BOWL
16-1

AFC
+800

AFC EAST
+195

PLAYER TO WATCH WR KEON COLEMAN

I actually touted Coleman for Offensive Rookie of the Year in our main NFL Betting Guide back in June. Allen developed more of a rapport with Shakir late in the year and will always utilize his two tight ends, but Coleman, who had 18 touchdowns over his final two years in college, has the potential to be more of a home run hitter with Stefon Diggs and Gabe Davis elsewhere. Coleman didn't find his footing in the preseason, but the hope is that he will with Allen when the games matter.



NEW YORK JETS

The most interesting developments of the preseason for the Jets did not happen in a game. Some heated conversations between Aaron Rodgers and Garrett Wilson were blown out of proportion back in late July and then Haason Reddick's trade request and holdout dominated the headlines.

Reddick's holdout continues, at least at time of print and it seems like it will at least carry over into the month of September. Reddick wants a new contract. The Jets want him to play on his existing one. He would certainly help the defense to be out there, but many believe that the Jets still have one of the league's dominant units without him. It would still help to have a guy with more than 50 sacks in the last four seasons out there.

But, when push comes to shove, New York reaching expectations comes down to the player wearing No. 8. Rodgers had one pass attempt before tearing his Achilles last season and did not play at all in the preseason. Not that he was ever going to, but until fans, pundits, bettors, and reporters see him in game conditions, the questions will linger. The offensive line is the primary area of concern as the season draws near, which is not ideal with a 40-year-old QB.

SUPER BOWL
19-1

AFC
10-1

AFC EAST
+165

PLAYER TO WATCH WR MALACHI CORLEY

The preseason was an up-and-down affair for Corley, who had seven catches on 10 targets, but also had some rookie blunders, including a holding flag. All he did in college was catch passes, leaving Western Kentucky with 259 grabs for more than 3,000 yards. We know that Rodgers loves tight ends, so Tyler Conklin, Jeremy Ruckert, and Zack Kuntz are all on the radar for prop bettors and fantasy enthusiasts, but Corley could become a star in short order if he gets vintage Rodgers.



MIAMI DOLPHINS

There wasn't a whole lot to find out about the Dolphins in the preseason. After all, we can't find out if they can beat playoff teams because (a) there aren't any yet and (b) nobody is playing their starters. That remains the concern for Miami, who lost twice to Buffalo, twice to Kansas City, the Eagles, Titans, and Ravens last year. Huge yards per play and points differentials were a little misleading because of how they handled their affairs against lesser foes.

Tua Tagovailoa got his work in by going 5-for-5 for 51 yards and a TD against the Commanders and that was it for him. The biggest story from Dolphins camp was that Tyreek Hill, Jaylen Waddle, and Odell Beckham Jr. were all dealing with varying injuries.

Because of the limited competition in the preseason, we didn't really get to see Anthony Weaver's defense at work, as he took over for former DC Vic Fangio. That being said, it was a good workout for Weaver's pass defense, which faced 115 pass attempts in three games. For a group that gave up 27 passing TDs last season, only allowing two in the preseason feels like a win, even if you have to put an asterisk next to it.

SUPER BOWL

22-1

AFC

11-1

AFC EAST

+205

PLAYER TO WATCH RB DE'VON ACHANE

Fantasy players and player prop wagers are definitely interested in the backfield for the Dolphins. Raheem Mostert remains the lead back, but Achane ripped off 7.8 yards per carry last season and head coach Mike McDaniel mentioned that it was a priority to find more ways to get him the ball. That said, not only is Mostert there, but the Dolphins traded up to get Tennessee's Jaylen Wright in the draft. We know that the Dolphins will have a high-octane offense, but the running back position is really deep and that makes it tough for bettors and drafters.



NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

The Patriots wound up being the last AFC team to finish up the preseason, drawing the Commanders on Sunday Night Football. But, it seems fitting because first-year head coach Jerod Mayo had a lingering question at the most important position on the field. As it turns out, the question still wasn't answered, as Drake Maye outshined Jacoby Brissett, but Mayo's postgame comments hinted towards Brissett being the Week 1 guy.

With left guard Cole Strange already out, right guard Sidy Sow left the final preseason game injured, so the Patriots head into the season with some offensive line injuries, which is never a good thing. All in all, the defense played really well during the preseason. That's hardly a surprise with Mayo at the helm and with the culture established by Bill Belichick, but all eyes were on the offense and all eyes will be on the offense as the season rolls along.

It will be fascinating to see how the offense comes together under Alex Van Pelt. He hasn't called plays since he was the OC in Buffalo back in 2009, as he had the OC title in Cleveland, but Kevin Stefanski has always been the one in the QB's ear.

SUPER BOWL

250-1

AFC

120-1

AFC EAST

25-1

PLAYER TO WATCH WR JA'LYNN POLK

Obviously the QB position is worth watching, but regardless of who runs the offense, somebody will have to catch the ball. This is a team that will trail a lot, both because of a lack of talent, but also a brutal schedule for the first 11 weeks. Polk finished the preseason with seven catches on nine targets for 53 yards. He was a second-round pick this year and could take some of the targets away from last year's sixth-round pick DeMario Douglas. Polk should get every opportunity to put up numbers on a bad team desperate for a playmaker.



BALTIMORE RAVENS

The emphasis on Lamar Jackson's health is more important than ever for the Ravens, who have Josh Johnson and Devin Leary in reserve. Jackson started 16 games last season for the first time in his career after starting 12 each of the previous two seasons. On the whole, the Ravens made it through the preseason healthy, including Jackson, who was only slowed by an illness early in camp.

This is basically last year's team on both sides of the ball, so Baltimore has the chance to hit the ground running while others are trying to find their proverbial sea legs. The +12 turnover margin may regress a bit, especially with Geno Stone and his seven interceptions with division rival Cincinnati. But, no news was good news otherwise for Baltimore throughout the month of August.

What we haven't seen yet is how 30-year-old running back Derrick Henry fits into Todd Monken's offense, but a ball control approach will probably help first-year DC Zach Orr, who takes over for Mike Macdonald at the age of 32. With limited odds movement, the Ravens are among the favorites to win the Super Bowl and are nearly in lockstep with the Bengals for the AFC North crown.

SUPER BOWL
10-1

AFC
+550

AFC NORTH
+145

PLAYER TO WATCH WR RASHOD BATEMAN

The presence of Henry certainly allows the Ravens to rely on the run, but somebody has to play Robin to Zay Flowers' Batman. Flowers had 108 targets, 44 more than anybody else, and 77 catches, more than double any other wide receiver. Obviously Mark Andrews missed time and will be a popular option for Jackson, but nobody really stepped up in his absence. Bateman only had 32 catches over 16 games and the preservation of Lamar could be contingent on finding another pass-catcher.



CINCINNATI BENGALS

With Myles Murphy out and Sam Hubbard ailing, the Bengals are a little bit light on pass rushers as the season gets underway. But, that pales in comparison to what they dealt with in the preseason last year with Joe Burrow's calf injury and everything that came along with it. Burrow's status means the world to the Bengals and he got through the preseason unscathed, with Jake Browning healthy enough to be the backup.

Nobody seems concerned about the Ja'Marr Chase contract dispute and the Bengals still have Tee Higgins, so the 1-2 punch is set. The defense, outside of the aforementioned EDGE injuries, looks very similar to last season's, just with Geno Stone in the mix after a huge season for the rival Ravens. All in all, this has been one of the best preseasons for the Bengals in the Burrow era.

Because he isn't banged up, I would anticipate that the Bengals take some more love in the futures markets as Week 1 approaches. As it is, they are the favorites to win the deep and talented AFC North and are also among the shorter prices to win the Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL
13-1

AFC
+700

AFC NORTH
+145

PLAYER TO WATCH RB ZACK MOSS

For the first time since 2016, Joe Mixon is not on the roster. Mixon had four 1,000-yard seasons with Cincy, but only had more than 4.1 yards per carry once, so it was more about volume and less about big plays. Moss has had over 4.1 yards per carry in four of his five seasons, though he's had problems staying on the field with a total of 53 games played. The Bengals have traded Mixon's durability for a bit more upside and hopefully some shorter third downs to convert.



CLEVELAND BROWNS

The Browns didn't play Deshaun Watson in a preseason game and the practice reports were quite mixed. The QB room is deep with Jameis Winston, Dorian Thompson-Robinson, and Tyler Huntley, but the plan is still to give Watson the Week 1 start, much to the chagrin of many fans and those who watched camp. The opener against the Cowboys would be Watson's first game action in 302 days.

Reserve lineman Luke Wypler went down with an injury, but the team moved quickly to reunite with Nick Harris, who got ample playing time last season with injuries to Jedrick Wills and Jack Conklin, as the offensive line was in a state of flux. Michigan draftee Zak Zinter also shined in his preseason reps and it wouldn't be a surprise to see him as a factor following his own major injury against Ohio State.

Denzel Ward dealt with another concussion and injuries feel like the only thing that could slow down Jim Schwartz's defense. Myles Garrett and No. 1s didn't get many reps, so the Browns avoided major injury and are ready to go with mostly unchanged futures odds heading into the season with a win total of 8.5 and Over juice.

SUPER BOWL

40-1

AFC

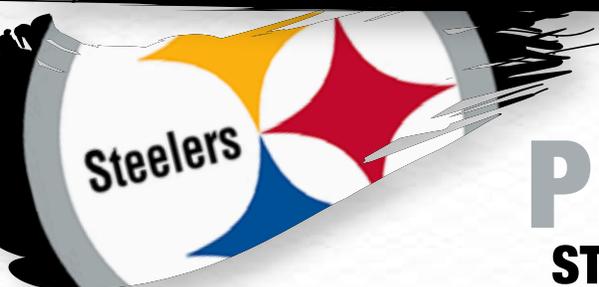
20-1

AFC NORTH

+550

PLAYER TO WATCH WR JERRY JEUDY

The Browns are likely to use a lot of 11 personnel (3 WR, 1 RB, 1 TE) with the acquisition of Jeudy to put with Elijah Moore and Amari Cooper. Moore had 104 targets last season, but only 59 catches, as the Browns had very mediocre QB play. I'm not sure it gets any better this season, but there are now three mouths to feed plus Njoku. Head coach Kevin Stefanski has to love the riches he has at wideout, but getting them the ball is a big question and the three-year commitment to Jeudy must mean they expect him to be a big factor.



PITTSBURGH STEELERS

We all thought that the Steelers had two quarterbacks, but it turns out that they might not have any. Well, by definition, Russell Wilson and Justin Fields both play the position, but they did not play it well in the preseason. Russ was 10-of-12 for 73 yards and Fields was 19-of-27 for 199 yards, but neither guy threw a touchdown pass and Fields showed the indecisiveness and inability to take care of the football that held him back in Chicago.

The completion percentages are great, but there was very little in terms of downfield passing. Tomlin was very complimentary of Wilson after the preseason finale against the Lions and it seems as though he'll get the first crack at leading Arthur Smith's offense. Cordarrelle Patterson's 31-yard TD run against Detroit matched the total number of rushing yards for Najee Harris on nine preseason totes. Jaylen Warren missed the game with a hamstring injury.

It is an understatement to say that the offense is a work in progress. The defense should be fine, as it usually is under Tomlin. The depth is really solid on that side of the ball as well. The well-documented gauntlet after the bye week for the Steelers still looms large in terms of their preseason odds with heavy vig on Under 8.5.

SUPER BOWL

50-1

AFC

30-1

AFC NORTH

+800

PLAYER TO WATCH WR ROMAN WILSON

Whether it's Wilson or Fields, George Pickens will get his targets and yardage. But, who is the WR2? Newcomer Van Jefferson has only had one big season. Calvin Austin and Quez Watkins have a chance with increased opportunity. The downside for Wilson is that he's missed a lot of important reps due to a sprained ankle that kept him out of all the preseason games and a lot of the practices. But, the third-rounder out of Michigan seems to have the highest ceiling aside from Pickens and should get a lot of looks in 11 personnel.



HOUSTON TEXANS

Two years ago, the Texans started Davis Mills at QB in the season opener against the Colts. Rex Burkhead was the leading rusher with 40 yards on 14 carries. Brandin Cooks had seven receptions for 82 yards. Burkhead was second with five catches and Chris Moore was third with three.

It is truly astonishing to look at how much things have changed for Houston and they had virtually no position battles in the preseason because the top guys like CJ Stroud, Joe Mixon, Stefon Diggs, Nico Collins, Tank Dell, and others were all set in stone. Stroud had 14 pass attempts in the preseason as the entire goal was to stay healthy and the lone question mark, the offensive line, made it easy to keep him on the sidelines.

Mills didn't even play the final two preseason games, as the Texans had the benefit of playing four with the Hall of Fame Game. Arguably the most interesting thing about the Texans is how other teams were circling like sharks around cut-down day to see which backs and receivers Houston made available.

Nothing has really changed in terms of their futures/division odds, although a quiet, kind-of-boring camp got people talking themselves into the Colts and Jaguars.

SUPER BOWL

16-1

AFC

+850

AFC SOUTH

+105

PLAYER TO WATCH RB CAM AKERS

Mixon has a solid set of hands, but he's not a big yards-per-carry guy, which may open up some opportunities for Akers. He shined in the preseason and got a lot of touches, as he had 32 carries plus receptions, including 10 on 24 snaps in the finale against the Rams. Akers has torn both Achilles over the last three seasons, but he looked like a real threat with the ball in his hands and the Texans have a strong affinity for dynamic players. Just look at how they put together their wide receiver corps.



JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Preseason wins and losses may not mean a whole lot, but no team in the AFC had a better preseason than the Jaguars. They went 3-0 with a +57 point differential and Trevor Lawrence looked outstanding in his limited action. He was 11-of-14 with 134 yards and three touchdowns, including a two-touchdown effort in the final tune-up against the Falcons.

Lawrence and TE Evan Engram kept up their impeccable chemistry from last season and first-round pick WR Brian Thomas Jr. is a weapon whether he's targeted or not. Given that the Jags got outgained last season and posted just a 22/14 TD/INT ratio, a bounce back season from Lawrence with some new and old faces would go a long way in a tough division, where the Jags are the second betting choice and an underdog to make the playoffs.

Jacksonville's 30 turnovers were among the most in the NFL and obscured how many takeaways the defense had with 28. New DC Ryan Nielsen only got one takeaway from his unit in the exhibition games, but they only allowed four red-zone trips. Again, it was the preseason, but the Jags dominated the time of possession in their final two games, which would certainly make life easier for Nielsen's crew.

SUPER BOWL

50-1

AFC

22-1

AFC SOUTH

+250

PLAYER TO WATCH TRAVIS ETIENNE JR.

After ripping off 5.1 yards per carry during his rookie year, Etienne only had 3.8 yards per pop last season. He actually got votes in the Offensive Player of the Year, which was kind of crazy given that he only had 4.6 yards per touch and one receiving TD on 58 targets. He doesn't seem to be getting much pressure from Tank Bigsby or D'Ernest Johnson in the quest for snaps, but maybe he should. He only had two 100-yard games on the ground last season and the lack of balance led to a lot of Lawrence turnovers. He had 11 carries for 49 yards and two catches for 12 yards in the preseason.



INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Anthony Richardson's preseason ended with 10 completions on 18 attempts for 111 yards with a touchdown and a pick. He also had two carries for four yards, as he got the memo about protecting his body. Joe Flacco is the safety net behind Richardson this year, although Jason Bean sure did his part to convince the coaching staff to keep him around.

But, as we know, the success for the Colts comes down to Richardson, who only made it through four games last season. This is a good roster around him and a team that was right in the playoff mix under first-year head coach Shane Steichen. You have to take the good with the bad with Richardson and the potential is there for more good than bad.

That being said, the Texans left the preseason healthy and the Jaguars actually looked really impressive in their exhibition games, leaving the Colts as the third choice in the AFC South and an underdog in the Yes/No playoff market. The kid gloves on Richardson until he played five drives against the Bengals made sense, but accuracy problems continued to follow him around in camp.

SUPER BOWL

75-1

AFC

35-1

AFC SOUTH

+340

PLAYER TO WATCH WR ADONAI MITCHELL

Rookies have to seize opportunities in the preseason and Mitchell stepped up to the challenge. While he only had three catches on six targets and accumulated just 29 yards, he was on the field with Richardson and got a lot of snaps with Josh Downs on the sidelines. It seems likely that he'll get a lot of looks in 11 personnel (3 WR, 1 RB, 1 TE) even after Downs comes back. He didn't see the field much at Georgia, but had 55 catches and 845 yards at Texas in his junior year, so there will be some growing pains, but Richardson's big arm makes him a player to watch in prop markets.



TENNESSEE TITANS

You never want to read too much into the preseason, but I can't be alone in thinking that the Titans might be better than a lot of people believe. Three close wins over the 49ers, Seahawks, and Saints can't be a bad thing, but the more important observations are that Will Levis actually looked pretty darn good and there is a lot of talent at the skill positions.

Tony Pollard is a dual-threat back and spark plug Tyjae Spears can do a bit of everything. Head coach Brian Callahan brought in his dad, Bill, to oversee the offensive line and Titans QBs not named Malik Willis were sacked once for three yards. The Titans accepted that Willis was a sunk cost and traded him to the Packers. Levis and Mason Rudolph played quite well in the preseason and now the QB room is set.

The yards per carry numbers weren't overly impressive, but the Titans had at least 117 rushing yards in every game and the signal callers should improve under the Callahans as the year goes along. By no means do I believe that this is a team that will fly past their season win total (6.5) enough to be a postseason factor, but they might be an ATS darling this year.

SUPER BOWL

150-1

AFC

80-1

AFC SOUTH

10-1

PLAYER TO WATCH WR DEANDRE HOPKINS

Hopkins had 75 catches for 1,057 yards last season. He had more than twice as many yards as the next guy (TE Chigoziem Okonkwo). This season, Hopkins will line up alongside proven commodities in Calvin Ridley and Tyler Boyd. Okonkwo is back in the mix as well. The addition of standout center Lloyd Cushenberry III and seventh overall pick JC Latham at left tackle provide more protection and Hopkins now has "lineup protection" as the "cleanup hitter" to borrow a baseball concept. We'll see how quickly D-Hop can get back from the knee injury, but he may be sitting on a huge season.



KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

Most of the news was good for the Chiefs in the preseason. The Super Bowl LIX favorite and biggest division chalk on the board just wanted to get through healthy. Patrick Mahomes mentioned that the loss of Marquise "Hollywood" Brown was a bummer in practice, but he'll be back in September and it doesn't hurt to have Xavier Worthy ready to contribute.

The biggest winner of the KC preseason was Creed Humphrey, who got paid a handsome rate for snapping the ball to Mahomes and directing traffic on the offensive line. Joe Thuney was hurt in camp from an injury suffered in last year's postseason, but isn't expected to miss regular season time, so it will be "all systems go" for the opener against the Ravens in the NFL Kickoff Game.

The most important position battle was a success, as second-round pick Kingsley Suamataia out of BYU looked the part of a starting left tackle in the NFL. The offensive line depth is a tad concerning for the Chiefs, so they'll need the No. 1s to stay healthy there. Injuries are the only thing standing between the Chiefs and another division title.

SUPER BOWL
+500

AFC
+300

AFC WEST
-260

PLAYER TO WATCH WR RASHEE RICE

This could've gone a number of ways, with Worthy, Carson Steele, Travis Kelce, who did show some signs of age in the regular season, or even incumbent RB Isiah Pacheco, but Rice is a really important piece for this team. It was a rough offseason for the Chiefs, with Rice front and center thanks to his decision-making. He had 102 targets and 79 catches as a rookie. It is entirely possible that Worthy and Brown take away some looks from Rice, but KC is also trying to commit to more downfield options with those two speedsters. Rice is a speedster in his own right, but he could morph into a possession role here with volume being the chief goal.



LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

Some teams gave us a good frame of reference in the preseason. Some teams did not. The Chargers were one of those teams. Justin Herbert didn't play at all due to plantar fasciitis and Easton Stick, Luis Perez, and Max Duggan did not play well at all. Gus Edwards and J.K. Dobbins registered zero combined carries, leaving it all for Kimani Vidal and Jaret Patterson. Ladd McConkey and DJ Chark Jr. combined for four targets.

So, the Chargers are something of an unknown heading into Year 1 under Jim Harbaugh, who clearly left Michigan at the right time with sanctions and notices arriving in Ann Arbor at a rapid rate. Harbaugh and the Chargers have downplayed Herbert's foot ailment and this is a team with a top-notch offensive line, especially at the tackle position, that seems ready to rely more on the run than past iterations.

Bettors have been bullish on the Bolts since the Harbaugh hiring and there is still ample Over vig on 8.5 for the season win total. They're still a slight underdog to make the playoffs (+110), but Herbert's hobbles haven't really thrown too much cold water on the team's chances. In fact, with a real chance at starting 3-0 (Raiders, @ Panthers, @ Steelers), the hype train may pick up speed early.

SUPER BOWL
45-1

AFC
22-1

AFC WEST
+350

PLAYER TO WATCH QB JUSTIN HERBERT

Herbert only played 13 games last season, leading to his first year outside of the top five in pass attempts. He was second in both 2021 and 2022. He was fourth in 2020 during the COVID season. In his four seasons, the Chargers have been 27th, 30th, 16th, and 30th in yards per carry. While Herbert is unlikely to put up the volume he has throughout his career, it is very possible his efficiency improves with a more balanced offense. Plantar fasciitis can be a long-term thing, so it will have to be monitored, but Herbert has never had a balanced offense at any point in his career and the notion that he might have to carry some weight with this team's expectations.



LAS VEGAS RAIDERS

The QB competition in Las Vegas was not a ratings bonanza, but it does seem as though the Raiders made a decision that raises the floor of the team. Gardner Minshew beat out Aidan O'Connell for the gig for first-year, full-time head coach Antonio Pierce, who had a rough preseason. Pierce probably made the right call with Minshew, but there were some game management things that evaded the sideline boss and the hard-nosed, physical team we saw late last year was rarely on display.

The Raiders only had 10 rushing first downs in the preseason, as the loss of Josh Jacobs seems pretty evident already. It is easy for the offense to look lackluster without its best player, which was the case for the Silver & Black with Davante Adams out with the birth of his child and then in the interest of protecting his health.

Adams doesn't really need time to get up to speed with new OC Luke Getsy's playbook because he was a prominent feature in that very thing for the Packers. That being said, with a defense full of holes and an offense that may struggle to find balance, all the missed time could certainly be problematic. The Raiders threw 94 times against 32 rushing attempts over the final two preseason games. A team with a win total of 6.5 should probably be working on throwing more than running, with or without a QB competition.

**SUPER BOWL
100-1**

**AFC
60-1**

**AFC WEST
10-1**

PLAYER TO WATCH RB ALEXANDER MATTISON

It appears to be Zamir White's backfield for now, but if the run-pass distribution of Getsy's offense is going to look something like it did in the preseason, Mattison is the more accomplished receiver. White played at least 57% of the snap share in each of the Raiders' last four games, including three over 70% and had 13 of his 19 targets. He only had 17 catches over three seasons at Georgia. White is the higher-upside runner and Mattison is the higher-upside pass catcher. With the Raiders likely to trail a good amount, it will be interesting to see the distribution of snaps.



DENVER BRONCOS

Sean Payton definitely had a plan in mind when he drafted Bo Nix and we're going to see it right away with the 12th overall pick named as the starting quarterback. Instantly, the Broncos appear to have a higher ceiling and Nix's preseason efficiency has been highly regarded, but we should take a deeper look.

Remember that Nix played at Oregon in an offense where the ball came out quick and a lot of passes were within a few yards of the line of scrimmage. The Broncos have run a similar set of plays for Nix in the preseason under OC Joe Lombardi. So, while he completed a high rate of passes, he had one of the lowest average depths of target (aDOT) among QBs that got a decent sample size. It wasn't much different for Zach Wilson and Jarrett Stidham when Nix sat against the Cardinals.

The offense was also set up to play to Bo's strengths with a lot of moving pockets and easy pitch-and-catch. But, will that help a defense that struggled last season per the advanced metrics? They were 24th in Success Rate on defense and lost some key contributors. Now an inexperienced QB will have to do his part to give that unit a boost.

**SUPER BOWL
300-1**

**AFC
120-1**

**AFC WEST
22-1**

PLAYER TO WATCH C LUKE WATTENBERG

More often than not, the "Player to Watch" will be a skill player on either side of the ball, but Wattenberg is in the spotlight to open the season here. The Broncos return four starters on the OL otherwise, but interior pressure is the biggest hardship for a rookie QB trying to go through his progressions and get to game speed. The 2022 fifth-round pick only played 38 offensive snaps last season and replaces Lloyd Cushenberry III, who played all 1,069. Nix will get the ball out early and quick, but if the Broncos ever want to go downfield, they may have some hiccups.



PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

Since the release of the first guide, the Eagles are down from 17-1 to 15-1 to win the Super Bowl and +700 to +600 to win the NFC.

The Eagles didn't play their stars in the preseason. Perhaps that means it'll take some time to get going in the regular season. However, it should also mean that they'll be healthy come Week 1. And by all accounts, Philadelphia looked sharp in a joint practice with New England on August 13th. Most beat writers noted that Jalen Hurts looked extremely comfortable in new offensive coordinator Kellen Moore's offense. He even linked up with newly acquired RB Saquon Barkley on a wheel route that went for a touchdown.

As far as the preseason goes, Nolan Smith Jr. popped. The 23-year-old had a sack in Philadelphia's first two games. One of them was a play in which he evaded a Patriots double team and took down rookie Drake Maye. Newly acquired Bryce Huff also looked comfortable in his brief time on the field.

Another good sign was that Avonte Maddox, who is being moved to safety, picked off Jacoby Brissett in the end zone in the second preseason game. Philadelphia's secondary was a mess last season. The Eagles did a lot to address that, but Maddox can help a bunch as a solid depth piece.

SUPER BOWL

14-1

NFC

+600

NFC EAST

-125

PLAYER TO WATCH LB NAKOBE DEAN

New defensive coordinator Vic Fangio will accept help wherever he can get it. Well, Dean could be hard to keep off the field. Dean battled injuries in the 2023 season, but he was stellar in the preseason. Dean was one of PFF's highest-rated players in the preseason, and he was seemingly all over the field for Philadelphia. Whether it was stuffing the ball carrier or blowing up screens, Dean made his presence felt.



DALLAS COWBOYS

There was a miserable stink surrounding the organization as the team failed to reach new deals with Dak Prescott and CeeDee Lamb. Prescott is going to play with or without the extension, but the Lamb situation was messier. Jerry Jones frustrated his top wideout by saying that working out a new deal wasn't "urgent". But Dallas ultimately inked Lamb to a four-year, \$136 million deal, so the vibes should be better heading into Week 1.

On the field, the Cowboys have some gamers in second-round pick Marshawn Kneeland and third-round pick Marist Liufau. Both players will have opportunities this season. And on offense, third-round pick Cooper Beebe feels like another hit for the Cowboys along the offensive line. Along with first-round pick Tyler Guyton, Dallas seemingly nabbed two starters up front in this draft.

Trey Lance's play in the final week of preseason did put a damper on everything. Dallas desperately wanted Lance to win the backup job, and there were even people that thought he was the Cowboys' post-Prescott plan. But Lance threw five interceptions against the Chargers in Week 3. His decision making is abysmal.

The 6-8 week injury to DaRon Bland was also a vibe-killer. Dallas will now be counting on either fifth-round pick Caelen Carson or Andrew Booth Jr. at corner.

SUPER BOWL

19-1

NFC

+700

NFC EAST

+170

PLAYER TO WATCH LT TYLER GUYTON

Tyron Smith leaves some massive shoes to fill at left tackle, but it seems like Guyton is up for the challenge. A serious toe injury for Chuma Edoga means the rookie will start in Week 1, but Guyton, who primarily played right tackle in college, seems ready to anchor the line. The 29th pick in the 2024 NFL Draft got a good amount of run in the preseason, and Dallas looked strong up front when he was out there. Guyton didn't necessarily stand out, but that's a good thing for an offensive lineman.

WASHINGTON

COMMANDERS

There was a lot of chatter about the offense featuring a ton of deep shots throughout training camp. Considering how well rookie Jayden Daniels throws the ball down the field, that would certainly make a lot of sense. But Kliff Kingsbury is the offensive coordinator for Washington, and the team's offense looked a lot like his old Arizona teams throughout the preseason.

There's clearly an emphasis on getting the ball out of Daniels' hands quickly. Daniels' time to throw was quicker in the preseason than the fastest release time in the NFL in 2023. That alone isn't a bad thing. But the offense has been heavy in RPOs and has Daniels throwing short passes frequently. Utilizing Daniels' legs makes a lot of sense. He's going to be one of the best running quarterbacks in football immediately. But will Kingsbury trust him to air it out?

Washington also made the decision to move on from Jahan Dotson, making a rare in-division deal to send him to Philadelphia. It was a head scratching move for a team that can use help at the receiver position, but perhaps it's a sign of how much the Commanders believe in third-round pick Luke McCaffrey.

All in all, there was a lot to like from Washington before the season, but the odds don't reflect that. The Commanders were +800 to win the NFC East a few months ago, but they're +900 now.

SUPER BOWL

120-1

NFC

60-1

NFC EAST

+900

PLAYER TO WATCH

RB BRIAN ROBINSON JR.

The Commanders might have brought in Austin Ekeler, but this is likely going to be Robinson's show. Kingsbury absolutely loves him as a between-the-tackles punisher, and Robinson looked even more explosive than usual in the preseason. There was a sequence in the loss to Miami in which Robinson hit two 11-yard runs in row. He's looking decisive and ready to get back to being the bellcow he was at Alabama. Of course, Ekeler will mix in. But he's very likely looking at the third-down role he had earlier in his career.

NEW YORK

GIANTS

Daniel Jones was the butt of every joke on X after his two-pick performance against the Texans. However, let's remember that Jones was playing in his first game back from ACL surgery. He was also going up against a Houston team that is stacked defensively, and Texans head coach DeMeco Ryans takes the preseason seriously. Jones also did some good things in the game. He shook off the mistakes and made some impressive downfield throws.

Realistically, the most important thing for New York is that the offensive line has been getting rave reviews. Last season, PFF had the Giants' offensive line ranked 30th in the NFL. Well, if New York can get some league-average production up front, that should help Jones find the game that got him a four-year, \$160 million deal. It will also make the loss of Saquon Barkley hurt less.

Malik Nabers was one of the big stories of training camp. He apparently stood out whenever he was on the field, and he had four catches for 54 yards against Houston in Week 2. Nabers seems like he's ready to show out immediately.

People are pretty clearly down on this team, though. New York was 12-1 to win the NFC East when our first guide released. The Giants are now 20-1 to win the division.

SUPER BOWL

150-1

NFC

70-1

NFC EAST

20-1

PLAYER TO WATCH

RB ERIC GRAY

Devin Singletary was brought in to be the Barkley replacement, but Gray could end up being a big factor out of the backfield. In New York's first preseason games, Gray rushed four times for 52 yards and two scores, and he also caught four passes for 46 yards. Gray was also more effective than Singletary in the loss to the Texans, rushing three times for 18 yards and catching five balls for 22 yards. He just has quite a bit of juice and could be hard to keep off the field with his ability to pick up chunk yardage.



DETROIT LIONS

On August 12, Jahmyr Gibbs suffered a lower body injury that looked like it was going to sideline him for a while. However, that ended up being a minor hamstring issue, and Gibbs is doing well in his recovery. Before Detroit's preseason meeting with Pittsburgh, Gibbs was seen running routes and catching passes from Jared Goff. The second-year back looked explosive in the videos that surfaced online, and it sounds like he's going to be out there in Week 1.

The real story heading into the season is the play of rookies Terrion Arnold, the 24th pick in the draft, and Ennis Rakestraw Jr., the 61st pick in the draft. Detroit's secondary was a mess last season, with the Lions being 25th in the NFL in Dropback EPA per play allowed. But Arnold and Rakestraw Jr. impressed this offseason, and they're going to be given every opportunity to make their mark immediately. Both players got hurt and missed time in the preseason, but Dan Campbell expects them back in Week 1.

It'll also be interesting to see what Hendon Hooker can learn from Goff and offensive coordinator Ben Johnson. Hooker made some bone-headed plays throughout the preseason, but he also rushed for 93 yards in a win over the Steelers last game. Quarterbacks that stand at 6-foot-3 and have his set of wheels don't grow on trees.

SUPER BOWL

12-1

NFC

+550

NFC NORTH

+130

PLAYER TO WATCH K JAKE BATES

There's a lot of pressure on Bates to perform this season. With Michael Badgley having suffered a season-ending injury, Bates will be the guy for Detroit. He apparently had his struggles throughout training camp, but he went 6 for 7 on field goals in preseason. The Lions are hoping to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl this year. That won't be doable without a serviceable kicker. Can Bates keep up his solid play from the preseason? If not, look for Detroit to sign somebody.



GREEN BAY PACKERS

Most of the talk surrounding the Packers this offseason was centered on the defensive side of the ball. After years of people calling for Joe Barry's job, Green Bay finally moved on and brought in former Boston College head coach Jeff Hafley as his replacement. By all accounts, Green Bay's defense is looking a lot more dangerous and aggressive. Hafley's move from a 3-4 to a 4-3 defense was ambitious, but the Packers have the personnel to make it work.

One player that has apparently enjoyed the transition is Rashan Gary. Now that he's even further removed from a torn ACL, people are excited about what he can do in this defense. Gary, and the rest of the defensive line, apparently handled a joint practice with Baltimore extremely well.

In regards to the offense, Jordan Love seems poised to build on what he did the second half of last season. He has one of the best pass-blocking lines in the NFL, and he has plenty to work with at wideout. The Packers might not have a legit superstar, but plenty of teams would take Christian Watson, Jayden Reed, Romeo Doubs and Dontayvion Wicks.

SUPER BOWL

18-1

NFC

+750

NFC NORTH

+230

PLAYER TO WATCH TE TUCKER KRAFT

Kraft is looking to build on a rookie season in which he caught 31 passes for 355 yards and two scores. His offseason didn't start the way he wanted because of a torn pec, but it sounds like he's back to playing at a high level. In the joint practice with the Ravens, Kraft caught five passes and was wreaking havoc in the middle of the field. Luke Musgrave is still in Green Bay, so Kraft probably isn't looking at a full-time workload. But Kraft has the potential to unseat Musgrave as the starter, and he opens up a lot of things for this Packers offense.



CHICAGO BEARS

You probably saw some Caleb Williams highlights in the preseason. He made a bunch of outrageous plays, and his improvisation skills can make him look like a cross between Patrick Mahomes and prime Russell Wilson. However, it's important to note that it wasn't all good for the No. 1 pick. Williams can be guilty of missing the easy read, as he's so talented that he wants to run around and wait for something bigger. That can get him into trouble, but it should get better with time.

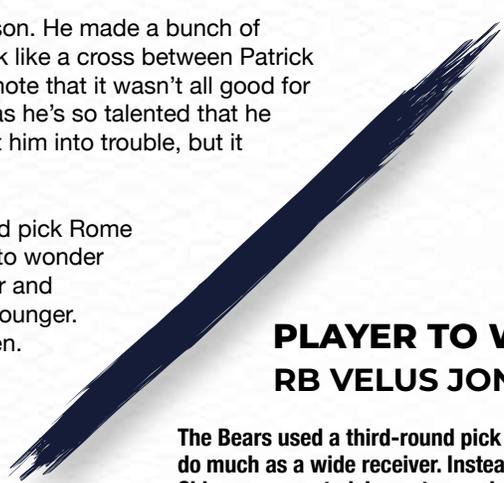
It was nice to see Williams' early chemistry with fellow first-round pick Rome Odunze. With DJ Moore and Keenan Allen on the roster, it's fair to wonder how well Odunze will play in Year 1. But he has looked like a star and Williams isn't going to avoid throwing to him just because he's younger. Odunze has a big body and understands how to get himself open. He flashed in the preseason and should be a big-time weapon immediately.

Chicago could also have something special brewing defensively. The Bears turned things around in the second half of last season, playing like a top-10 defense after acquiring Montez Sweat. Well, the Bears continued to look like a force in the preseason, especially when it came to taking the ball away. Chicago has also built some tremendous depth on that side of the ball, and that was very clear when looking at the secondary.

SUPER BOWL
35-1

NFC
15-1

NFC NORTH
+280



PLAYER TO WATCH RB VELUS JONES JR.

The Bears used a third-round pick on Jones in 2022, but he didn't do much as a wide receiver. Instead of giving up on Jones entirely, Chicago converted Jones to running back. That move is paying off for Jones, who looks like he'll be sticking around in the Windy City. In the final preseason game against the Chiefs, Jones rushed 13 times for 111 yards and a touchdown. He clearly has a good feel for finding holes as a runner, and he should get better as he spends more time at the position. His experience as a wideout should also make him a valuable pass catcher out of the backfield. Jones is also a very good special teams player.



MINNESOTA VIKINGS

Many expected Sam Darnold to be a short-term starter while rookie J.J. McCarthy, the 10th pick in the 2024 NFL Draft, got used to being a professional. But McCarthy suffered a torn meniscus in training camp and underwent season-ending surgery. So, Darnold will get the ball in Week 1 and will likely be the starter all season. Nick Mullens is expected to be the backup, but Jaren Hall could end up stealing that job. In the third week of preseason, Hall completed 17 of 25 passes for 189 yards and two touchdowns against the Eagles.

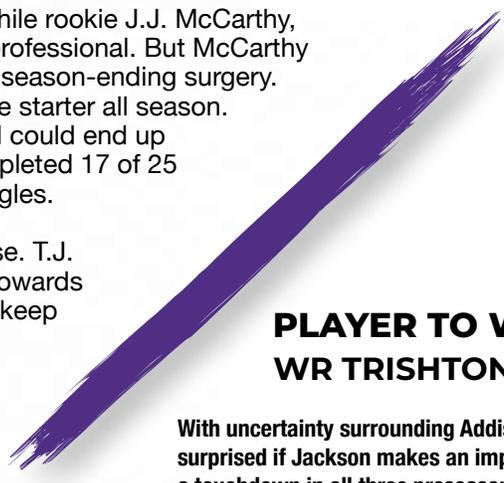
Minnesota is also dealing with some key injuries on offense. T.J. Hockenson still isn't back from the torn ACL he suffered towards the end of 2023, and Jordan Addison's ankle injury might keep him out of Week 1. So, Minnesota might have a hard time scoring early in the season.

On the other side of the ball, Blake Cashman is banged up. But one positive that came out of the preseason was that Lewis Cine played well. A first-round pick in 2022, Cine hasn't had a great start to his career. He broke his leg as a rookie and wasn't able to find his groove in 2023. But he was flying around the field in the preseason, looking a lot like he did in Georgia. He should be able to find a way to contribute, or Minnesota can deal him for a draft pick.

SUPER BOWL
80-1

NFC
40-1

NFC NORTH
11-1



PLAYER TO WATCH WR TRISHTON JACKSON

With uncertainty surrounding Addison heading into the year, don't be surprised if Jackson makes an impact. The 6-foot-1 wideout scored a touchdown in all three preseason games, and he had four catches for 100 yards in preseason Week 1. He made contested catches, was fearless over the middle of the field and was good after the catch. If the Vikings don't keep him around, he'll quickly latch on with another team.



ATLANTA FALCONS

“Mike showed us last week enough that we don’t have to play him in the preseason,” said Falcons coach Raheem Morris after Penix Jr’s performance against Miami in the preseason opener. Kirk Cousins, who signed a four-year, \$180 million deal in the offseason, is expected to be ready for Week 1, but the Falcons will be comfortable trotting out their rookie if the veteran isn’t recovered from his Achilles injury. Morris was especially impressed with the way Penix changed protections at the line of scrimmage.

There’s some speculation that Penix was held out the final two games of the preseason because Cousins won’t be ready. There are others that believe the front office was afraid of Penix playing well and sparking a quarterback controversy. There probably isn’t truth to either, but it’ll be fun to monitor this situation all year.

One thing that was clear in the preseason was that Atlanta is missing something in the secondary. Outside of AJ Terrell, who just signed a four-year, \$81 million extension, it’s pretty thin. That’s why Atlanta just signed Justin Simmons.

SUPER BOWL
30-1

NFC
13-1

NFC SOUTH
-130

PLAYER TO WATCH WR RAY-RAY MCCLOUD III

Outside of Drake London and Darnell Mooney, the Falcons aren’t in great shape at wide receiver. One player that could take advantage of that is McCloud, who had 12 catches for 135 yards with the 49ers last season. McCloud is in line to be the team’s No. 3 wideout. He did a lot of work with Cousins in training camp, and it seems like he’s going to be a big part of the passing game. His ability to make plays after the catch should be a welcome addition to this offense. On top of that, McCloud is an effective special teams player.



TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Dave Canales did great work with Baker Mayfield, playing a big role in the former Heisman winner signing a three-year deal worth up to \$115 million. With that in mind, there’s naturally some concern over Canales having bolted to be the coach of the Panthers. However, there must have been a collective sigh of relief after Tampa Bay marched down the field for an opening-drive touchdown against Miami in preseason Week 3. Mayfield went 3 for 3 for 54 yards and Rachaad White rushed four times for 16 yards and a score.

Todd Bowles was considering giving the starters a significant workload in the game, but he was so impressed that he rested them after the score. That was the first, and only, taste of preseason action for the first team.

Something specifically worth noting is that the Buccaneers ground attack has looked good under new offensive coordinator Liam Cohen. Things should only get better as rookie Graham Barton, a first-round pick in 2024, gets more comfortable. Barton played well enough to unseat Robert Hainsey as the team’s starting center, and he should continue to improve with more reps.

It’s also worth mentioning that Chase McLaughlin drilled a 51-yard field goal and went 3 for 3 on extra points. McLaughlin was 1 for 3 on field goals in the first two weeks of preseason, and local media members were pressing Bowles about whether he’d bring in another kicker.

SUPER BOWL
80-1

NFC
35-1

NFC SOUTH
+320

PLAYER TO WATCH LB JOSE RAMIREZ

Ramirez was just a practice squad player in 2023, but he might be an important part of the Tampa Bay pass rush to start the season. YaYa Diaby is dealing with a pretty significant high ankle sprain, and Randy Gregory was released after failing to report to training camp. That means that the Buccaneers are light on players that can get after the quarterback. Well, Ramirez consistently got into the backfield in the preseason, and he even had a three-sack game against Jacksonville in Week 2.



NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

The Saints are banged up in the secondary, so seeing rookie corner Kool-Aid McKinstry go down with a leg injury in preseason Week 2 was quite the blow. McKinstry looked great in a win over the Cardinals the week prior. Fortunately, McKinstry avoided a long-term injury, but New Orleans will be hoping to see him on the field sooner rather than later.

Chase Young's name came up often in the offseason. The second pick in the 2022 NFL Draft hasn't lived up to the hype early in his career, but he's on a one-year deal with the Saints and he's out to prove he deserves a big contract. When New Orleans took on San Francisco, Young's former team, in the second week of preseason, he was the best player on the field. Young was explosive in getting after the quarterback, and he was a monster against the run. It feels like he's hungrier than ever, and veteran Demario Davis said he wouldn't be surprised if Young is in the Defensive Player of the Year conversation.

Of course, the Saints defense isn't the problem. New Orleans was fifth in EPA per play allowed last year. It's Derek Carr and the offense that will need to rise to the occasion. Carr didn't look great in his limited preseason reps, so that side of the ball is still a major question mark.

SUPER BOWL

100-1

NFC

45-1

NFC SOUTH

+400

PLAYER TO WATCH QB TAYSOM HILL

Broncos head coach Sean Payton will be admiring from afar, as it certainly looks like this could be a big year for Hill. New Orleans has featured him heavily throughout the offseason, and it might not be the worst idea in the world. Despite being 34 years old, he has the speed required to provide a spark to a lifeless unit. New offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak really likes what Hill brings as a runner. In fact, it was Hill that punctuated a scoring drive with the first team in a preseason game against the 49ers in Week 2. Expect to see a lot of him in the red zone.

CAROLINA PANTHERS

We didn't see too much of second-year signal caller Bryce Young in the preseason, but he performed at a high level in joint practices with the Jets. Young was also superb in his short time on the field against the Bills in Week 3 of the preseason. He played one drive but went 6 for 8 for 70 yards and a score. After that, Canales had seen enough and pulled the first team offense.

One of the keys to Young's success has been strong play up front, which is to be expected after the amount of money Carolina pumped into the offensive line. But he also looks comfortable in Canales' system.

Despite the fact that we haven't seen much from Carolina, it appears there's some optimism in the air. When we released the original NFL Betting Guide, the Panthers win total was just 4.5. That is now sitting at 5.5 at DraftKings Sportsbook, and it's -115 to the Over.

SUPER BOWL

250-1

NFC

120-1

NFC SOUTH

11-1

PLAYER TO WATCH CB D'SHAWN JAMISON

Dane Jackson is going to miss the first quarter of the regular season, so Carolina is going to need somebody to slot into the No. 2 role under Jaycee Horn. One of the guys that was in consideration was Lamar Jackson (a different one), but the Panthers cut him after Week 2 of the preseason. That presents a real opportunity for Jamison, who was one of the team's standouts in training camp and the preseason. Jamison is far from a lockdown corner, but he's solid enough as a bend-don't-break option.



SAN FRANCISCO

49ERS

The 49ers have been looking for edge rushers that can take advantage of the attention Nick Bosa demands on the other side of the line. San Francisco brought in Leonard Floyd and Yetur Gross-Matos to address that. The problem is that both players suffered knee injuries in the 49ers' win over the Raiders in the third week of preseason.

It'll also be very interesting to see how Brock Purdy performs out the gate. Purdy threw a pick against Las Vegas, and we mostly saw up-and-down play out of him in the preseason. That came after reports that he was struggling in training camp. But we have heard this with Purdy before, and he tends to figure it out when the lights are brightest. So, it could be a non-issue. But San Francisco's pass blocking isn't as reliable as the run blocking, and the team also wants to lessen the load on Christian McCaffrey this year. That means Purdy will need to be solid right away.

We're also still awaiting the conclusion of the Brandon Aiyuk and Trent Williams sagas. The Steelers have been heavily linked to the wideout all offseason, but he's still in San Francisco and an extension is a possibility. Meanwhile, Williams is still holding out for a new deal. He's arguably the most important player on the team, so San Francisco badly needs to iron something out here.

SUPER BOWL

+600

NFC

+250

NFC WEST

-195

PLAYER TO WATCH

RB JORDAN MASON

"We have guys that can run the ball... We have to protect Christian from himself." That was a June quote from head coach Kyle Shanahan, and it's something to consider if you're looking at Overs on McCaffrey's player prop markets. We also saw Mason seamlessly run with the first team against the Raiders, rushing for 42 yards and a touchdown on only eight carries. Don't be surprised if Mason unseats Elijah Mitchell as San Francisco's No. 2 back. And whoever does win that battle could be in for a decent-sized workload.



LOS ANGELES

RAMS

It's hard to learn much of anything from the Rams in the preseason. Sean McVay doesn't feel in-game reps are important enough to risk the long-term health of his starters, and it's hard to argue with the logic.

One thing we did see is that Stetson Bennett isn't worthy of being a backup — even if he will be out of necessity early on. Bennett has some juice in his legs and can occasionally make some nice throws, but his decision making is a nightmare — especially for a quarterback that is viewed as a game manager. With Jimmy Garoppolo suspended the first two games, the Rams better hope Matthew Stafford is healthy. Stafford is back to practicing in full, but he has been dealing with a hamstring issue.

We also learned that McVay values third-round pick Blake Corum quite a bit. The former Michigan star was held out of the preseason with the rest of Los Angeles' key pieces. Perhaps we'll see something close to a full split between Corum and Kyren Williams.

If you're high on Los Angeles, you're going to have to pay up to take the Over on 8.5 wins. The Over was juiced to -140 at DraftKings when we put out the first guide. It's up at -160 now.

SUPER BOWL

30-1

NFC

15-1

NFC WEST

+350

PLAYER TO WATCH

WR JORDAN WHITTINGTON

It remains to be seen what type of role a rookie wideout can carve out in Los Angeles. The Rams are pretty set with Cooper Kupp, Puka Nacua and Demarcus Robinson at the position. However, Whittington will be ready if called upon. The sixth-round pick out of Texas was a target machine in the preseason. He's good at finding gaps in the defense, and he's not afraid to take hits over the middle of the field. Sean McVay raved about Whittington's play in training camp. It wouldn't be shocking if he overtakes Robinson in three-wide sets.



SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

New offensive coordinator Ryan Grubb, who held the same position with the Washington Huskies last year, has made his presence felt early. The Seahawks were near the top of the NFL in motion in the preseason, and they were also heavily utilizing RPOs and play action. All of that helped Sam Howell, Seattle's backup quarterback, find success. That's important with Geno Smith's history of getting banged up. And overall, the idea of the Seahawks' talented trio of wideouts, along with Smith and a good group of rushers, being in the Grubb offense is exciting.

The offense isn't the only side of the ball changing though. New head coach Mike Macdonald, last year's defensive coordinator in Baltimore, and defensive coordinator Aden Durde have also breathed some life into the defense. We didn't see much from the Seahawks starters, but there was a little more creativity in changing up formations and disguising blitzes — or bringing them from different parts of the defense. Unfortunately Seattle edge rusher Uchenna Nwosu got hurt in the final preseason game and he'll miss some time.

Pete Carroll did some great things in Seattle, but his teams were generally predictable. This new era of Seahawks football will be innovative. People are buying, too. The Over on 7.5 wins is now juiced to -150 at DraftKings.

SUPER BOWL

65-1

NFC

28-1

NFC WEST

+650

PLAYER TO WATCH WR LAVISKA SHENAULT JR.

Look, Shenault always pops up as a "player to watch" and never seems to actually produce. I get it. However, the jack of all trades, master of none has been a standout for Seattle in the preseason. Shenault has made a huge impact as a special teams player, and Grubb also likes him as both a pass catcher and a runner. So, don't be surprised if he ends up being a useful gadget player for the Seahawks. At the very least, his presence on the field will make it hard for defenses to roll double coverage in the direction of DK Metcalf.



ARIZONA CARDINALS

We didn't see Kyler Murray in the preseason, but the buzz surrounding this new-look Cardinals offense is palpable. Arizona beat writers continue to praise Murray for his command of the offense, as well as his leadership. It also sounds like Marvin Harrison Jr. looks the part of an elite wide receiver, which is what the Cardinals are expecting from the fourth overall pick. However, Harrison won't have to do it alone. Everybody has hyped the play of wide receivers Michael Wilson, Greg Dortch and Zay Jones, and tight end Trey McBride is a big-time weapon.

As far as the preseason goes, the Cardinals simply didn't give their starters enough run. So, it's hard to take much away from it. But one thing that did stand out was that the pass blocking along the offensive line was a nightmare. Sure, Arizona's starters weren't out there, so that could change immediately. But some of the Cardinals' key depth pieces, like Elijah Wilkinson, Isaiah Adams and Jon Gaines II, haven't looked good.

On the flip side, the team's pass rush was better than expected. There might not be a clear stud in the group, but Arizona seems to press the right buttons in shuffling guys in and out.

It's also hard to ignore the play of rookie running back Trey Benson. He should be the backup as soon as Week 1, and he'll likely see real work this year.

SUPER BOWL

100-1

NFC

50-1

NFC WEST

13-1

PLAYER TO WATCH LB XAVIER THOMAS

BJ Ojulari, who had four sacks last season, is out for the year with a torn ACL. That means head coach Jonathan Gannon can use a little pass-rushing juice. Perhaps Thomas can provide that. Thomas battled injuries in his time with Clemson, but he's a former five-star recruit that had three sacks and 25 tackles in 12 games in his final season in college. Thomas also popped in preseason, when he was a consistent presence in the opposing backfield. Arizona might have a little something in this year's fifth-round pick.