VSiN PRO

NFL BETTING GUIDE
PRO EDITION

WHO WILL BE SUPER ENOUGH?
TIPS & STRATEGIES FOR BETTING THE NFL

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- PREVIEWS OF ALL 32 TEAMS
- BEST BETS FROM VSIN HOSTS
- PLAYER PROPS AND PROJECTIONS

VSiN

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CONFERENCE AND TEAM INDEX

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

**ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

Greetings, everyone!

The first of our two football labors of love has arrived with the 2025 VSiN NFL Betting Guide! Much like football, this project is a complete team effort and I would be remiss if I didn't start the Guide by thanking my Senior Editor Zachary Cohen, Editor Michael Dolan, and Guide Designer Extraordinaire Matt Devine.

Many of our VSiN hosts and contributors deserve thanks as well for putting their thoughts and opinions into this year's Guide, as there are more than 110 best bets on futures, props, and awards markets, as well as a win total pick or lean on all 32 teams in our team previews.

Not only is this year's publication chock full of best bets and team previews, we also have a bevy of featured articles, including:

- Steve Makinen on Key Stats for Predicting Improvement/Decline and his Win Total Projections
- Matt Youmans and assorted bookmakers on the Super Bowl futures market
- Josh Appelbaum on How to Use NFL Betting Splits
- Zachary Cohen on Who Will Be This Year's Broncos/Commanders
- Adam Burke on Betting Alternate Win Totals and the Effects of the New Kickoff Rules

We also have two features on season-long props with a dose of fantasy football advice from John Hansen and Ryan Heath of Fantasy Points, including key stats to know and tips for your upcoming drafts.

Here at VSiN, we pride ourselves on having something for everyone and this year's comprehensive NFL preview fulfills that promise. And, hey, that other football labor of love? Our 2025 VSiN College Football Betting Guide comes out on Tuesday, August 5, so we're already hard at work on our next big offering for our valued VSiN Pro Subscribers.

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Tell your friends, tell your family, tell your colleagues and coworkers, tell anybody who will listen why now is the time to join us here at VSiN, THE Sports Betting Network.
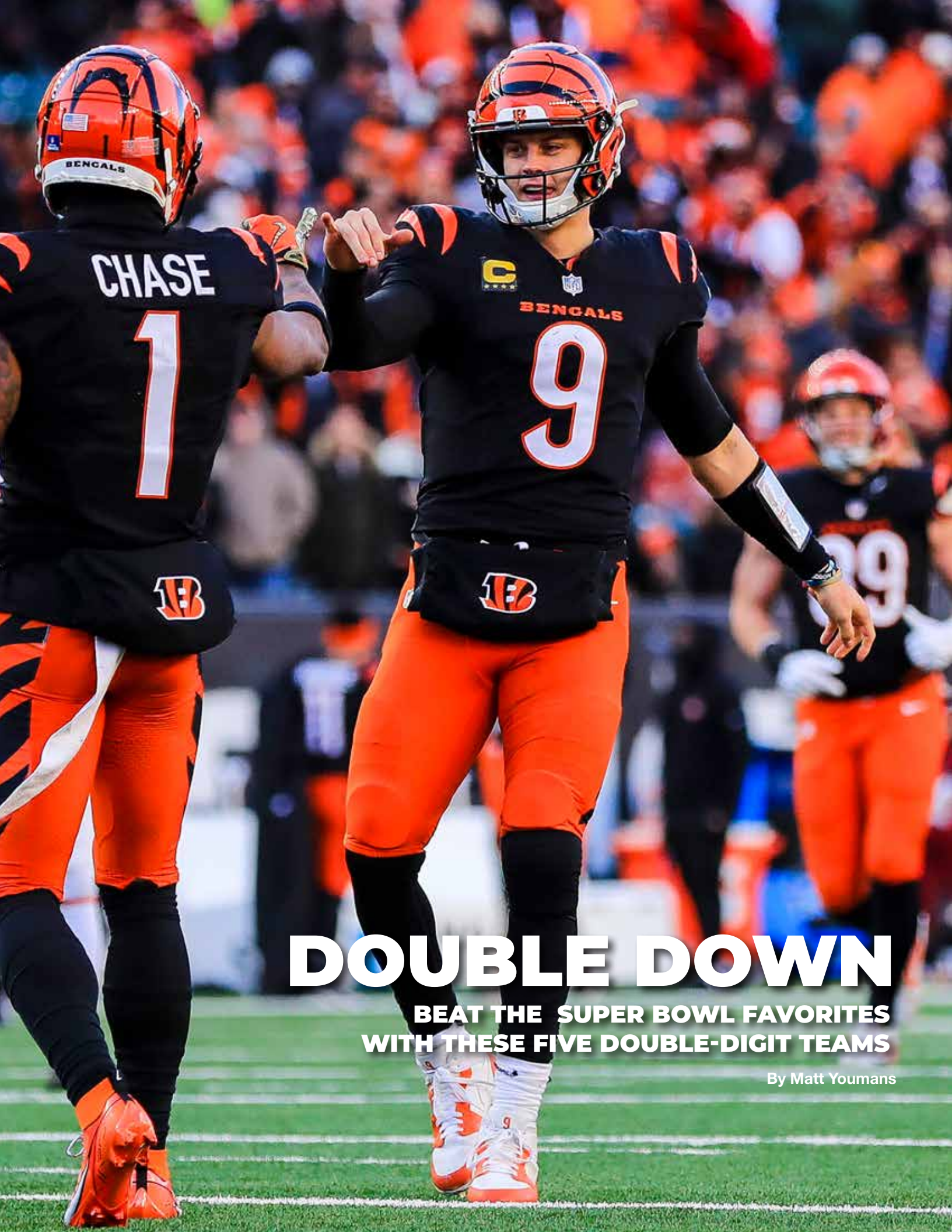
Thank you for your support and good luck this
NFL season!

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2025 SEASON PREDICTIONS

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AFC EAST	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills
AFC NORTH	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Steelers	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Bengals	Ravens	Bengals
AFC SOUTH	Texans	Texans	Texans	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans
AFC WEST	Chiefs	Broncos	Chargers	Broncos	Chiefs	Chiefs	Broncos	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs	Chiefs	Broncos	Broncos	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs	Chargers	Chargers	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs	Broncos
AFC WILD CARD	Bengals	Chiefs	Chiefs	Ravens	Bengals	Steelers	Ravens	Steelers	Broncos	Ravens	Chargers	Bengals	Ravens	Chiefs	Broncos	Bengals	Chargers	Ravens	Bengals	Chiefs	Chiefs	Ravens	Ravens	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs
AFC WILD CARD	Broncos	Bengals	Ravens	Chiefs	Chargers	Broncos	Bengals	Chargers	Chargers	Chiefs	Bengals	Texans	Chiefs	Bengals	Texans	Chargers	Bengals	Broncos	Chargers	Ravens	Broncos	Chargers	Chargers	Texans	Bengals	Ravens
AFC WILD CARD	Chargers	Chargers	Steelers	Chargers	Dolphins	Patriots	Chiefs	Broncos	Bengals	Broncos	Broncos	Raiders	Chargers	Chargers	Bengals	Broncos	Texans	Steelers	Steelers	Broncos	Patriots	Texans	Broncos	Broncos	Steelers	Chargers
NFC EAST	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Commanders	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Commanders	Cowboys	Eagles	Commanders	Eagles	Commanders	Commanders	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles
NFC NORTH	Lions	Lions	Lions	Lions	Packers	Vikings	Lions	Bears	Packers	Lions	Lions	Packers	Packers	Vikings	Packers	Packers	Packers	Lions	Packers	Lions	Lions	Packers	Lions	Lions	Packers	Packers
NFC SOUTH	Falcons	Falcons	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Panthers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Falcons	Falcons	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Panthers	Falcons	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Falcons	Falcons	Buccaneers	Buccaneers	Falcons	Buccaneers
NFC WEST	49ers	Rams	49ers	49ers	Rams	49ers	Rams	Cardinals	49ers	Rams	49ers	Rams	Rams	Rams	49ers	Cardinals	49ers	Seahawks	Rams	49ers	Rams	49ers	49ers	49ers	Rams	Rams
NFC WILD CARD	Commanders	49ers	Rams	Packers	49ers	Rams	49ers	Lions	Rams	Cardinals	Packers	49ers	Eagles	Lions	Lions	Lions	Eagles	Commanders	49ers	Eagles	49ers	Eagles	Eagles	Rams	49ers	Lions
NFC WILD CARD	Packers	Packers	Vikings	Cardinals	Commanders	Commanders	Packers	49ers	Falcons	Giants	Rams	Lions	Lions	Commanders	Rams	Commanders	Rams	49ers	Lions	Packers	Lions	Rams	Packers	Lions	Commanders	49ers
NFC WILD CARD	Rams	Buccaneers	Panthers	Cowboys	Lions	Lions	Bears	Cowboys	Commanders	Bears	Commanders	Buccaneers	Cardinals	49ers	Commanders	Cowboys	Lions	Packers	Vikings	Rams	Buccaneers	Bears	Rams	Falcons	Buccaneers	Cowboys
AFC CHAMPION	Ravens	Ravens	Bills	Bills	Bills	Ravens	Broncos	Bills	Bills	Bengals	Ravens	Bills	Ravens	Bills	Bills	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Texans	Bills	Ravens	Bills
NFC CHAMPION	Commanders	Eagles	Eagles	Lions	Rams	Vikings	Eagles	Eagles	49ers	Buccaneers	49ers	Packers	Rams	Rams	49ers	Packers	49ers	Lions	Eagles	Lions	Packers	49ers	Lions	49ers	Eagles	Rams
SUPER BOWL LX	Ravens	Eagles	Bills	Bills	Bills	Ravens	Eagles	Bills	Bills	Bengals	49ers	Bills	Ravens	Rams	Bills	Packers	Ravens	Lions	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bengals	Lions	Bengals	Ravens	Rams

DOUBLE DOWN

BEAT THE SUPER BOWL FAVORITES WITH THESE FIVE DOUBLE-DIGIT TEAMS

By Matt Youmans

After reaching the playoffs six years in a row and coming up short of the Super Bowl six straight times, Josh Allen and the Bills have to hope seven is their lucky number. The betting public believes in Buffalo, for better or worse.

A behind-the-counter look into NFL futures wagering at Las Vegas books this summer reveals several trends have surfaced across the board. A handful of teams are hot, including a few longer shots, but the Bills are becoming the most popular play in the market.

At Circa Sports, Buffalo is the new Super Bowl favorite at 6-1 odds, leaping over reigning conference champions Philadelphia (+660) and Kansas City (+750). The Bills opened at +800 before attracting the most volume on the board, including a pair of $25,000 wagers, according to Circa vice president of operations Mike Palm.

Allen was voted league MVP last season and led Buffalo to playoff victories over Denver and Baltimore before falling 32-29 in the AFC title game at Kansas City. In the aftermath of their embarrassing loss to the Eagles in the Super Bowl, the Chiefs have dropped from +535.

"The team with the most tickets on it is the Bills," Red Rock sportsbook director Chuck Esposito said. "If you look at their division with the Jets, Dolphins and Patriots, you would think there's a good chance Buffalo is going to be the No. 1 or No. 2 seed in the AFC. But I really like the Ravens more than the Bills."

Bookmakers rarely fear the favorites because short odds don't amount to dangerous liability. At Circa, Baltimore (+650) is the second choice on the board and one of four teams at single-digit odds. At the Westgate Superbook, the Eagles are the favorites at +600, followed by the Bills, Chiefs and Ravens each at +700, and the Lions recently moved to +800.

"The public likes the Bills, but 7-1 takes a while to add up," Westgate oddsmaker Ed Salmons said.

The Westgate took a $20,000 wager on the Lions at 10-1, Salmons said, and that was enough to significantly move the odds at this time of the year. At Circa, where Palm said there is "nothing really on the Lions," the odds on Detroit are 14-1.

"Our largest liability is on the Lions at 10-1," DraftKings oddsmaker Matt Grill said. "I'm surprised, but the bettors believe in them. Of the favorites, that's our biggest loser by far."

The Lions won 15 games to claim the top seed in the NFC last season. However, after Washington rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels outplayed Jared Goff and the Commanders manhandled the Lions in a 45-31 playoff win, the dominoes started falling in Detroit. Offensive coordinator Ben Johnson (Bears) and defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn (Jets) took head coaching jobs prior to the Lions losing two starters on their offensive line.

"You have to wonder if the Lions will take a little step back," Esposito said. "Ben Johnson was good at getting the best out of Goff." After the consensus top five teams on the Super Bowl futures board — Bills, Eagles, Ravens, Chiefs and Lions — the fun for bettors really begins in the hunt for longshots.

"People are looking for value instead of betting the low odds," Esposito said.

A year ago, the Eagles were highlighted in this column at 14-1 odds. Sharp money showed over the summer on Philadelphia, which was my first futures bet last year and a team Salmons bet early at 22-1.

"The Eagles figure to be solid, but you never know with injuries and it's a tougher schedule," Salmons said. "But they still figure to be as good as anyone in the NFC."

For bettors looking to beat the favorites with teams at double-digit odds, here are my five best bets:

BENGALS (20-1)
Cincinnati was upset in its first two home games — by the Patriots in Week 1 and by the Commanders in Week 3 — to wipe out about half of the Circa Survivor field. For those who were burned by the Bengals last season and feel hesitant to buy in this time, that's understandable. Aside from Trey Hendrickson, who led the league with 17.5 sacks, the Bengals ranked either below average or bad in most major defensive categories.

The offense is a much different story. Joe Burrow led the NFL in passing yards (4,918) and touchdowns (43) and remains complemented by receiver Ja'Marr Chase and arguably the best set of playmakers in the league. I bet Burrow at +650 to win MVP and still will consider other futures plays on this team, but the defense raises doubts. Prior to the Chiefs' three-year AFC reign, Cincinnati reached the Super Bowl in 2022, falling 23-20 to the Rams.

RAMS (22-1)
My first bet of this offseason was on the Rams at 30-1 in early March, around the same time VSiN host Mitch Moss said he made the same play. We were not alone because there has been a major move in Los Angeles' odds, which are now 16-1 at Circa. DraftKings offers the best current price at 22-1.

"The team we actually have the most liability on — and I agree with this — is the Rams," Esposito said.

Veteran quarterback Matthew Stafford, 37, still has what it takes to win another Super Bowl and should be more productive this season with dynamic receivers Davante Adams and Puka Nacua. A defensive front seven led by Jared Verse is loaded with young talent. Last season, the Rams rallied from a 1-4 start to finish 10-7, making it four NFC West titles and six playoff appearances in coach Sean McVay's eight years. Stafford had a shot to stop the Eagles' run to the Super Bowl, but his late drive died deep in Philadelphia territory in a 28-22 loss.

"If you look back, the Rams gave the Eagles their best game," Salmons said. "The Rams are so much more of a complete team than the 49ers, but the only issue is the schedule. If the 49ers don't win 10 games, they should fire everyone because their schedule is so easy. I don't like the 49ers' team at all."

VIKINGS (30-1)
The most noticeable change in Minnesota will be the quarterback. Sam Darnold, who passed for 35 touchdowns in a breakout year, is out

and replaced by J.J. McCarthy, who missed his rookie season with a knee injury. Darnold benefited by learning under coach Kevin O'Connell, but Darnold was a disaster in the Vikings' final two games — blowout losses to the Lions and Rams — and McCarthy should be a capable young starter. After finishing 14-3, the Vikings' expectations have surprisingly plummeted in the betting market.

"They can't stop betting the Vikings," Salmons said. "I'm not a Darnold guy, but there's no way McCarthy can be that good in his first year."

The NFC North was the strongest division in the NFL last season, at least until all three playoff teams busted out without a win. Green Bay might be the team about to break through, but the division appears up for grabs among the Lions, Packers and Vikings.

"I keep thinking the Packers will take a step forward and they kind of run in place," Palm said. "We're seeing Vikings' money coming in."

Instead of a Super Bowl play on Minnesota, the better bet is probably the win total. Palm and Moss have bet the Vikings Over 8.5 wins.

BRONCOS (40-1)
It's a lot to ask of second-year quarterback Bo Nix to win an AFC headlined by Mahomes, Allen, Burrow and Lamar Jackson. But I did make two other plays on the Broncos — Over 9.5 wins (+110) and to win the AFC West (+350) — so I'm a believer in this team.

"It wouldn't be a stunner to me if the Chiefs don't win their division," Esposito said. "The Super Bowl blowout was a reality check for them."

Denver returns 20 starters and made key additions to a roster that suddenly ranks among the strongest in the NFL on both sides of the ball. A sophomore slump for Nix is a possibility, but Payton's offense should improve after ranking 10th in scoring at 25 PPG. The defense led the league in sacks (63), ranked third in scoring (18.3 PPG) and looks even better. The Broncos, who were a blocked field goal away from sweeping the Chiefs last year, have what I grade as the best defense and deepest roster in the NFL's toughest division.

STEELERS (67-1)
This is a contrarian opinion, and while I do like this Pittsburgh team more than most, it's a play on the number as much as anything. Circa is dealing almost double the 35-1 price offered at DraftKings. The Steelers ranked eighth in scoring defense (20.4 PPG) and made some shrewd moves in free agency and the draft. Almost no one believes 41-year-old quarterback Aaron Rodgers has much left, which could be a reason to think he's got a surprise season left in him.

"To me, Rodgers doesn't really move the needle at all," Esposito said.

Circa, DraftKings, Red Rock and Westgate bookmakers are reporting action on some other intriguing teams — including the Commanders (18-1), Chargers (28-1), Texans (35-1), Cowboys (60-1) and Cardinals (80-1) — and there's plenty of time this summer to shop around for the best prices.

VSIN TEAM AND PROP BEST BETS

MATT YOUMANS

RAMS OVER 9.5 WINS (-130) AND TO WIN NFC (11/1)

On a snowy January day in Philadelphia, Matthew Stafford had a shot to stop the Eagles' run to the Super Bowl. The Rams advanced to the Philadelphia 21-yard line with 1:25 to go, but the drive died after Stafford was sacked on third down and fired a fourth-down incompletion in a 28-22 loss. Considering the Eagles crushed the Commanders and Chiefs in their next two games, the Rams made a statement about being a team on the rise. Stafford, 37, still has what it takes to win another Super Bowl and should be more productive as a passer this season with Davante Adams and Puka Nacua forming a dynamic receiver duo. Kyren Williams returns after rushing for 1,299 yards and 14 touchdowns. The defensive front seven, featuring linebackers Jared Verse, Byron Young and Omar Speights, and linemen Braden Fiske and Kobie Turner, is stronger with the addition of run-stuffing nose tackle Poona Ford via free agency. In coach Sean McVay's eight years, the Rams own four NFC West titles and six playoff appearances. Last season, after starting 1-4, the young Rams grew up and rallied to finish 10-7. Repeating as the division winner won't be easy, mostly because the 49ers face a softer schedule, but the Rams have the coaching and talent on both sides of the ball to win it all.

BRONCOS OVER 9.5 WINS (+110) AND TO WIN AFC WEST (+350)

After evaluating the preseason games last August, it became apparent to me that almost everyone was underestimating Denver's depth and talent, including rookie quarterback Bo Nix, and there was a sharp play to be made with Over 5.5 wins. After starting 0-2, Sean Payton coached the Broncos to a 10-7 finish. The time to buy low is history, and the schedule is much more difficult, but I remain dedicated to backing a Denver team that returns 20 starters and made key additions to a roster that suddenly ranks among the strongest in the NFL on both sides of the ball. A sophomore slump for Nix is a possibility, but he's surrounded with more talent and Payton's offense should improve after ranking 10th in scoring at 25 PPG. The Denver defense, which led the league in sacks (63) and ranked third in scoring (18.3 PPG), is the real deal. The Broncos, who were a blocked field goal away from sweeping the Chiefs last year, have the best defense and deepest roster in the NFL's toughest division.

DAVE ROSS

COWBOYS OVER 7.5 WINS (-130) AND TO WIN NFC EAST (8/1)

Yes, call me a homer all you want but I've already played the Cowboys. Three years in a row, this team under "Big Mike" won 12 games and I cashed all of those tickets. Last year was a no play for me because the books finally adjusted. And once Dak Prescott went down, the season was over.

Now, with Big Mike gone, the books are underselling this team big-time. If Prescott stays healthy, I think they're also a good play to win the division. (Yes, that's in pocket, too.)

Why? If Brian Schottenheimer is half as good as his dad was, this is an eight-win team at minimum.

I loved the subtle offseason moves. Of course, everyone is talking about George Pickens at wide receiver, but I'm looking at Tyler Booker coming in and starting right away on the younger, revamped offensive line. If there's one thing this team has traditionally done well, it's draft offensive lineman — and I think that's all Prescott really needs. A run game will help, too. I believe the Cowboys addressed all of it in free agency and the draft.

The defense will be as good as Micah Parsons can be, and he can be the ultimate game wrecker when he's not busy podcasting.

LIONS TO WIN NFC (+550) AND SUPER BOWL (11/1)

Everyone is selling Detroit and I get it. Both coordinators are gone, and the center unexpectedly retired. Now the whispers of "Can Dan Campbell really coach?" are starting again.

Yes, he can.

The best thing he's done? Establish a culture of winning. That is sometimes the hardest thing to do in football. He's done it and then some. And they still have elite offensive talent. And don't look now, but they're going to get back around 4-5 defensive studs that were on IR at the end of the year.

This team will be loaded for Bear, Packer and Viking.

BENGALS TO WIN AFC (10/1) AND SUPER BOWL (20/1)

The division is brutal. The conference is brutal. But I do think the Bengals are flying below the radar. Look, they may have to win every game 38-35, but they may be good enough to do so. Just kidding. Of course, they've got to be better defensively, but that's where Al Golden comes in. Sure, this isn't Notre Dame, but his track record is pretty damn good.

Zac Taylor has the offense humming. Ironically, he may be on the hotseat. This is my "Maverick" selection. They are either going to win the battle or crash and burn. I'm banking on the former rather than the latter

DAVE TULEY

LIONS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+135), OVER 11.5 WINS (+125) AND TO WIN SUPER BOWL (+1325)

I know these sound chalky for me, but I see value with the Lions at plus-money to win the NFC North and Over 11.5 season wins, and as of the deadline for this VSiN NFL Betting Guide, they were still being offered as high as +1325 to win the Super Bowl at Circa Sports (for the sake of comparison, 11-1 at William Hill, 10-1 at DraftKings and 8-1 at Westgate). There were definitely times last season when the Lions were the best team in the NFL and went 15-2. We don't expect 15 wins again, but going Over 11.5 just needs a dozen wins so even a regression of three victories gets us there. The Lions are the two-time defending division champs, so the only reason they're not odds-on favorites is because the division did so well overall last year, but I'll still take the plus-money there, too.

TEXANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+105) OVER 9.5 WINS (+110) AND TO WIN SUPER BOWL (34/1)

I was high on the Texans last year and they were among the top AFC teams (though a cut below the Chiefs, Bills and Ravens) all season, but didn't really challenge for the AFC's top seed and first-round bye. They won the AFC South and routed the Chargers 32-12 in the wild-card round before losing 23-14 to the eventual AFC champion Chiefs. It'll be just as tough of a fight this year, but there were many times in my horse handicapping career where I would jump on a horse at nice odds. If it lost, I wouldn't throw out my opinion and instead bet them again in their next out, often at better odds (like I did last year where I had Dornoch in the Kentucky Derby but stuck with him in the Belmont, where he won at 17-1). It's better to be on a horse/team early as opposed to later when everyone is on the bandwagon and kills the price. So, I can't pass up 30-1 or better on the Texans this season in case it was just a matter of being on them too early. And just like last year, when I still made money on them to win the AFC South and go Over their season win total, I like both those bets again at plus-money as I don't see the Jaguars or Colts closing the gap in the division.

BRONCOS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (-105) AND POSSIBLY WIN AFC WEST (+350)

The Broncos improved from 8-9 in 2003 to 10-7 last year and made the playoffs before losing to the Bills in the wild-card round. Rookie Bo Nix replaced Russell Wilson as the starting QB and the team was competitive all season. They finished third in the AFC West but still have upside and I believe they should be favored to make the playoffs again. I'm tempted to grab +350 on the Broncos to win the division, but not sure that's as good of betting value as they would have to leapfrog not only the Chiefs but also the Chargers. But I wouldn't talk anyone out of it.

JENSEN LEWIS

49ERS TO WIN NFC (10/1) AND SUPER BOWL (20/1)

The 49ers head into the 2025 season with cautious optimism, fueled by a favorable schedule and the return of key contributors — but shadowed by lingering injury concerns. With an opponent win percentage of just .415 based on 2024 results — the lowest in the league — the path to a bounce-back season is there for the taking.

Offensively, San Francisco remains dangerous. Quarterback Brock Purdy anchors a group that includes a hopefully healthy Christian McCaffrey, George Kittle and a revamped receiving corps led by Brandon Aiyuk (returning from ACL surgery), Jauan Jennings, and rookie Ricky Pearsall. If Aiyuk regains form, the passing attack could be among the league's best.

On defense, the return of Robert Saleh's scheme and a younger, retooled line around Nick Bosa may help fix last year's struggles against the run. Six primetime games and a favorable late-season stretch — five of their final eight games are at home against teams that had losing records in 2024 — give the 49ers a chance to build momentum.

Injuries were the story of 2024. McCaffrey appeared in just four games and Aiyuk was lost after Week 7. On defense, the departures of Talanoa Hufanga and Dre Greenlaw leave depth concerns, while safety Malik Mustapha's ACL recovery likely rules him out for Week 1, putting early pressure on rookies to contribute. Special teams also remain a question mark and must improve under new coordinator Brant Boyer.

If healthy, Purdy could flirt with 4,500 passing yards and McCaffrey is a prime Comeback Player of the Year candidate. Rookies like cornerback Mykel Williams and linebacker Alfred Collins will need to make immediate impacts. Saleh's return is key to shaping a young defense with upside.

Health is the variable that will define this team. If the 49ers stay out of the medical tent, a 12-win season and NFC West title are well within reach. If injuries return, so could the struggles. Still, with talent on both sides of the ball and an easy schedule, a playoff return feels not just possible, but probable — with dark horse potential if everything clicks.

CHARGERS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (-140), WIN AFC (12/1) AND WIN SUPER BOWL (25/1)

Expectations are high for the Chargers entering 2025, with Jim Harbaugh's strong first season setting the tone for a team aiming to contend. A tough schedule — the 11th hardest in the league (.522 opponent win rate) — opens with a high-profile international showdown against the Chiefs in São Paulo, Brazil.

The defense remains the foundation, finishing first in points allowed (301) last season. Anchored by Derwin James and Khalil Mack, the unit now adds promising rookies Myles Cole (edge, Texas Tech) and Payton Wilson (linebacker, NC State). On offense, Justin Herbert leads with his elite decision-making — when protected — and second-year sensation Ladd McConkey, coming off an 82-catch, 1,149-yard rookie season, adds explosiveness to the passing game.

The additions of Najee Harris and Mekhi Becton aim to revitalize the run game, especially under OC Greg Roman's physical, run-heavy scheme. A late-November bye offers a well-timed reset for the playoff push.

Still, concerns linger. The offensive line's interior remains shaky (20th in run block win rate), which could again expose Herbert, who was sacked four times in last year's playoff loss. The receiver room lacks depth beyond McConkey, with Mike Williams still inconsistent and Josh Palmer now gone. The team will also travel a league-high 37,086 miles, with difficult back-to-back matchups late in the year (Eagles, Chiefs in Weeks 14–15) challenging their durability.

Losing Joey Bosa and cornerback Kristian Fulton (signed with Chiefs) creates pressure on the edge and in the secondary, where Donte Jackson and rookie contributors must step up to maintain last season's elite performance.

If Herbert stays healthy and the run game clicks, he could top 4,500 passing yards and the Chargers should push for 10–12 wins. A wild-card berth — or even an AFC West title — is within reach, provided they survive the travel grind and capitalize on key home primetime games.

STEVE MAKINEN

FALCONS OVER 7.5 WINS (-140)
Last year the Falcons had a bold strategy of signing veteran QB Kirk Cousins and then opting for a QB (Michael Penix) in the first round of the draft. The two moves were supposed to go hand-in-hand, with Cousins not only keeping the seat warm and the team in contention, but also helping to get Penix ready for the challenges of the NFL. When Cousins struggled beyond expectation, the plan was accelerated, with Penix eventually taking over late in the season. He looked every bit the part of a potential future star, leading the team to a near playoff-clinching win at Washington in Week 17. Atlanta eventually settled in at 8-9 after the final two losses in overtime, but Penix had proven himself by guiding the offense to 32 PPG in his three starts. With the left-hander now locked in as the answer at the game's most crucial position, he is surrounded by a plethora of young and talented stars at the skill positions, namely Bijan Robinson, Drake London, and Kyle Pitts. His team also falls into a unique season-to-season system showing that since 2009, there have been 43 teams that had negative turnover differentials and won less than six games against the spread. All but seven of these teams improved their outright winning percentage as well, by an average of about 20%, and 13 of them qualified for the playoffs. The NFC South has a lot of question marks in my opinion, and Atlanta looks ready to ascend.

JAGUARS OVER 7.5 WINS (-125)
New head coach Liam Coen has a big job to do, as after leading the Jaguars to back-to-back 9-8 seasons that included a playoff win, things unraveled last season for predecessor Doug Pederson, who was consequently fired. What makes this situation better than a lot of others however, is that Jacksonville was 10-7 ATS, a sign that they were playing competitively. On another good note, this franchise has had a tendency for bouncing back quickly after rough seasons recently, as they went from 3-14 to 9-8 from '21 to '22, and from 3-13 to 10-6 from '16 to '17. It can be done. The biggest challenge for Coen, having last worked with QB Matt Stafford as OC for the Rams, will be to get QB Trevor Lawrence back up to speed after an injury-riddled '24 campaign. His numbers weren't bad in 10 games, but if Coen can get anything resembling the Rams' passing attack going, the Jaguars have the weapons outside to produce a lot offensively. Getting back to the nice point spread mark last year, this franchise will qualify for a very strong bounce back system in '25: Since '93, 46 teams have lost 8+ games in "close loss" format, that being one possession or less (8 pts). Of those, 39 improved the next season, with a combined average IMPROVEMENT of a hefty 3.97 wins per season. In addition, there have been 18 teams since 2009 that had a negative or even turnover differential yet still managed to win double-digit games against the spread. Eleven of those teams reached the postseason the next year. This is a team that has assembled some nice talent in a division ripe for the picking. Wipe the slate completely clean for Jacksonville in 2025.

RAIDERS OVER 6.5 WINS (-145)
How much difference does stability at head coach and quarterback mean to a NFL franchise? In my opinion, it means more than you can imagine, and what happens in Las Vegas this year for the Raiders will stand as evidence of it. After juggling coaches and QBs over the last few seasons, this franchise finally gets some solid foundation in two of the most critical areas of team building as they bring in HC Pete Carroll and QB Geno Smith, who worked together in Seattle as recently as two years ago. Just simply looking at the similar veteran QB signings of late, the combined success rate of the last 32 qualifying veteran QB players was 230-221-1 SU (51%) & 217-221-14 ATS (49.5%). That's a record above .500 with nothing else considered. Last season, the Raiders lost eight games by double-digit margins, but none by 20+. Those are actually good signs of teams ready to bounce back. Over the L31 seasons, there have been 78 teams that have lost at least eight games in a season by double-digit margins. Of those, 59 IMPROVED the next season, and by an average of 3.68 wins per year. Regarding turnover issues last year, Smith should help that improve, and since 2020, there have been 15 teams that endured a turnover differential of -0.6 per game or worse and did not make the playoffs. All but two of those teams improved the next season. The average regular season win improvement was 3.8 wins per season for the other 10 teams. In the draft this past April, Las Vegas also added explosive RB Ashton Jeanty out of Boise State. Between him and Smith, this offense should be MUCH improved. This is a pretty low win total for a team that now has some juice.

SAINTS UNDER 6.5 WINS (-190)
I had the pleasure of attending a late season Monday night game at Lambeau Field this past season when the Packers clobbered an overmatched Saints team 34-0. It was almost as if New Orleans wasn't in the same league. They started QB Spencer Rattler that game and the offense was abysmal. It seems as though Rattler could be in line to be the full-time starter in '25 after Derek Carr's sudden offseason retirement, although supposedly rookie second-round draftee Tyler Shough has shown some promise. Whoever it winds up being, this looks like it's going to be a big job for new head coach Kellen Moore, and a big chance for a guy who has led some of the more prolific offenses in the league over the last seven years as a QB's coach and coordinator, including a year ago for the Super Bowl champion Eagles. The Saints come off a season in which they failed to score 20 PPG for just the second time since 2005. They also allowed their most points per game in a season since 2016. There was also talk in the offseason of trading some of the franchise's biggest stars in an effort to accelerate the rebuild, including WR Chris Olave and an aging RB Alvin Kamara. After what I saw under the lights in Green Bay, combined with what was a challenging offseason, to me, the Saints have the feel of a team that might be heading for the first draft pick next April.

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

BILLS AFC #1 SEED (+195) AND MOST WINS (+350)
A lot is set up nicely for the Bills. The schedule of opponents is relatively easy compared to the rest of the league and the spacing of the games as well as travel could not have broken down any better. Buffalo travels the least amount of miles of any team this coming season and they will play just one game outside the Eastern time zone all year when they travel to Houston in Week 12. Sure, they begin the year with the Ravens and have to play four primetime games in the first six weeks, but their short-week game on TNF comes after playing the Jets, and it's also at home which gives them less of a disadvantage. Speaking of being home, the toughest games for Buffalo will all be in Orchard Park with the Ravens in Week 1, Chiefs in Week 9, Bengals in Week 14 and Eagles in Week 17. The Bills should have no problem navigating this cake of a schedule and finish with the #1 seed in the AFC and the most wins in the NFL.

CHRISTIAN MCCAFFREY COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR (+350)
Okay first off, let's start with a reality check. While it's cute to look at players who underperformed last year as potential winners of this award, the league specifically made sure the voting goes to only those who missed time for injuries, not performance. After Joe Flacco won the award a few years ago, the league released a statement saying, "The spirit of the AP Comeback Player of the Year award is to honor a player who has demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity by overcoming illness, physical injury or other circumstances that led him to miss playing time the previous season. The decision to provide this guidance was made last December but could not be implemented for the 2023 awards because the season was almost completed."

Now that that's out of the way, we look at players who missed significant time due to injury, and the first and most obvious name is Christian McCaffrey. Frankly, I don't get how he is not the overwhelming favorite to win this. C-Mac played in just 4 games last year, and while you want to be hesitant with a guy coming off injuries, perhaps the time off helps a player who is used as much as he is in this offense. McCaffrey is a perennial Offensive Player of the Year and MVP candidate, and in his limited time in the 49er offense, has put up over 2400 rushing yards, 1100 receiving yards, and scored 31 touchdowns in 31 games played. The 49ers also must feel confident about McCaffrey's ability to come back from injury, as they traded away backup RB Jordan Mason and did not draft a RB early in the draft. It's easy to see C-Mac have his normal role, if not a bigger one in this 49er offense now without Deebo Samuel. McCaffrey should bounce back to All-Pro form and be a clear winner of this award.

PAULY HOWARD

LIONS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-120)

Both coordinators are gone and the genius Ben Johnson takes his creativity and imagination to Chicago. The Lions will play 11 of their 17 games against teams coming off playoff berths, with seven on the road. This is the most difficult schedule I have seen. They play three first-place teams from last season, and going into the Sunday slate on the divisional round six teams were left. The Lions play five of them on the road. Dan Campbell is Coach of the Year if they win 11 games.

49ERS OVER 10.5 WINS (+115)

The Niners are 9-3 in their last 12 meetings with the Rams and face an easy schedule this year. Injuries have killed this team in the last 3-4 years, so I am betting on health being the biggest key. They will be better than Arizona and Seattle and cannot have a repeat of the special teams disaster last year. San Fran lost six games by one score and will bounce back with a close of 6-2 or 7-1 at the end of the season. Brock Purdy got paid and should have a big year like two years ago when he was the favorite to win MVP before a Christmas Day meltdown against Baltimore.

RAMS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (22/1)

The Rams gave the Eagles all they could handle in a blizzard and had first-and-goal for the win.

They have a good coach, organization and talent, and could win the division — with a bye perhaps. This price is way too high. They swept the 49ers last year and McVay owns Arizona and Seattle also. Grabbing Davante Adams will be huge and take pressure off Matt Stafford and Puka Nacua.

SAINTS TO FINISH WITH WORST RECORD (+500)

When someone who covers the team says don't bet a dime on the Saints, you have to listen. Mike Detillier from WWL knows his stuff and thinks this team will struggle — along with rookie quarterback Tyler Shough. With a new coach and the worst team in the division, while also considering Cleveland and Tennessee should be better, I will go with New Orleans to have the worst record/fewest wins.

AFC SOUTH EXACTAS

Houston - Jacksonville - Indianapolis - Tennessee (+900)
Houston - Indianapolis - Jacksonville - Tennessee (12/1)

KELLEY BYDLON

COWBOYS OVER 392.5 POINTS SCORED

The Cowboys are a team I'm very interested in this season. While I don't think they are a true contender in the NFC, or even their own division, I do think they are being slept on a bit by bettors (definitely not by ESPN). While there are concerns on the defensive side of the ball and the offensive line, a healthy Dak Prescott will be back, and he's now surrounded with an impressive group of weapons in CeeDee Lamb, George Pickens, and Jake Ferguson. While I'm still considering an Over play on their win total, the route I've decided to go early is betting Over their team total points scored for the season at over 392.5. Yes, they fell below this last year, but Prescott only played eight games, and this team had easily cleared that mark in the three seasons prior. Considering they are only favored in six games, as of now, and I do have concerns with their defense, there is a good chance this offense is playing some catch-up late in games which could lead to more points.

GIANTS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-120)

This was the first bet I made this offseason. Juice has moved a tad, but I still think it's a play. They have the toughest schedule in the league and I think they get absolutely beat up in the division. I have no idea what's going to happen at the quarterback position, but I don't expect any of the three of them to find too much success with this roster. However, Jameis Winston would at least make things fun…just had to throw that in.

BILLS MOST REGULAR SEASON WINS (+450)

Yeah, they're the favorite in this market, but if you can get 4-1 or better on the Bills to have most regular season wins, it's a must play for me. You'd think the defense can only improve after last season, they have an MVP at quarterback who has played 16+ games every season since he became a full-time starter (he doesn't get hurt), they have the fifth-easiest strength of schedule (based off win totals) entering the season, and I am down compared to the market on almost every other team in their division.

Now, if you have concerns about that Week 1 matchup against Baltimore, that's fair. You can always jump in at a better price after that game if you think they lose and still want a piece. But part of this bet for me is them winning that Week 1 game.

SEAHAWKS TO FINISH FOURTH IN NFC WEST (+120)

I THINK this is the only team future bet I'll end up on in the NFC West. I've been considering some bullish plays on the Rams, and do lean to them winning the division, but I do think it will likely be tight with the 49ers. One of the teams I thought people were low on last year was Arizona. Now, the expectations have ticked up this offseason, but I think their win total is about right, and if I like all three of the Rams, 49ers, and Cardinals, the Seahawks are an easy fade look for me in the division. I don't necessarily think they are terrible, but they are the odd man out. I have enough questions and concerns about the coaching staff and quarterback position to put them behind the others.

*WEEK 1: CARDINALS -4.5 (-115)

This is still up at FanDuel/Boyd. Most shops have gone to 6 on this game against the Saints. I expect the Saints to be the worst team in the NFL this season, and the first week of the year with a rookie QB likely starting probably won't be their high point. On the flip side, I am high on the Cardinals this season. I rarely make Week 1 bets this early, but anything under 6 is a player here for me.

GREG PETERSON

WEEK 1: COWBOYS +7
Many people are bearish on the hire of Brian Schottenheimer because he isn't a sexy name for the Cowboys, but he might be just what the team needs to be at their best on offense. The Eagles will have a lot of pressure on them after winning the Super Bowl and the Cowboys may not be deep, but they have a bunch of top end talent and until injuries pile up, can provide some unexpected value with that talent.

STEELERS UNDER 8.5 WINS (-110)
The Steelers have the circus coming into town with Aaron Rodgers, who did not sign with the team until early June. A north of 40-year-old quarterback needing to learn a new system with not a lot of chemistry with his teammates, two years after a catastrophic injury, isn't good to start with. While Mike Tomlin is an amazing coach and dealt with the headache of Antonio Brown very well, this will be played out in the media much more. This is also a brutal division with a Ravens team that is one of the best in the league, and the Bengals have potential to be dangerous once again. Rodgers will end Tomlin's streak of a .500 record or better with his giant ego and not being who he once was at his advanced age.

WILL HILL

STEELERS ROUND ELIMINATION WILD CARD +330 (DK)
Steeler' fans are all too familiar with early exits under Mike Tomlin, as they have been 'one and done' four of the last five seasons. For all of the praise Tomlin gets for never having a losing year, the 2016 season is the last time his team won a playoff game. With Aaron Rodgers on board, I believe the Steelers still have the defense and the culture to once again possibly eke out 9 or 10 wins and make the playoffs, but not enough upside to win the AFC North, meaning they'd be on the road in the Wild Card Round. If that's how the season plays out, not only will they be on the road, but they will likely run into one of the many elite quarterbacks the AFC has to offer. Their last three playoff losses have come at the hands of Lamar Jackson, Josh Allen, and Patrick Mahomes. I expect a similar fate this season for the over-celebrated Steelers.

GIANTS UNDER 5.5 WINS
I get the sense this will be a popular play, and that always scares me, but not enough to keep me off of it. The Cinderella run of 2022 seems like a distant memory now, as Brian Daboll made the playoffs and won a playoff game in his first Giants' season, but in the two years since has come closer to picking first in the draft than returning to the postseason. This is an obvious pick with one quick look at the schedule. Road games vs. the Commanders and Cowboys, then games vs. the Chiefs and Chargers are just the start of what is a grueling schedule that has only a road game in New Orleans, barring upsets, as a spot to feel good about capturing a win. The aforementioned Daboll is intense, and likely on the hot seat. That combined with a brutal schedule is the recipe for another losing season for "Big Blue", as a coaching change and another poor record seem to be ahead.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

EAGLES UNDER 11.5 WINS (-110)
Obviously, the last time we saw Jalen Hurts and Co. they looked like the Monstars vs. the Tune Squad, only that Tune Squad was the NFL dynasty Kansas City Chiefs; however, I often talk about the championship fatigue that comes from winning, and despite some outliers, it's very hard to come back the following season as hungry and focused to stay at the top of the mountain as you were to get to the top of the mountain. This is probably the most talented team in the league, but I think they're more in a "fat and happy" spot this season than a hungry one, and they know coasting to a 10-7 season still gets them in the playoffs (probably) and then they can try to flip the switch into playoff mode. Consider this a psychological and "load management" bet for a supremely talented team coming off a Super

Bowl win. I don't have my TSI NFL numbers done yet, but ESPN's FPI only projects 10.1 wins and TeamRankings.com projects 10.8, so I like this bet a lot for this year.

MATT BROWN

JOE BURROW TO WIN OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (50/1)
I know the Offensive Player of the Year Award has become the de facto 'award for best non quarterback', but hear me out. Joe Burrow has the best 1-2 punch of receivers in the NFL. He also is likely going to be throwing the ball a ton as the team continues to either keep pace or rally from a deficit, given the lack of talent on the defensive side of the ball. I think the upside here is Burrow eclipsing his league-leading 4,918 passing yards from last season…BUT squeaking into the playoffs. This might be just the formula needed to win the OPOY. The team isn't good enough for MVP, but the consolation prize is OPOY. I like the number and the route to getting there.

JOE MIXON UNDER 10.5 RUSH TDS
Only 10 running backs reached 11 rushing TDs last season (both Josh Allen and Jalen Hurts did as well), so right off the bat, this is going against Mixon. And while he did get there last season in just 14 games (11 rush TDs on the dot), he did so without much competition in the backfield. Enter Nick Chubb, the competition. He's bound to steal at least 100 carries and probably a handful of rushing TDs. Further, Mixon will be 29 when the Texans' first snap is taken this September. And while Derrick Henry continues to defy Father Time, most running backs do not. Mixon would need another healthy season, while still maintaining the goal line back role full-time to hit this number.

49ERS UNDER 10.5 WINS
You know how many teams won 11 games last year? NINE. One of which (the Chargers) got there in Week 18 by beating a four-win, Aidan O'Connell-led Raiders team with less than anything to play for. There are a lot of assumptions being made about the 49ers. The assumption that a 29-year-old Christian McCaffrey, fresh off his latest major injury, is going to be the same player he was before. The assumption that Brandon Aiyuk can handle the WR1 role coming off his own major ACL and MCL injury, and without Deebo Samuel around to boot. The assumption that a defense that has a fraction of the elite personnel it once had, is going to magically right itself because Robert Saleh is back… despite them likely having to start three rookies and two objectively bad players in Pinnock and Elliott. And how about the biggest assumption of them all… that Brock Purdy is anything better than league average? He was tied for 15th this past season in PFF's passing grade, bettered by the likes of Aaron Rodgers, Russell Wilson, Kyler Murray, Geno Smith, and Baker Mayfield. The cake schedule could be the only thing that saves them. That said, the Rams are going to be better. The Cardinals are going to be better. They travel to Tampa and Houston. Maybe Michael Penix is good. Perhaps Bryce Young builds on his end-of-season momentum. And I think everyone likes the Bears this year. I see six no-doubt wins and too much hype for a team we know less about than we think. Play the Rams to win the division while you're at it.

WES REYNOLDS

LIONS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-110)
The Lions 15-2 season came to a surprisingly abrupt end losing at home in the Divisional Round last season to the Washington Commanders. Change is always inevitable and now the Lions are going through it on both sides of the ball.

Offensive coordinator Ben Johnson had been with Jared Goff since he was acquired in 2021, as had passing game coordinator Tanner Engstrand. Johnson is now the head coach of the Chicago Bears and Engstrand was brought in as offensive coordinator for the New York Jets by its new head coach Aaron Glenn, who also leaves Detroit where he served as defensive coordinator.

John Morton takes over as offensive coordinator in a role where he lasted one season with the Jets in the 2017 season. Kelvin Sheppard

is promoted from linebackers coach for his first crack as defensive coordinator. On paper, this duo is clearly a drop-off from their predecessors.

The Lions offensive line, one of the league's best last season, also undergoes a bit of a makeover as its longtime anchor Frank Ragnow retired and Kevin Zeitler signed with Tennessee. With Graham Glasgow likely moving to the right side, the Lions could potentially start rookies at both center (second-rounder Tate Ratledge) and left guard (fifth-rounder Miles Frazier).

This is also a substantially tougher schedule with trips to Baltimore, Kansas City, Washington, and Philadelphia. Last season, the Lions only played four outdoor games. This season, they are scheduled to play seven.

With the coordinator changes, more difficult schedule, potential regression in close games (7-2 last season), and a division that should be more competitive in 2025, the Lions look to take a step back this season.

JAGUARS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+325)

Going into last season, Baker Mayfield was off his career year and then his coordinator Dave Canales left for Carolina. Many, including me, anticipated that regression was coming, but Liam Coen proved us wrong. Under Coen, Mayfield exceeded his career-highs in completions, attempts, passing yards, completion percentage, QBR, yards/attempt, and rushing yards.

Trevor Lawrence is hoping for the same fate as Mayfield under Coen's tutelage as the 39-year-old begins his first season as Jaguars head coach. He also brings in 29-year-old first-year coordinator Grant Udinski, who was on the Minnesota staff for Sam Darnold's career season last year.

Lawrence certainly looks to have a better offensive staff to work with and what should be an improved offensive line with the additions of Patrick Mekari (Baltimore) and Robert Hainsey (Tampa Bay). Brian Thomas Jr. was the leading rookie receiver in the league last season and now he has other playmakers around him including Dyami Brown (Washington) and No. 2 overall pick and Heisman winner Travis Hunter.

The defense is not much to write home about, but does have a good tandem of edge rushers — Travon Walker and Josh Hines-Allen — that need to lead a pass rush to better numbers (34, fifth worst in 2024). However, the Titans are still rebuilding, and the Colts have questions throughout the organization. The Texans as two-time reigning division winners are the obvious favorite, but Jacksonville should have the most firepower of any offense in the AFC South.

EAGLES UNDER 11.5 WINS (-110)

The Philadelphia Eagles are the reigning Super Bowl Champions, but as always there is a price to pay for being the hunted in the following season. That price typically entails other teams paying higher dollars for your players. Well, this year for the Eagles, it is teams paying for its coaches, as the overwhelming majority of the offensive staff follows Kellen Moore to New Orleans.

Two years ago, everything fell apart especially late in the season for the Eagles and they were one-and-done in the playoffs. Last year, everything went right and they won the Super Bowl. They were one of the healthiest teams in the league all season, won almost all the close games (8-1 in one score games), and had a permissible schedule with only six games against playoff teams.

This year, they play 11 games versus playoff teams from last year. The Eagles also do not have a stretch of consecutive home games all season while having two back-to-back road spots including at Washington (December 20) and at Buffalo (December 28) before closing at home with Washington. That is a difficult end to a very tough schedule.

NICK WHALEN

TEXANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+115)

While the Texans did win a playoff game, last season felt like an overall disappointment after CJ Stroud's breakout rookie year. Injuries and inconsistency on offense were among the culprits, but I like how the Texans operated this offseason, aggressively pursuing pass-catchers in Christian Kirk, Jayden Higgins and Jaylin Noel, while mixing in some veteran additions on defense. The offensive line remains a possible concern, but I view last season as somewhat of a baseline for Houston, which is still the highest-floor — and probably highest-ceiling — team in the AFC South. Solving their offensive line issues will be paramount, however.

In terms of winning the division, the Jaguars may be the biggest threat, on paper, but there are a lot of "what if" statements involved in projecting Jacksonville after a disastrous 4-13 season. Meanwhile, the Titans are starting a rookie quarterback and the Colts are wandering in the wilderness with Daniel Jones. Give me Houston at plus money to win its third straight AFC South crown.

BIJAN ROBINSON TO WIN OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (16/1)

In recent years, this has essentially become the non-quarterback MVP award, with three running backs and three receivers taking it home over the last six seasons. Saquon Barkley (+650) is the favorite to repeat — something that no one has done since Marshall Faulk at the turn of the century. Certainly, we know what players like Barkley, Ja'Marr Chase and Derrick Henry are capable of.

But the argument in favor of Robinson is that his best, peak season is still yet to come. After a relatively slow start, Robinson turned it on over the second half of the season, ripping off 824 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns over Atlanta's final eight games. More importantly, the Falcons seemed to realize that the offense should run through Robinson, who notched north of 24 touches per game in that span, compared to 19 per game over the first half

I like Robinson's chances to pick up where he left off and firmly establish himself as perhaps the most dynamic back in the league. He may not have 2,000-yard upside, but his ability as a pass-catcher could lead to a monster yards-from-scrimmage season.

BROWNS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-140)

The Browns were a three-win operation a year ago, and it's difficult to find much reason for optimism in 2025. Quarterback remains an obvious weakness, and Cleveland did very little outside of the draft to upgrade talent around the roster. Both Mason Graham and Quinshon Judkins are intriguing future pieces, but they don't move the needle for me when it comes to this season's outlook. Schedule-wise, the Browns don't catch many breaks. On paper, they'll face one of the NFL's most-difficult schedules, including out-of-division matchups against Green Bay, Minnesota, Detroit, San Francisco and Buffalo. They do get the Dolphins, Jets, Raiders and Titans — all winnable games — but they'll need to catch some serious breaks and pull off a few unlikely upsets in the AFC North to have any shot at reaching six wins.

VIKINGS TO MISS PLAYOFFS (-140)

I toyed with the idea of Minnesota U8.5 wins at a better price (+120) but settled on this angle instead. Minnesota has essentially yo-yo'd between overachieving and underachieving in recent years, and last season was clearly an example of the former. Minnesota was 9-1 in one-score games and led the NFL in turnovers forced with 33 – 11 more than their 2023 total. The Vikings blew through their preseason win total en route to 14 wins, though the underlying numbers say they were closer to an 11-win outfit.

Either way, with Sam Darnold moving on after a dream season, the Vikings once again start anew at quarterback with J.J. McCarthy, who is yet to take an NFL regular-season snap. There's some reason to believe McCarthy could hit the ground running, given his head coach and the pieces around him, but he's essentially a rookie, and most inexperienced quarterbacks tend to struggle early on.

The Vikings also have one of the league's toughest projected schedules, including six difficult division games, as well as dates with the Bengals, Steelers, Chargers, Eagles, Ravens, Commanders, Cowboys and Falcons. The Browns and Giants are the only true bottom-feeders on the schedule, and both of those games are on the road.

If McCarthy can give the Vikings even league-average quarterback play, a postseason berth could again be within reach. But the NFC will once again be loaded with talented teams, so the bar to clear could again be 10 or 11 wins. When push comes to shove, I see the Vikings being left out of the playoff field. Minnesota, for what it's worth, has not made the postseason in back-to-back years since 2008 and 2009, when Brett Favre was slinging the rock to Sidney Rice.

WEEK 1: CARDINALS -4.5 AT SAINTS

First off, I'm not overly high on this Cardinals team, but I am very low on the Saints, who will be in the mix for the No. 1 pick in the 2026 NFL Draft. That march toward the No. 1 slot begins in Week 1, when the Saints will be trotting out…Tyler Shough? Spencer Rattler? at quarterback. Kyler Murray is coming off of a disappointing season, but sometimes NFL games are as simple as QB advantages, and Arizona has a massive one here. New Orleans does have some skill-position talent, but the defense took a big step back last season, finishing 28th in yards per play allowed. More than anything, whether it's Shough or Rattler, I see the Saints really struggling to consistently move the ball on a re-tooled Cardinals defense.

STORMY BUONANTONY

49ERS OVER 10.5 WINS (+110) AND FINISH AS NFC TOP SEED (+650)

Last year was brutal for the 49ers. It was the definition of penthouse to outhouse, as San Francisco went from nearly winning to losing 11 games and finishing dead last in the NFC West. That colossal disaster was largely due to the fact SF ranked second in the NFL for number of games missed by injured players (226), which included key starters on both sides of the ball.

Looking at this season, it might also be natural to slight SF for the players who will not be back — Deebo Samuel has moved on, as has Dre Greenlaw and Talanoa Hufanga. But I love the makeup of this team.

Kyle Shanahan can continue to utilize his creativity as a play-caller with Christian McCaffrey back healthy, Brock Purdy and George Kittle signed (avoiding any potential marquee training camp drama), a WR room full of potential and the all-important Trent Williams covering Purdy's blindside.

Defensively, Robert Saleh is back. Say what you want about him as a head coach, but this man is a masterful DC and should re-inject a toughness and stout run-D that's been missing the last couple seasons. I also think the addition of Bryce Huff isn't getting enough positive pub. From 2020-22, Huff recorded a 26% pass rush win rate (top-10 in the league). Then, in 2023, the sack numbers increased, having 10 before heading to Philly in FA. He obviously didn't have the same success with the Eagles, but he had a wrist injury that required surgery. I think he gets back to form playing opposite former DPOY Nick Bosa. I also expect some of the young incoming pieces, namely DE Mykel Williams and DL Alfed Collins, should make an immediate impact.

Now here's the ultimate icing on the cake: Have you looked at their schedule?! The 49ers on paper have the easiest schedule in the NFL entering this year based on last year's strength of record and this season's opponent win total projections. I think they rack up wins, especially early. They should get Over the win total and perhaps even establish themselves as the top seed in the NFC if all goes to plan.

ASHTON JEANTY TO HAVE 7+ TDS (-140) AND 10+ TDS (+260)

I'm not usually the type to pound the table for a season long rookie prop, but I couldn't help myself. I'm such a fan of Ashton Jeanty, his running style, talent and what he can bring to the Raiders offense. It was a masterful final collegiate season in Boise for Jeanty that saw him lead the FBS in scrimmage yards per game, totaling more than 2,700 all purpose yards, rushing for nearly 1,800 yards on 8 YPC and 29 rushing TDs.

While I'm fully aware NFL defenses and that of the Mountain West Conference are very different, he's going to an offense in Vegas where he can be the focal point of a completely transformed unit under new HC Pete Carroll and OC Chip Kelly. It's no secret Carroll is going to want to run the rock.

You'll notice, however, I'm looking at Jeanty's scoring potential instead of yards. I still have questions about the Raiders offensive line and him to go Over 1,000 yards this season is -185. Instead, I'm betting him to score. I'm looking at both the standard 7+ Rushing TDs (-140) market and an ALT 10+ TDs. I trust his ability to get yards when needed, break off a big TD run every now and then (complements of some insane contact balance) and to be the go-to guy within 10 yards.

COWBOYS OVER 7.5 WINS (-135)

I might be going full Dave Ross here with this pick, but I really think this could be a buy-low year for the 'Boys. They went Over their win total three-straight seasons (12-5 each) before dropping to 7-10 last year and exchanging Mike McCarthy for Brian Schottenheimer.

2025 starts with QB1. If Dak Prescott stays healthy, I think Dallas is back in business. Since he entered the league in 2016, he's played at least 12 games in seven of his nine seasons. The Cowboys have had 8+ wins in every one of those seasons, averaging 10.85 wins per game. He has a new toy and true WR weapon to play with opposite CeeDee Lamb in George Pickens. The run game is still a concern, but I have hopes for an improved OL. Plus, with so many key defensive players back healthy, and Micah Parsons leading the way as a potential sack leader, there's several reasons to believe that side of the ball elevates.

Lastly, I am aware of the schedule. The Cowboys do have the fifth-most difficult SOS to open the year due to their division and a couple short week games against teams that won 14+ games last year, but a lot of the upper-tier teams they're playing are also teams I've heard arguments for taking a step back in 2025 (Vikings, Lions, Chiefs, Commanders). Let's not forget they also get the Giants twice, the Panthers, Jets, Cardinals and Raiders as well, who are all teams with a lot of questions. Give me America's team to put together 8+ Ws.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

49ERS OVER 10.5 WINS (+110), OVER 12.5 WINS (+370) AND NFC NO. 1 SEED (+650)

Everything is in place for San Francisco to bounce back in a big way. Christian McCaffrey is healthy after knee and Achilles injuries limited him to just four games last season. Brandon Aiyuk is recovering from a torn ACL, but Jauan Jennings broke out for 975 yards and six touchdowns last season. Ricky Pearsall also showed some promise after getting his season started in Week 7. Brock Purdy has the supporting cast needed to leave his worst season as a starter behind and find his 2023 form once again.

It should also be noted that Kyle Shanahan is a good coach. In four of the last six years, the 49ers have won at least 10 games, have made it to the NFC Championship game four times and won it twice. San Francisco also has the easiest schedule in the NFL by a mile this season. Shanahan will take advantage of that and pile up wins in a monster campaign.

DOLPHINS UNDER 6.5 WINS (+170)

It is a pivotal season for the Dolphins franchise, but the writing is on the wall for a massive disappointment. Jalen Ramsey was gone by the time our Guide came out, and the noise around a Tyreek Hill trade will not subside. Tua Tagovailoa – who has played fewer than 13 games in four of five seasons – has an abysmal offensive line in front of him on paper. Tagovailoa regressed immensely last season with a career-low ADOT (6.1) and the lowest yards per pass attempt (7.2) since his second year. Miami looks no better on defense. It has a slew of defensive ends recovering from serious injuries. Kade Kohou – a 2022 undrafted free agent – is likely their most consistent corner outside of Ramsey. There is not much on paper to love about this team in 2025. It does have

the ninth-easiest schedule in the league, but if Tagovailoa misses time – and there is little reason to believe he won't – this team could drop off a cliff. Playing the win total Under is a fine move, but teams usually don't fall right on their projected win total. If the Dolphins go Under, they will likely miss their current market win total by a decent mark. Six wins or fewer seems more probable than the market believes for this paper-thin roster.

JAGUARS (+300) TO WIN THE AFC SOUTH

This is a play on the price and against Houston in the AFC South. The division is terrible. Houston is an overrated favorite with some clear flaws. CJ Stroud was the most pressured quarterback in the league, and one could argue his offensive line got worse in the offseason. The Texans are also going to rely on two rookies to play pivotal roles at wide receiver. I don't believe that team deserves to be favored to the degree they are in this division.

That leads me to Jacksonville. Liam Coen is an unknown, but if his offensive system hits, this team has a ton of potential. Brian Thomas Jr. was incredible his rookie season and could thrive in Coen's offense. So too could Trevor Lawrence. The former first overall pick has regressed each season, but with a litany of offensive firepower and a better scheme, there is a real chance this team takes a step forward. In the AFC South, that step could mean nine wins and a division crown.

ADAM BURKE

BRONCOS TO WIN AFC WEST (+300)

We've been waiting for the Chiefs to wear down for a while now, but I think we may have finally reached that point. Patrick Mahomes was pretty bad by his standards during the regular season. Travis Kelce is clearly getting older. KC basically navigated the regular season thanks to the defense and not the offense.

It seems pretty clear that Sean Payton feels really comfortable with Bo Nix as his QB. And Nix put up some strong numbers last season, including a 29/8 TD/INT ratio over his last 14 games. Things started a little bit slowly, but as Nix grasped the playbook and the speed of the pro game, it all came together well.

This has the potential to be the best defense in the league again and could be even better this season. Denver's defense was second in percentage of opponents' drives ending in points and tops in points per drive allowed. DC Vance Joseph is still there and Jahdae Barron is a plug-and-play corner opposite Patrick Surtain II from Day 1. With a group that led the NFL in sacks and was second in yards per carry allowed, Barron just might be the missing piece to take this unit to another level.

Of course I also like Broncos Over 9.5 at -105, which is probably a safer play.

MITCH MOSS

VIKINGS OVER 8.5 WINS (PLAY UP TO -140)

This team played on the final Sunday night of the regular season with a chance to win 15 games and be the No. 1 overall seed. Sam Darnold was their QB. I'll take my chances with J.J. McCarthy under center as long as Kevin O'Connell is the head coach. I trust this combo to make it work with targets such as Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison, and T.J. Hockenson. KOC is a wizard, and the organization addressed some needs in the offseason to get better. Brian Flores has done a stellar job working as the defensive coordinator since joining the team in 2023. I expect that side of the ball to be a factor yet again this season.

CHASE BROWN TO WIN OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (200/1)

When teammate Zack Moss went down for the season in Week 8 of 2024, Brown went from a nice handcuff to the clear number one option in the backfield. In the eight games following the injury to Moss, Brown averaged nearly 19 carries per game, 5.5 targets, 23.6 touches, and 116.3 yards. He totaled 11 touchdowns on the season. He's the every down back on one of the highest-scoring offenses in the entire league with an elite QB. I had to take some of this number.

GILL ALEXANDER

GIANTS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-120)

Easily the quickest bet I made this offseason. I'm not sure how the Giants get to four wins let alone the six it will require to beat me here. In fact, if the Giants can't figure out a way to beat the Saints at New Orleans on October 5th, we could very well be talking about NYG making a run at having the worst record in the NFL and, in a worst-case scenario, a winless season. Their schedule is just that difficult on paper. The reason I opted for this market, though, rather than those latter two which would obviously provide more bang for the buck, is that Russell Wilson is under center and some degree of respect has to be given to the ability of a veteran quarterback of his caliber to manufacture a couple wins when not expected. Nonetheless, Under 5.5 wins ought to provide ample cushion to make this a largely sweat-free experience.

BILLS/DOLPHINS 1-2 EXACTA AFC EAST (+290)

In recent years, I've thought alternate team season win totals provided some of the best value in season-long markets. With those numbers generally priced in a less appealing manner this offseason, I've turned to 1-2 preflop division exactas in hopes of at least replacing those opportunities to some degree. These might be somewhat less sexy than 1-2 exactas in MLB divisions over a 162-game schedule, but I like them in the much shorter 17-game NFL season, as well, and of the six divisions, the most straightforward is the AFC East, which eliminates having to handicap who finishes first. Rather than try to determine if, say, Houston or Jacksonville tops the other in the AFC South, or who between the Niners and Rams wins the NFC West crown, for instance, I'll take the Bills as the clearest of all division winners this upcoming season and pair them with the Dolphins at a relatively nice payoff, as I'm not quite buying into the Patriots preseason hype I'm hearing and don't believe the Jets can make a credible run. Don't let me down, Tua.

BRONCOS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (-120)

Remember how the AFC had so many more power-ranked Top 10 teams than the NFC did preflop the last few seasons? Now? Not so much. The Commanders and Packers of the world are up and the Dolphins and Browns (yes, remember that?) of the world, just to name two teams in each conference off the top of the dome, are down. You could extend that to Rams up, Steelers down and so on. The point is, regardless of how one feels about Sean Payton, Bo Nix, and the Broncos, the path to the playoffs seems way easier than it did even a year ago. Will there even be a wild card from the AFC East? How about the AFC South? If I spot you whichever team doesn't win the AFC North between the Ravens and Bengals and even give you the Chargers (and you know how that goes), is there a team you'd rather have at such a low price to make the playoffs than these defense-led, Nix-coached up Broncos? The answer for me is an emphatic no.

SEAN GREEN

BRONCOS TO WIN AFC (14/1)

The Broncos check all the boxes for a team to make a leap and win the conference championship. They have one of the best OLs in the game, a legit home-field advantage, a Year 2 QB who is a gamer and one of the best coaches in the league. The Broncos defense was already good and then they used a first-round pick on CB Jahdae Barron, plus they brought in S Talanoa Hufanga and LB Dre Greenlaw. The Chiefs are dealing with a Super Bowl hangover loss and I'm not sold on Herbert or Lamar in the playoffs. The Bills are rightly the favorites, but they have a tortured fan base for a reason.

NOLAN SMITH TO WIN DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (100/1)

Smith really hit his stride as a pass rusher for the Eagles in Year 2, in particular after the bye. Starting from Week 5 on, he logged 10.5 sacks, including four in the playoffs setting a franchise record. Josh Sweat and Milton Williams departing in free agency means even a bigger role for Smith. Teams will continue to have to double team Jalen Carter on the inside and Smith has the pedigree and opportunity to crack this award wide open. Am I a homer? Yes, but this is going to be a fun long shot that has a legit shot to hit.

MIKE SOMICH

BILLS #1 AFC SEED (+195), MOST WINS (+350)

Buffalo won the annual schedule lottery in the NFL. I do not think I have seen a road schedule this weak for a team with a first-place schedule in a long, long time. The toughest road game is Houston, where they will be a short dog at worst. Their three toughest games at home all happen to be spaced out: one to open the season, one midseason and one at the end. They play on short rest just twice and are only in primetime three times.

The main competitors for the AFC top seed have to deal with significantly more difficult divisions as well. The Jets, Dolphins and Pats are nothing compared to the AFC North and West.

The Bills are set up to roll and 15 wins is not out of the question. If they lose Week 1, I will bet this back at a better number.

TEXANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+110)

Behind the Bills getting the top seed in the AFC, the Texans to win the division is my favorite bet on the board. Their defense is going to be Top 5 in the NFL with two shutdown cornerbacks and a ferocious pass rush. The offense should also see an uptick this season as well with a new offensive coordinator and more aggressive passing game on early downs.

The division also stinks. You can rule out the Titans, the Colts are a mess, and I simply do not trust this version of the Jags to miraculously get things together this season.

ZACHARY COHEN

JAGUARS OVER 7.5 WINS (-110), BROWNS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-143) AND STEELERS OVER 8.5 WINS (+110)

For my thoughts on the Jaguars, Browns and Steelers, check out my AFC North and AFC South division previews. While I gave out eight predictions in those two division write-ups, these are the three I'm actually taking.

I also have Patriots Over 7.5 (-125), Giants Over 5.5 (+125), Panthers Over 5.5 (-120) and Vikings Over 8.5 (-125) in pocket from when win totals first became available. I wrote those up at VSiN.com on April 3rd.

VIKINGS TO WIN NFC (16/1) / VIKINGS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (33/1)

Not only do I like the Vikings to win nine games, but I think this team has the potential to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl — and possibly even win it. I know Minnesota has a difficult schedule, but that means very little to me. This is a team that had an elite statistical profile a year ago, and the roster looks better in 2025 than it did in 2024.

The Vikings were second in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (-0.091) last year, and they really beefed up their defensive line. They signed Jonathan Allen and Javon Hargrave, who should immediately make a difference for Brian Flores' group. Isaiah Rodgers was another big acquisition for the team, as he'll pair up with Byron Murphy Jr. to give the Vikings a strong coverage duo. I'm also interested in seeing if Flores can get something out of Jeff Okudah. Once viewed as a future lockdown corner, Okudah hasn't lived up to his potential in the pros. But if anybody can fix him, it's Flores. The former Dolphins head coach is the best coordinator in football.

As far as the offense goes, I'm not going to worry about a Kevin O'Connell-led team. I know Sam Darnold had a career year for Minnesota, helping him earn a big payday with Seattle. Now, the Vikings are seemingly left without a quarterback. But J.J. McCarthy won a national title with Michigan, processes the game at a high level and has a much bigger arm than he's given credit for. With Minnesota having improved along the offensive line, he's stepping into a great situation. He'll have time to throw, an elite play caller calling the shots and one of the best groups of weapons in the league. Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison and T.J. Hockenson are good enough to make average quarterbacks look excellent.

If McCarthy isn't wildly disappointing, the Vikings should be just as good as last year, when they looked the part of a contender in most weeks. So, at their current prices, I'm buying some stock.

POWER RATED
SCHEDULE
PROJECTIONS

BY STEVE MAKINEN

As bettors, we're looking for every edge we can get, and by analyzing every game, we can potentially find things that oddsmakers setting the season win total props may have missed or overvalued. For this particular piece, we will be comparing my projections against the numbers set by DraftKings. If you're a savvy bettor who prides yourself on shopping for and jumping on the best number available, you will be able to find differences up to 0.5 wins or more, or variations on money lines associated with the prop at other locales. One of the things I love about the DK offering is that bettors can opt for tiered options on their win total props. For instance, if a team's -110/-110 number is 8.5 wins, you can also bet them at 4.5, 6.5, 10.5, etc.

In this exercise, I have simulated the 2025 schedules for each team using their actual opponents and my latest power ratings, including the team-specific home and road field ratings. I should note that my current NFL home field advantage ratings settled at about 1.9 points at the conclusion of last season, and I have kept them at this point heading into 2025. You'll see the projected 2025 standings on the chart below, followed by a team-by-team list of the opponents and projected point spreads. Use these numbers to bet the season win totals or any "games of the year" that have been released by books.

For my power ratings, I generally tend to follow the betting markets first and foremost until teams accumulate statistics. I do make adjustments from the betting markets based on certain factors. For one, if you consider the recent strengths of the last four Super Bowl Champion teams, they generally shared a handful of different personnel grouping strengths, and I value them in this particular order:

1) Quarterback play
2) Ability to pressure opposing passer
3) Defensive back play, shutting down receivers and creating turnovers
4) Protecting the quarterback on offense
5) Skill/volume of offensive playmakers.

When analyzing the results of the schedule simulation, bettors should be able to make their own personal adjustments to the numbers based upon things like how hard the slate is at the outset, grouped road/home games, game difficulty at home or on the road, and placement of the bye week in the schedule. These are all key variables that can lend to a team having a better or worse season than the oddsmakers project.

As you look at the projected standings, here are some of the noteworthy findings:

Steve's top 5 teams expected to win more games than prop:
1. CLEVELAND - DraftKings: 4.5, Steve's Projection: 5.6, Diff: +1.1
2. NY JETS - DraftKings: 5.5, Steve's Projection: 6.5, Diff: +1
3. TENNESSEE - DraftKings: 5.5, Steve's Projection: 6.4, Diff: +0.9
4. LAS VEGAS - DraftKings: 6.5, Steve's Projection: 7.1, Diff: +0.6
5. ATLANTA – DraftKings: 7.5, Steve's Projection: 8.0, Diff: +0.5

Steve's top 8 teams expected to win less games than prop:
1. CHICAGO - DraftKings: 8.5, Steve's Projection: 7.6, Diff: -0.9
2. DENVER - DraftKings: 9.5, Steve's Projection: 8.6, Diff: -0.9
3. HOUSTON - DraftKings: 9.5, Steve's Projection: 8.9, Diff: -0.6
4. PHILADELPHIA - DraftKings: 11.5, Steve's Projection: 11.0, Diff: -0.5
5. DETROIT – DraftKings: 10.5, Steve's Projection: 10.0, Diff: -0.5
6. KANSAS CITY - DraftKings: 8.5, Steve's Projection: 8.0, Diff: -0.5
7. MINNESOTA – DraftKings: 11.5, Steve's Projection: 11.0, Diff: -0.5
8. SEATTLE – DraftKings: 8.5, Steve's Projection: 8.0, Diff: -0.5

- According to my figures, the Giants play the league's toughest schedule, at least as it stands now, based on opponent/home/road breakdown. New York ranked just ahead of the Bears and Browns in that regard. Not only will they have to face the tough NFC East foes, they also face the Packers and Vikings, plus the AFC West, which sent three teams to the postseason last year. For what it's worth, the Texans faced the toughest schedule in this column last season but still went on to a 10-7 campaign that won a division crown.

- The league's easiest schedule belongs to the 49ers, a team looking to make a massive rebound in 2025 after enduring an injury-riddled 6-11 season last fall. A primary reason for the schedule softness is that San Francisco is in a relatively modest NFC West division and faces a returning last-place slate. Assumed to be healthy at the outset, at this point, my power ratings have the 49ers as an underdog in just two of 17 games, and the biggest underdog line they face is +2.5 points at Tampa Bay. This could be a nice bounce-back season for a team whose championship window may be closing quickly.

- Buffalo (11.4) is projected to win the most games of any team in the NFL, followed by Baltimore (11.1), Philadelphia (11.0), and Kansas City (11.0). There are two other teams among the double-digit win projections. The other projected division winners include San Francisco (10.2), Detroit (10.0), Tampa Bay (9.7), and Houston (8.9).

- Last year, there were two teams projected to win six (6.0) games or less, and those were Carolina (5.8) and New England (6.0). Both teams actually failed to reach six wins. For 2025, there are two more projected for this level of futility: Cleveland (5.6) and the New York Giants (5.9). Of course, those win totals would represent noteworthy improvements for both franchises, each of whom drafted a rookie quarterback in the first round this past April.

- Assuming the projections play out accurately, the AFC's top-seeded team for the playoffs would be Buffalo. Baltimore, the #2 would be slotted to take on #7 Miami in the expanded playoff format. Also in the wild card playoff round, the #4 Texans would host #5 LA Chargers, and Kansas

STEVE'S TOP 5 TEAMS EXPECTED TO WIN MORE GAMES THAN PROP
1. CLEVELAND - 5.6 wins (+1.1 diff)
2. NY JETS - 6.5 wins (+1 diff)
3. TENNESSEE - 6.4 wins (+0.9 diff)
4. LAS VEGAS - 7.1 wins (+0.6 diff)
5. ATLANTA - 8.0 wins (+0.5 diff)

City would face the Bengals in the #3-#6 matchup. For the NFC, the top seed would be Philadelphia, while the wildcard matchups would be San Francisco-LA Rams, Detroit-Washington, and Tampa Bay-Green Bay.

- The largest point spread at the outset of the season is expected to be a September non-conference game featuring the Saints at Buffalo, with the Bills shown as 13.3-point favorites. There are 10 other games showing lines with double-digit favorites, with the rest featuring the Ravens, Chiefs, Lions, Eagles, or Bills at home. Notably, there were 36 games projected to have double-digit point spreads in 2022, and just 31 in the three years since, so we seem to have landed in an enhanced era of parity for the league.

- Of the 265 matchups played at host stadiums, 93 of them are showing point spreads designating road favorites, down five from 2024. The Bills and Packers claim the distinction of being projected as road favorites the most times for the 2025 season, appearing as such in eight road games each. On the opposite side of the spectrum are the most frequent home underdogs, those being the Giants and Titans, each expected to be in that role eight times.

Other interesting scheduling tidbits:

- There are three teams that will face at least three opponents that are coming out of a bye week, which theoretically might be considered a disadvantage. Those teams are Washington (4x), Las Vegas (3x) and New Orleans (3x). The Raiders face these three teams coming out of byes in a five-week span from Weeks 9-13.

- The Rams claim the distinction of facing the most teams heading into their bye weeks, three.

- There are five different situations in which teams have a three-game set against opponents averaging a power rating of 19.2 or less.

Theoretically, these are the easiest three-game stretches in the league this year:
1. San Francisco: Weeks 12-15, 18.07 average opponent PR
2. Buffalo: Weeks 3-5, 19.0
3. New Orleans: Weeks 15-17, 19.1
4. Buffalo: Weeks 2-4, 19.2
5. New England: Weeks 8-10, 19.2

- On the argument of toughest stretches, there are five different situations in which teams have a three-game set against opponents averaging a power rating of more than 28.45:
1. Cincinnati: Weeks 13-15, 30.17 average opponent PR
2. Cleveland: Weeks 2-4, 29.63
3. NY Giants: Weeks 6-8, 29.43
4. Cincinnati: Weeks 14-16, 28.6
5. LA Chargers: Week 14-16, 28.47

- Who has the toughest stretch to start the season? In reality, projecting a team's late-season schedule difficulty is a challenge, since things can change dramatically over the course of a season. As such, these teams face the most difficult three-game slates to start the year:
1. Cleveland: Weeks 1-3, 29.63 average opponent PR
2. NY Jets: 28.13
3. Philadelphia: 27.7
4. New Orleans: 26.7

- These are the teams facing arguably the easiest trio of contests to start the 2025 season:
1. Buffalo: Weeks 1-3, 19.2 average opponent PR
2. San Francisco: 20.33
3. Houston: 21.27
4. New England: 22.03

2025 PROJECTIONS

EAST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
BUFFALO	11.5	29	2.7	0.6	22.81	31	11.4	5.6
MIAMI	8.5	24	2.5	-0.4	23.6	22	8.7	8.3
NEW ENGLAND	8.5	22	1.6	0.3	22.88	30	8.1	8.9
NY JETS	5.5	20	1.6	-0.7	24.3	12	6.5	10.5

NORTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
BALTIMORE	11.5	29.5	2.5	0.4	23.84	18	11.1	5.9
CINCINNATI	9.5	25	2.1	0.7	23.83	19	9.1	7.9
PITTSBURGH	8.5	24	2.3	0.2	24.21	14	8.4	8.6
CLEVELAND	4.5	19	2.1	-0.6	25.11	3	5.6	11.4

SOUTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
HOUSTON	9.5	24.5	1.9	-0.1	23.71	20	8.9	8.1
INDIANAPOLIS	7.5	21.5	1.7	-0.1	23.4	26	7.6	9.4
JACKSONVILLE	7.5	21.5	1.8	-0.4	23.35	27	7.6	9.4
TENNESSEE	5.5	19	2	-0.5	23.19	29	6.4	10.6

WEST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
KANSAS CITY	11.5	29	2.3	0.5	23.85	17	11.0	6.0
LA CHARGERS	9.5	25.5	1.3	0.1	24.22	13	9.1	7.9
DENVER	9.5	24	2.1	-0.3	23.87	16	8.6	8.4
LAS VEGAS	6.5	21	1.9	-0.4	23.95	15	7.1	9.9

EAST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
PHILADELPHIA	11.5	30	2.3	0.4	24.74	8	11.0	6.0
WASHINGTON	9.5	27	1.3	0.2	24.83	6	9.6	7.4
DALLAS	7.5	23	2.6	0.6	24.41	10	7.8	9.2
NY GIANTS	5.5	20.5	1.5	-0.3	25.9	1	5.9	11.1

NORTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
DETROIT	10.5	28	2.8	0.3	24.75	7	10.0	7.0
GREEN BAY	9.5	27	2.5	0.4	24.37	11	9.8	7.2
MINNESOTA	8.5	24	2	0.2	24.91	5	8.0	9.0
CHICAGO	8.5	23.5	2.1	-0.7	25.39	2	7.6	9.4

SOUTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
TAMPA BAY	9.5	26	2.1	0.1	23.44	24	9.7	7.3
ATLANTA	7.5	22.5	1.5	-0.4	23.66	21	8.0	9.0
CAROLINA	6.5	21	1.2	-0.9	24.44	9	6.8	10.2
NEW ORLEANS	6.5	18.5	1.6	0.3	23.25	28	6.2	10.8

WEST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
SAN FRANCISCO	10.5	25.5	2.3	0.5	21.94	32	10.2	6.8
LA RAMS	9.5	26.5	-0.1	-0.1	24.97	4	9.3	7.7
ARIZONA	8.5	24	1.4	0.5	23.42	25	8.8	8.2
SEATTLE	8.5	22.5	1.7	0.5	23.46	23	8.0	9.0

KEY: DK WINS = DraftKings Win Total • SM PR = Steve Makinen's Power Rating • HM FLD = Home Field Advantage • RD FLD = Road Field Advantage
SC STR = Schedule Strength • SC RANK = Schedule Strength Rank • PRO W = Projected Wins • PRO L = Projected Losses

VSIN MVP

BEST BETS

BY ZACH COHEN

When it comes to the NFL's Most Valuable Player award, history is clear: quarterbacks have dominated the honor, especially in the modern era. Since 1957, quarterbacks have claimed this trophy 48 times — far outpacing any other position. In fact, over the last 25 years, Adrian Peterson is the only non-quarterback to break the quarterback stranglehold — and it took a near-record-breaking season for him to do so. In the last decade, this has really been a showcase for elite quarterbacks, with Patrick Mahomes, Lamar Jackson and Josh Allen being the last three winners.

If you need another reason to view this as a quarterback-only market, how about looking at the season Saquon Barkley had in 2024? The running back rushed for 2,005 yards and 13 touchdowns for an Eagles team that won the Super Bowl. He also had 33 catches for 278 yards and two scores as a receiver out of the backfield. If that wasn't good enough for a skill position player to win MVP, is there any reason to look away from the quarterback spot in 2025? Running backs have barely had success when looking at the recent history of this award, and wide receivers and defensive players never get any recognition.

Given that historical context, let's look at some quarterbacks that could be worth betting to win the MVP award this upcoming season.

LAMAR JACKSON (+550)

Jackson's 2024 season was impeccable. He threw for 4,172 yards with 41 touchdowns and only four interceptions, and he also rushed for 915 yards and four touchdowns. On top of that, Jackson led the NFL in passer rating (119.6) and QBR (77.3). Jackson was also PFF's highest-graded quarterback (94.9) — and sixth-best quarterback since 2006. In pretty much every way imaginable, Jackson topped his 2023 MVP campaign. Unfortunately for him, that wasn't enough for him to win it in back-to-back years — or to add to a trophy room that already includes a 2019 MVP award.

Allen did have an awesome season for the Bills, so it's hard to say he wasn't deserving of his MVP honors. But it definitely felt like voter fatigue did Jackson in. Well, now that Jackson isn't the reigning MVP entering the 2025 season, perhaps voters will be open to giving him the award for a third time.

The Ravens are odds-on favorites to win the AFC North, and this is once again looking like a team that will contend to win the AFC — and possibly the Super Bowl. That means Baltimore should win a ton of games. When you combine that with the fact that Jackson should put up astronomical numbers, it's hard not to like him at +550 odds.

Baltimore also went out and added DeAndre Hopkins in the offseason. At 33 years old, Hopkins' best days are certainly behind him, but he's still a big body that should give the Ravens a jump-ball, box-out threat that they've lacked in recent years. This is the best group of skill position players that Jackson has ever had.

JAYDEN DANIELS (+850)

While PFF had Jackson as the best quarterback in football last year, Daniels was fifth in his rookie season. The Offensive Rookie of the Year threw for 3,568 yards with 25 touchdowns and only nine interceptions, and he also rushed for 891 yards with six scores.

Of course, we have seen some sophomore slumps out of some high-level quarterbacks, with C.J. Stroud being a very recent example. But Daniels feels like he's going to rise above that.

Teams might have more film to work with when trying to slow Daniels down, but Daniels' skill set could render some of that useless. He's accurate to every part of the field, he's bold in attacking tight windows and he's a flat-out special runner.

The Commanders have also invested in Daniels' success, trading for an elite pass-blocking left tackle in Laremy Tunsil and a dangerous play-making weapon in Deebo Samuel. Daniels will now have more time to throw, and he'll have a real group of pass catchers to work with. When you combine that with the fact that Washington improved its defense, it's hard not to like Daniels as a legitimate MVP threat.

It's not crazy to think the Commanders are in for an 11- or 12-win season. Washington won 12 games last year, and this roster is better than it was a year ago. Also, while you can use the sophomore season against Daniels, he'll also have a better understanding of how to beat opposing defenses. He's also going to be more comfortable in Kliff Kingsbury's offense, which should open up a little with improved personnel.

If the Commanders do hit double-digit wins again, Daniels should get more MVP buzz now that he's not a rookie. This is a dynamic player that is ready to crash the table with the other top-tier quarterbacks in this league.

BAKER MAYFIELD (40/1)

Mayfield is a compelling dark horse candidate. Last year, the fiery signal caller posted career-best numbers: 4,500 passing yards (third in the NFL), 41 touchdowns (tied for second), a 106.8 passer rating and a league-leading 71.4% completion rate. Those marks not only reflect elite efficiency but also highlight his ability to be the engine of a top-five offense that averaged 29.5 points per game — and finished fifth in EPA per play (0.133).

Mayfield's leadership and improved decision-making — cutting down on turnovers while maintaining aggressive play — have been central to Tampa Bay's offensive resurgence.

Working against Mayfield is the fact that he'll be working with his third offensive coordinator in as many years. Dave Canales did so well with the Bucs that he got the head coaching gig for the Panthers. Liam Coen then took Tampa Bay's offense a step further, earning himself the Jaguars job. Now, it'll be Josh Grizzard, the Bucs passing game coordinator last year, calling the shots. However, Grizzard would be foolish not to keep things extremely simple in 2025. He'll stick to what has worked with Mayfield, and that should mean another outrageous year for the former No. 1 pick.

Mayfield's supporting cast remains strong, as Mike Evans and Chris Godwin are back. Godwin might take some time to get right after dislocating his ankle last season, but the team has plenty of talent to work with while he focuses on getting healthy. Jalen McMillan showed promise last year, and the team used a first-round pick Emeka Egbuka. Don't be surprised if the latter makes his mark right away. The Ohio State product looks like a future star.

Realistically, if Mayfield maintains or improves his 2024 form and leads the Buccaneers to a division title, he could emerge as a legitimate MVP contender in 2025. Though it would be nice if the NFC South winner is a little better than it has been the last couple of years. Mayfield likely needs to win 11 or 12 games in order to actually have a chance at this. But that's not out of the realm of possibility.

Let's see who our VSiN hosts and contributors like for their best bets in the MVP market.

MATT YOUMANS

JOE BURROW (+650)
Any futures bet on the Bengals is tied to their below-average defense, so it seems smarter to bank on the quarterback and an offense that ranked No. 1 in passing (273 YPG) and sixth in scoring (27.8 PPG). Burrow led the NFL in passing yards (4,918) and touchdowns (43). His injury history is a concern, yet with receivers Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins, and tight end Mike Gesicki, the pieces remain in place for Burrow to top 5,000 yards. If Cincinnati is a playoff team, and that should happen, Burrow will be a top contender for MVP.

PAULY HOWARD

BROCK PURDY (30/1)
In 17 of the last 18 years, a QB has won the award. Ignore other positions. The path is there for the Niners to win 13 games, get the No. 1 seed, and Purdy has great numbers like two years ago.

MATT BROWN

MATTHEW STAFFORD (50/1)
I have made a case for this bet on several shows on the network, so let's get it from spoken word into print. I love me some Rams this year, and in turn, love me some Matthew Stafford. Of course, I love the addition of Davante Adams, but I'm not sure enough is being made about this offensive line. I have them as a top-five unit headed into the season, with top-three upside. Destroyed by injuries last year, they'll enter 2025 healthy, giving Stafford the potential for massive numbers.

It's also a 'make today' bet as opposed to a 'wait for a better number' bet. The Rams play the Texans, Titans, Eagles, Colts, and 49ers in their first five games. While a road game with the Eagles will be tough, a win is not out of the range of outcomes. Taking down a 49ers team that I'm lower on than most, I could see the Rams sitting 5-0 headed to Baltimore with a massive game against the Ravens. If any of this plays out, Stafford's 50-1 is likely to be 20-1 or shorter. I have a whole Rams portfolio of Stafford, NFC West, and NFC champs.

KELLEY BYDLON

MATTHEW STAFFORD (45/1)
Here's my one Rams high-upside play. Yeah, he's getting older. Yeah, there were rumors of him leaving in the offseason. But Matt Stafford can still sling it, and I love the offseason addition of Davante Adams. I like Cooper Kupp, but this is an upgrade.

This play is really all about the number though. In reality, I really think MVP will come down to Josh Allen and Lamar Jackson once again, but I see a lot of names after those two at the top that I don't think have that much better of a shot at winning this than Stafford.

ADAM BURKE

JOE BURROW (+650)
Shop around as always, but Burrow's +650 price as the third favorite at DraftKings seems pretty attractive. While it was too little, too late last season for the Bengals, Burrow won Comeback Player of the Year on the heels of five straight wins to finish out the season. Admittedly, I am skeptical of new DC Al Golden, so the Bengals are likely going to have to outgun opponents to win games and that should allow Burrow to put up mammoth numbers yet again.

Last season, he led the league in completions, attempts, passing yards, and passing touchdowns under first-year OC Dan Pitcher. Pitcher is back again and so are Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins. Higgins nearly had 1,000 yards and missed five games. Seven of Cincy's eight losses came in one-score games and the schedule is a bit more manageable this season.

It's not a sexy price or a long shot pick, but the Bengals have a very good shot to win the division this season in my estimation and if Burrow puts up similar or potentially better numbers in the process, this is an alternate way of playing Bengals +230 to win the AFC North.

NICK WHALEN

JARED GOFF (30/1)
This is more about the price, and spinning a narrative, than anything else. Goff finished fifth in MVP voting a year ago — in a stacked field — which feels like it could be his peak, given where he stacks up, reputation-wise, relative to Josh Allen, Lamar Jackson and Joe Burrow. However, part of the narrative with Goff is that he's being carried by superior talent and coaching. Most of that surrounding talent remains, but with Ben Johnson now in Chicago, the spotlight will be firmly on Goff to prove that he can remain an elite quarterback without (arguably) the best offensive coordinator in football. If Goff can virtually match last season's production, and the Lions can again push for 14 or 15 wins, his name will have to be in the conversation. Of course, the problem with betting a longer-shot like Goff is it essentially requires other contenders to fall off, but I don't think it's out of the question that the likes of Allen, and especially Burrow and Jackson, could struggle to match their ultra-elite 2024 production. If you want to look in another direction, Dan Campbell for Coach of the Year (22/1) follows a similar narrative.

JENSEN LEWIS
JUSTIN HERBERT (18/1)

SEAN GREEN
JALEN HURTS (20/1)

WILL HILL
JOSH ALLEN (+550)

One of the major questions going into the 2024 NFL season surrounded field position. In hopes of reducing injury and creating more returns, the league adopted new kickoff rules prior to the season. As a cliff notes version of what changed, here are the most noteworthy adjustments:

- No one except the kicker and returner can move until the ball is fielded
- The kicking team lined up on the receiving team's 40-yard line, while the kicker still boots it from his own 35-yard-line
- The receiving team lined up between their own 30 and 35-yard line
- Any kick that landed in front of the 20-yard-line is considered "out of bounds" (ball placed at the 40)
- Touchbacks were placed at the 30-yard-line, a five-yard difference from a 2016 rule change

The rule changes largely worked. Concussions were down significantly and the touchback percentage (TB%) went from 73% to 64.3%. The extra five yards mattered a lot to special teams coaches and the closer proximity of the players on the kicking team meant that placekickers found the risk of a return more palatable, especially relative to the "penalty" for a touchback.

Yards per return went up from 23.0 to 27.6. Average starting field position went from the 28.8-yard-line to the 30.1-yard-line. Given that the league-wide TO% dropped from 11.6% to 10.7%, kickoffs had a lot to do with the change.

Teams scored on 38% of their possessions compared to 35.5% in 2023 and 36.4% in 2022. Points per drive went from 1.88 to 2.07. There were 85 more touchdowns scored in 2024 compared to 2023 and 26 more made field goals on 55 more field goal attempts.

For the 2025 season, the "punishment" for a touchback will be placement of the ball at the 35-yard-line, so we could see even better field position numbers this year.

While the kickoff rules absolutely played a part in the increased scoring, those were not the sole reasons why. The league-wide third-down conversion rate went from 38.9% to 39.8%. More importantly, teams went from 7,194 third-down attempts in 2023 to 6,874 third-down attempts in 2024. That right there is a sign of how much more effective teams were on first and second down and the priority placed on success rate to stay ahead of the chains.

Fourth-down attempts were actually down last season, but the success rate was up dramatically. Teams converted at 51.8% in 2023 and 56.6% in 2024.

Red zone success also took a leap, going from 54.3% to 56.9%. With the likelihood of more trips inside the opponents' 20-yard-line now with field position probably improving across the board again this season, the fact that teams are having more success on third down, fourth down, and in the red zone should increase scoring yet again.

There were 622 more points scored during the 2024 season than the 2023 season. It will be interesting to see how much of a leap we'll see this season and if some of those conversion percentages keep trending up, especially because red zone efficiency started very slowly in 2024, as teams were below 47% through the first two weeks.

The average Over/Under was 43.1 in 2023 and 44.6 in 2024, so an adjustment was made over the course of the season to put totals on par with what we saw back in 2022. So, you could argue that 2023 was the outlier and the changes simply brought us closer to what should be the baseline. So, we'll see what the 2025 season holds and how sportsbooks and bettors adjust to the changes.

VSIN DEFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

BEST BETS

BY ADAM BURKE

Fourteen offensive players went off the board in the first round of the 2024 NFL Draft before the first defensive player was taken. It was an historic first round in a lot of ways…and also a one-year outlier. Three of the top five picks in the 2025 NFL Draft were defenders and 15 of the 32 first-round selections overall.

Players who get after the quarterback or have the ability to intercept passes are generally the ones to highlight here. Much like the Offensive Rookie of the Year, where running backs are likely to be few and far between going forward after a lot of success in the early-to-mid 2000s and 2010s, this is now a pass-driven award, so linebackers and tackle machines are unlikely to get the benefit of the doubt.

Four of the last five winners have been pass rushers. The last true linebacker to win was Shaquille (formerly Darius) Leonard in 2018. The last one before that was Luke Kuechly in 2012. I guess "true" depends on your definition of guys like Jared Verse and Will Anderson.

Outliers are definitely a possibility, but let's look at the last 10 Defensive Rookie of the Year winners and attempt to get a baseline for the stats and the circumstances that are required to be in the running.

DEFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR WINNERS

PLAYERS
Jared Verse, Will Anderson, Sauce Gardner, Micah Parsons, Chase Young, Nick Bosa, Shaquille Leonard, Marshon Lattimore, Joey Bosa, Marcus Peters

BY DRAFT POSITION (ROUND.PICK)
1.19; 1.3; 1.4; 1.12; 1.2; 1.2; 2.36 (Leonard); 1.11; 1.3; 1.18

Nine of the last 10 winners have been top-20 picks in the draft. We only had four players who fit that mold from the 2024 NFL Draft and Verse was one of them, so the trend continued. This year, we have nine, including Travis Hunter, Abdul Carter, and Mason Graham as top-five picks.

FIRST-PLACE VOTES (L5 YEARS)
36 (Verse), 16 (Anderson, runner-up Jalen Carter and third-place finisher Kobie Turner had 14); 46 (Gardner); 50 (Parsons); 42.5 (Young)

Anderson's win was clearly the most contested in the last several years and the closest since 2013 when Sheldon Richardson had 23 first-place votes to Kiko Alonso's 19.

Also, team success isn't necessarily a prerequisite, but eight of the 10 teams made the playoffs. Four of the last five have been on division champions. You have to make plays and make noteworthy plays for noteworthy teams more often than not.

STATS OF THE WINNERS

JARED VERSE (2024)
Verse had 66 combined tackles, 11 tackles for loss, 18 QB Hits, and 4.5 sacks. He added a couple fumble recoveries. He actually won the award running away with 36 of the 49 first-place votes, as Quinyon Mitchell was the only other player with more than one first-place vote.

WILL ANDERSON (2023)
Anderson had 45 combined tackles, 22 QB hits, and seven sacks. He didn't have any interceptions and only one pass defended, hence the very small margin of victory. For reference, Carter had six sacks and Turner actually had nine.

SAUCE GARDNER (2022)
The Cincinnati product led the league with 20 pass breakups and also had a couple of interceptions. He had 75 combined tackles. Not only was he the DROY, but he was also a Pro Bowler and even finished eighth in the Defensive Player of the Year voting.

MICAH PARSONS (2021)
Parsons racked up 13 sacks and 84 combined tackles in his rookie year, which set him on a Hall of Fame trajectory. He has 40.5 sacks through three seasons and has finished in the top three in the Defensive Player of the Year voting every year, including a runner-up vote in 2021. Parsons had 30 QB hits that year and 20 tackles for loss.

CHASE YOUNG (2020)
Young played 15 games for the Washington Football Team with 7.5 sacks, 44 tackles, 10 TFL, and a touchdown on a fumble recovery. He very comfortably won the award with only three others getting votes, none of whom had more than three sacks.

NICK BOSA (2019)
Bosa had nine sacks, 47 tackles, 25 QB hits, and 16 TFL during his DROY season. He also had an interception and a couple of pass breakups. Even though both Maxx Crosby and Josh Allen had more sacks, Bosa still won the award comfortably. He would go on to win Defensive Player of the Year in 2022.

DARIUS LEONARD (2018)
Now going by Shaquille, Leonard led the NFL with 163 tackles in 2018. He also had seven sacks, picked off two passes, had four fumble recoveries, and broke up eight passes. It was truly an incredible season full of stat-filling for Leonard. Amazingly, though, he only got 29 first-place votes, as Derwin James had 20.

MARSHON LATTIMORE (2017)
The Texans swept the OROY/DROY board in 2023, but the Saints did it back in 2017 with Lattimore and Kamara. Lattimore only played 13 games, but had 18 pass breakups and five interceptions. His 18 PD are one off of his career record set in 2021, but his five INT are still a career-best. He easily won the award over Tre'Davious White, who has had quite the NFL career himself.

JOEY BOSA (2016)
The third overall pick had 10.5 sacks and 41 tackles over just 12 games in his rookie campaign. Bosa was tied for 13th in sacks overall and did

not really have a challenger for the award. He got 37 first-place votes. Jalen Ramsey (10) and Deion Jones (3) were the others to get a nod.

MARCUS PETERS (2015)

The Washington product had an insane debut season. He had 26 pass breakups to lead the NFL and also led the league with eight interceptions and 280 return yards. He also had two touchdowns and actually has seven pick-sixes in his career. Incredibly, five voters didn't think he was the clear DROY. It was one of the best rookie seasons for a corner in recent memory.

What does this mean for 2025? Pass rushers and defensive backs are absolutely the places to look. History would also suggest that the higher the draft pick, the better that player's chances of living up to the hype and potential as a rookie.

Now, let's turn it over to our VSiN hosts and contributors for their best bets in the Defensive Rookie of the Year market.

ADAM BURKE

DONOVAN EZEIRUAKU (22/1)

This could be a really great situation for Ezeiruaku. There are a lot of eyes and a lot of headlines about the ongoing contract impasse between Micah Parsons and the Cowboys. While it is highly, highly, highly unlikely that Parsons plays for another team on his next contract, at least there

could be a discussion and a little bit of buzz for Ezeiruaku if he puts up numbers.

Parsons is going to command a ton of attention from opposing schemes and blockers. Ezeiruaku, who had 16.5 sacks and was second in the nation at Boston College last season, has the chance to really benefit. While he doesn't exactly fit the mold given his second-round draft position, the fit is really strong here.

Furthermore, Matt Eberflus is now the defensive coordinator for the Cowboys and Shaquille Leonard won the Defensive Rookie of the Year in 2018 on his watch. I don't think Ezeiruaku will become the tackle machine (163) that Leonard was, but double-digit sacks and a little bit of notoriety could have him in the mix.

JENSEN LEWIS
MASON GRAHAM (14/1)

SEAN GREEN
SHEMAR STEWART (21/1)

WILL HILL
SHEMAR STEWART (21/1)

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VSIN OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

BEST BETS

BY ADAM BURKE

After a year in which six quarterbacks and seven wide receivers were drafted in the first round, and 14 offensive players before the first defensive player, we had a much more balanced draft in 2025. There were 17 offensive players taken and 15 defensive players. Of those 17 offensive players, there were only three quarterbacks and two wide receivers.

So, that means we may have the chance to buck a few trends this year. We had two first-round running backs, a position that hasn't won this award since 2018. We could also have our first Offensive Rookie of the Year from outside the first round since 2017.

One would think it takes a lot to win this award as a quarterback because the guys that play right away are often drafted to bad teams with bad offensive lines. While that is true, four of the last six winners have been QBs.

Wide receivers have the other two wins in the last six seasons, but Ja'Marr Chase (2021) was something of an exception, in that the last WR to win prior to him was Odell Beckham Jr. in 2014. Before that, you have to go back to Percy Harvin in 2009.

Outliers are definitely a possibility, but let's look at the last 10 Offensive Rookie of the Year winners and attempt to get a baseline for the stats and the circumstances that are required to be in the running.

OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR WINNERS

PLAYERS
Jayden Daniels, C.J. Stroud, Garrett Wilson, Ja'Marr Chase, Justin Herbert, Kyler Murray, Saquon Barkley, Alvin Kamara, Dak Prescott, Todd Gurley

BY POSITION
5 QB, 3 RB, 2 WR

BY DRAFT POSITION (ROUND.PICK)
1.2; 1.2; 1.10; 1.5; 1.6; 1.1; 1.2; 3.67 (Kamara); 4.135 (Prescott); 1.10

Eight of the last 10 have been first-round picks and all eight were top-10 picks. Opportunity matters as much as anything. First-round picks on bad teams, almost regardless of position, are a lock to start.

First-place votes (L5 years): 48 (Daniels), 48 (Stroud); 18 (Wilson, runner-up Kenneth Walker III had 19); 42 (Chase); 41 (Herbert)

Nobody has been unanimous since Ben Roethlisberger in 2004 with all 48 votes.

Also, team success isn't exactly a prerequisite. The Texans, Bengals, Saints, and Cowboys were all division winners within the last 10 years, but the Commanders, Jets, Chargers, Cardinals, Giants, and Rams were not. Of those six non-division winners, the Commanders are the only team to make the playoffs.

STATS OF THE WINNERS

JAYDEN DANIELS (2024)
For the second straight year, the No. 2 overall pick and second QB off the board won this award. Daniels had 4,459 total yards and 31 total touchdowns in leading the Commanders to the playoffs. Daniels got 48 of the 49 first-place votes, as Brock Bowers got the other one.

C.J. STROUD (2023)
Stroud started 15 of the team's 17 games and had 499 pass attempts with a 23/5 TD/INT ratio. He led the league in INT% and passing yards per game with 273.9. Puka Nacua got the other two first-place votes.

GARRETT WILSON (2022)
Wilson played in all 17 games and had 83 catches for 1,103 yards and four touchdowns. Former Ohio State teammate Chris Olave was second among rookies with 1,042 receiving yards and finished fourth in the OROY voting. Wilson was 15th in receiving yards overall.

JA'MARR CHASE (2021)
The Joe Burrow connection definitely helped Chase here, as the rookie had 81 catches for 1,455 yards and 13 touchdowns. It was arguably the best rookie season in this generation for a wide receiver. He was fourth in the NFL in receiving yards and third in touchdowns, which was definitely worthy of breaking the WR drought.

JUSTIN HERBERT (2020)
Herbert had a 31/10 TD/INT ratio and started 15 games in his rookie season. He threw for just under 290 yards per game and 4,336 yards total. Only Deshaun Watson, Patrick Mahomes, Tom Brady, Matt Ryan, and Josh Allen threw for more yards and Herbert also finished 10th in TD passes.

KYLER MURRAY (2019)
Murray threw for 3,722 and ran for another 544 in his rookie year. In total, he accounted for 24 total touchdowns across 16 starts. He was the most-sacked QB in the NFL, but still did enough to garner 26.5 of the 50 first-place votes. That was a weak crop for rookies, but Murray was certainly the most impactful.

SAQUON BARKLEY (2018)
Barkley was a Pro Bowler in his rookie year and led the NFL in yards from scrimmage with 2,028. He ran for 1,307 and added 721 more on 91 receptions and 121 targets. He was second to Ezekiel Elliott in rushing yards and edged him by 27 yards in total yardage. He actually ranked 13th in receptions and only Christian McCaffrey had more among running backs.

ALVIN KAMARA (2017)
Kamara ran for an insane 6.1 yards per carry during his rookie year and won the award, despite only starting three games. He played all 16 and, much

like Barkley a year later, racked up a ton of yardage through the air. His 826 receiving yards are still a career-high. He actually only rushed for 728 yards, but had 13 total touchdowns. Despite the eye-popping all-purpose yardage total, he had 28 first-place votes to 21 for Kareem Hunt, who rushed for 1,327 yards and actually outgained Kamara from scrimmage.

DAK PRESCOTT (2016)
Prescott's relative lack of pedigree was a huge deal, as the fourth-round pick became the latest player drafted since Denver's Mike Anderson in 2000 (sixth-rounder) to win OROY. To this day, Dak and Dennis Shaw (1970) are the only non-first-round QBs to win. He started all 16 games and had a 23/4 TD/INT ratio and actually finished sixth in MVP voting.

Teammate Ezekiel Elliott was the only other vote-getter and, in fact, got 21.5 of the 50 first-place votes.

TODD GURLEY (2015)
In the Rams' final season in St. Louis, Gurley played in 13 games and had 1,106 rushing yards. He only had 10 total touchdowns, all on the ground, but won comfortably. Gurley had 27 first-place votes and ranked third in rushing yards behind Adrian Peterson and Doug Martin.

What does this mean for 2024? Well, like I said, opportunity matters. You notice that all of those players stayed healthy enough to play a lot of games to rack up passing attempts, carries, and targets, but they were also on teams that gave them the chance to shine.

Even when Barkley and Kamara won, they were huge parts of the passing game. It is a pass-driven award at this stage, especially with no running back winning since 2018 and the diminished importance of running backs in terms of draft position. In fact, of the last 20 vote-getters for this award, only three have been running backs and they have had 31, 4, and 6 points in the voting.

Now, let's turn it over to our VSiN hosts and contributors for their best bets in the Offensive Rookie of the Year market.

MATT BROWN

SHEDEUR SANDERS (40/1)
DILLON GABRIEL (80/1)
I am here to make the dual case for Sanders and Gabriel. The Browns have proven to be a joke of an organization, so I suppose there is a chance they start one of Joe Flacco or Kenny Pickett at quarterback. It would make absolutely no sense, but what have they done to make a lot of sense lately? Any rookie starting quarterback in the NFL is worthy of OROY talk. Cam Ward is going to play for a bad team with a shaky offensive line. Tyler Shough? The Saints are going to be the worst team in the NFL. Jaxson Dart might not see the field until after the Giants Week 14 bye. Opportunity is the play here. There's a lot of reasons to like both Sanders and Gabriel as bets at their current number.

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

COLSTON LOVELAND (30/1)
Can Ben Johnson do it again, but get a win this time? The new Bears coach turned a rookie tight end in Sam LaPorta into one of the biggest breakout stars of 2022. LaPorta set NFL records for receptions by a rookie tight end with 86 (shattered last year by Brock Bowers and his 112 catches) and joined Mike Ditka and Rob Gronkowski as the only rookie tight ends with double digit touchdown receptions. LaPorta finished third in the Offensive Rookie of the Year voting in 2022 behind Puka Nacua and his record-breaking season, and the eventual winner CJ Stroud and his record-breaking season. Loveland has the potential to have a LaPorta-like season this year for the Bears and, with Johnson leading the way, could emerge as the best offensive rookie in the NFL.

Loveland has frequently been compared to LaPorta in the way he runs routes and catches balls. One anonymous NFL executive told The Athletic,

ADAM BURKE

TETAIROA MCMILLAN (15/1)

It is clear what the Panthers are trying to do — salvage the choice to draft Bryce Young by putting as much talent as possible around him. McMillan represents the second first-round WR taken in the Dave Canales era and the plan is going to be to give a shorter QB as many options with big catch radii as possible.

Sounds similar to what Canales had to work with in Tampa, right? A smaller QB who likes to uncork some 50/50 balls that he has to trust his receivers to either high point the football or be strong enough to catch it. McMillan could very well be the Mike Evans in this offense as a big 6-foot-4 kid that was thrown into first-team reps during OTAs. As mentioned, the last six winners have been QB or WR, and while there are some very interesting running backs in the mix this season, especially compared to previous ones, I'd still lean towards a passing game player getting the nod.

The other thing here is that team success is not a prerequisite. The Panthers, who some think could challenge for a playoff spot, may trail a lot, giving McMillan even more chances to rack up numbers and develop as a player. These rookie awards are usually about opportunity and McMillan should have a ton of it.

TIM MURRAY

KALEB JOHNSON (40/1)

One of my favorite players in the NFL Draft was Iowa's Kaleb Johnson. With the 83rd pick, the Steelers passed on Shedeur Sanders and selected the talented running back. Johnson was Iowa's offense in 2024. Johnson rushed for 1,537 yards on 240 carries and scored 21 touchdowns on the ground. With Najee Harris in Los Angeles with the Chargers, there is a path for Johnson to become RB1 in Pittsburgh. Jaylen Warren is still in Pittsburgh, but spending a third-round pick on Johnson is a clear indication on how much they value him. It's worth noting, the Steelers did not have a second-round pick after trading for DK Metcalf from Seattle. Yes, Aaron Rodgers is in town, but the acquisition of Metcalf and Robert Woods should open up running opportunities for Johnson. Raiders RB Ashton Jeanty is the rightful favorite to win Offensive Rookie of the Year, but Johnson should have a great year in Pittsburgh and will challenge for the award.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

TETAIROA MCMILLAN (15/1)

Obviously, Jeanty and Ward will dominate this discussion, and rightfully so, but I think on a futures bet like this you want to look at some longer odds that will have a chance to either 1. Actually cash or 2. Drastically have an odds shift that you can reposition yourself down the road for some profit. T-Mac going to the Panthers gives Bryce Young a stud WR that he's needed, and if they can make the Panthers a competent offense again, there will be a lot of praise heaped his way. He was the only thing that kept Arizona even remotely relevant last year, and with his size and athleticism, I think he could be a very good NFL player and in a relatively weak rookie class, I think he could be your OROY.

JENSEN LEWIS
MATTHEW GOLDEN (25/1)

SEAN GREEN
QUINN EWERS (300/1)

WILL HILL
CJ HARVEY (20/1)

"Loveland is going to catch a million balls. He will be better than Sam LaPorta. He is such a good receiver, and he's bigger." With teams utilizing more 12 personnel (two tight ends on the field), the Bears should excel with current TE Cole Kmet and Loveland on the field together. Defenses have been stacking the box vs. two-TE sets and the Bears can expose this. With Kmet being more of an in-line tight end, blocking and releasing, Loveland can split out wide and run more routes. (It's worth noting that Johnson's offense used 12 personnel at the second highest rate in the NFL last year.)

At 30/1 odds, Loveland is a great value play considering the expected volume and contributions he will have in this Bears offense.

TEAMS WITH
SLEEPER APPEAL

BY ZACH COHEN

The 2024 Commanders flipped the script in the NFC East, going from basement-dwellers to division champs. The leap was powered by a coaching overhaul, the electric debut of rookie Jayden Daniels and a few strategic offseason upgrades. The Broncos also made a sizable jump, going 10-7 with Sean Payton finding his quarterback in rookie Bo Nix, along with the front office providing the legendary head coach with some real talent on both sides of the ball.

I'm not sure the same exact formula is out there this year. There won't be many rookies starting games, and the ones that will are in bad situations. However, I do see some teams that will make similarly massive turnarounds from 2024 to 2025. And if you're looking to bet futures this summer, identifying which teams can do so should be a profitable exercise — whether that's for win totals, alternate win totals or bolder futures with bigger payouts.

Here are some candidates for teams with sleeper appeal, excluding teams like the 49ers who were ravaged by injuries last season.

CHICAGO BEARS

The Bears were pegged for a breakout year in 2024, but they stumbled out the gates and finished 5-12. Caleb Williams played like a rookie and head coach Matt Eberflus, along with other key members of his staff, was dismissed midseason. Overall, it was a disappointing year for a team that had high hopes for the No. 1 pick, especially considering the type of talent he was surrounded by.

The good news for Chicago is that the team's struggles allowed the franchise to grab one of the hottest available coaches in years: Ben Johnson, the offensive coordinator of the Lions. From 2022 to 2024, Johnson oversaw some of the best offenses in football. In fact, over that three-year stretch, the Lions had an EPA per play of 0.095, which was the third-highest mark in the NFL. Last year, nobody in the league averaged more points per game than the 33.2 that Detroit put up.

Johnson's obsession with detail, in addition to his creativity as a play caller, should unlock Williams, and that's especially true with the Bears having made some improvements along the offensive line. The arrival of All-Pro guard Joe Thuney should stabilize a group that is talented up front — and healthier than it has been in years.

If Johnson can get Chicago to another level offensively, the sky's the limit in the Windy City. The Bears were 13th in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (0.002) last year, so they don't have to get too much better on that side of the ball. Plus, they brought in some big bodies to address their porous run defense. That said, they should be ready to rock on defense.

Of course, the NFC North is loaded. Detroit will be good again, Minnesota has been consistently excellent under Kevin O'Connell and Green Bay is always a threat to make the playoffs. So, going from worst to first will be a challenge for Chicago. But the Bears have a win total of 8.5 this year, and you can get plus-money odds to take the Over. If things break right, Chicago could go Over that mark — and a spot in the postseason isn't out of the question.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

The Patriots should be able to get right rather quickly. Going from Jerod Mayo to Mike Vrabel is a huge upgrade on the sidelines, and Josh McDaniels is a good offensive coordinator for Drake Maye, who should be awesome in Year 2 under center.

Maye was actually 12th amongst starting quarterbacks in Completion Percentage Over Expected (2.8%) as a rookie, and he already looks like a dangerous runner — he averaged 8.8 yards per carry last season. With New England having signed Morgan Moses and Garrett Bradbury, Maye has a better group blocking for him. The team also used the fourth overall pick on LSU lineman Will Campbell, who notably said he's going to "fight and die" trying to protect Maye after being selected. All of that, combined with some small improvements at the skill positions, should mean a much better Patriots offense.

New England also loaded up quite a bit defensively, signing Milton Williams, Carlton Davis, Harold Landry III and Robert Spillane to add to a group that should already be better with Vrabel just being around.

This is just a more talented team and a better coached team than it was last season, and it's checking a lot of boxes when looking for Over plays on regular season win totals. But I wouldn't stop there with the Pats. This is a team in which you'll want to consider some alt Overs at great prices, and an easy schedule is a big part of that.

New England has home games against seven opponents that had losing records last year. Tack on another four road games against opponents that were below .500 and this could be a team that hits double-digit wins. Honestly, the Patriots have a better shot than the Dolphins of giving the Bills a run for their money atop the AFC East.

CAROLINA PANTHERS

The Panthers will play 11 games against opponents with losing records from 2024. That alone means we should see a better season for a Carolina team that was very competitive to end the 2024 season. It also doesn't hurt that the Panthers open the season with seven winnable games. Starting the season on the right note is a good way for a team to build confidence and shake off a bad year.

Carolina also added some talent on defense, including Tershawn Wharton, Bobby Brown III and Tre'von Moehrig. And getting Derrick Brown back should mean the Panthers will immediately be tougher to run against than they were last year. Also, rookies Nic Scourton and Princely Umanmielen could make some noise as edge rushers.

Defensive coordinator Ejiro Evero is also highly-regarded around the league. He did good work as the coordinator for Denver in 2022, and he should be able to patch things up now that Carolina gave him some actual talent to work with.

As far as the offense goes, we could see an entirely different Panthers team. Bryce Young is going to be extremely comfortable in his second year in Dave Canales' offense, and we saw the third-year signal-caller do some great things towards the end of last year. Young finished the season throwing for seven touchdowns and no picks in his final three games. And over the second half of 2024, Carolina performed like a top-

15 offense in EPA per play. With improved offensive line play, we could see the Panthers flirt with top-10 offensive production — especially if rookie wideout Tetairoa McMillan is ready to make use of that 6-foot-5 body of his. Carolina didn't have a true No. 1 receiver in Young's first two years in the league.

Realistically, heading into last season, Carolina was pegged as a sleeper team after beefing up the offensive line and making some big short-term investments. Sure, the Panthers ended up disappointing a bit, but sometimes we're a year early in predicting the success of young teams. Carolina looks like a great bet to go Over its win total, and I wouldn't rule out the Panthers winning the NFC South. Of all of the teams looking to go from worst to first, Carolina has the best shot.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Liam Coen, the new head coach of the Jaguars, didn't receive as much hype as Ben Johnson did, but he did a similarly spectacular job last season. Coen was the offensive coordinator for the Buccaneers, who finished the season fifth in the NFL in EPA per play (0.133). Coen did tremendous work with Baker Mayfield and an explosive Tampa Bay passing game, but he also got the ground game going. The Bucs were sixth in the league in Rush EPA per play (0.012) in 2024. They were 27th in Rush EPA per play (-0.166) in 2023.

Coen will now look to make some things happen with a Jacksonville offense that was 19th in EPA per play (-0.023) last year. And there's really no reason to think he can't. Trevor Lawrence hasn't lived up to his pre-draft hype, but we know he has a big arm, great size and the ability to make plays with his legs. He's also not too far removed from a 2022 season in which he completed 66.3% of his passes and threw for 4,113 yards with 25 touchdowns and only eight interceptions. Well, Coen's offense should be able to bring that version of Lawrence out again. The Jaguars are going to do a lot of things pre-snap, and receivers should be schemed open more often than they were under Doug Pederson. Also, Grant Udinski should be able to add a lot to the offense. The new Jacksonville offensive coordinator has been with Minnesota since 2022, so he should be able to help Coen install some of Kevin O'Connell's playbook.

As long as the Jaguars offensive line isn't a nightmare, we could be looking at a sleeping giant when talking about the Jacksonville offense — especially with Brian Thomas Jr. in Year 2, looking poised to take advantage of being in this new system.

If the offense lives up to the hype, it isn't crazy to think the Jags can contend in the AFC South. Of course, Jacksonville can't be the worst team in the league when it comes to Dropback EPA per play allowed (0.241) again. But it's hard to expect that given some of the team's offseason moves. The Jaguars used the second overall pick on two-way superstar Travis Hunter, who should add a lot to the secondary. It's not yet clear how many snaps he'll play on defense, but he's an electric, ball-hawking playmaker that will contribute when he's out there. Jacksonville also added Jourdan Lewis, who should be productive while some of the team's younger corners look to crack the depth chart. The Jags will also be hoping for a bounceback year from Tyson Campbell, who played great ball in 2022. And some continued growth from Montaric Brown could help the defense a lot.

It's just hard not to like the group of pass rushers Jacksonville has, and the linebacking corps is solid as well. So, it isn't crazy to expect new defensive coordinator Anthony Campanile to fix this defense up. He's viewed as an outside-the-box thinker — much like the new Jags head coach and front office members — and he'll be aggressive with the tools he has at his disposal.

Overall, this is just a talented team that can make some real strides with a new set of voices on the coaching staff. People liked this team to contend in the AFC a year ago, and that didn't work out for a number of different reasons. But there's no reason that leap can't come a year later, and it doesn't hurt that Jacksonville plays in one of the weakest divisions in the league.

WIN WITH VSIN
BETTING SPLITS

BY JOSH APPELBAUM

The NFL is the most heavily bet sport by far, dwarfing all other professional and college leagues in terms of public interest, ticket counts and overall money wagered. With 39 states (and counting) having legalized sports betting across America, millions of bettors are set to participate in NFL betting this season, many for the very first time.

The vast majority of bettors wagering on the NFL are considered "public" bettors. This means they are mostly betting for fun and making their weekly selections based upon gut instinct, bias and favoritism. Most public bettors lean toward favorites (take the better team!) and Overs (it's more fun rooting for points!), while also leaning toward home teams, whoever has the better won-loss record and whoever played better the previous week.

Unfortunately for the public, betting based on bias and emotion is a recipe for disaster and plays right into the sportsbooks' hands. Instead, bettors should focus on cold, hard sports betting data to help them decide who and what to bet on.

Luckily for bettors, VSiN provides NFL Betting Splits for Pro members. Bet Splits cut through the noise and media narrative by reporting the real and accurate percentage of bets and dollars made across the marketplace for all bet types. By learning how to analyze and interpret the bet splits, bettors can be confident in placing data-driven wagers with their head and not their heart.

Bet Splits can be confusing, so let's provide an actionable blueprint on how to use them to your advantage.

GO CONTRARIAN

Because the NFL is the most popular public sport, data-driven bettors look to bet against the masses. Why? Because more often than not, Average Joes come out on the losing end. After all, when the public loses, the house cleans up. And year after year, the sportsbooks make a killing. With this in mind, data-driven bettors look to bet against the public and place themselves on the side of the house.

In order to go contrarian, bettors should focus on the "bets" column located next to the "spread" tab. The goal is to look for games displaying the most lopsided ticket counts and then take the opposite side.

For example, if the Chargers (-3) are receiving 80% of spread bets against the Raiders, that

means the public loves Los Angeles and is betting heavily in their favor. For contrarian bettors, this lopsided bet split would lead them to go the other way and take Raiders +3, who are unpopular, undervalued and receiving only 20% of spread bets.

A line of demarcation for contrarian bettors is 65/35. This means betting against teams receiving 65% of spread bets or more and betting in favor of teams receiving 35% of spread bets or less.

Keep in mind, contrarian value is heightened in primetime games due to the increased public participation in Sunday Night Football, Thursday Night Football and Monday Night Football. So, if you see a team getting 35% of spread bets or less in primetime, that is a situation contrarians love to play.

FOLLOW SHARP ACTION

Going contrarian is one piece of the data-driven puzzle. It's a good starting point and foundational pillar. However, the ultimate goal is to not only bet against the public but also place yourself on the side of the sharps who win at a high rate and have the respect of the sportsbooks.

In order to identify sharp action, bettors must compare and contrast the "bets" column with the "handle" column. While the "bets" column shows you the percentage of overall, raw tickets each side is receiving, the "handle" column shows the percentage of overall money each side is receiving. The goal is to look for teams receiving a higher percentage of handle than bets, which means they are receiving a larger share of respected wagers.

For example, if a team is only receiving 40% of spread bets but 65% of spread dollars, that would qualify as a sharp bet split. However, if a team is receiving 65% of spread bets but only 40% of spread dollars, that would qualify as a public bet split worth fading because the team is popular with the masses but receiving far less cold, hard cash.

A good line of demarcation is 10%. This means searching for teams getting at least 10% more money than bets. Keep it simple and remember this phrase: "low bets, higher dollars."

DRAFTKINGS VS CIRCA

One of the best features of the VSiN Bet Splits is the fact that they come from two different sportsbooks, DraftKings and Circa Sports. As data-driven bettors, it's our job to analyze both sets of splits to get the clearest picture of where the public is and where the sharps are.

To figure out where the public is (and go contrarian), bettors should focus on the DraftKings splits. After all, DraftKings is one of the most popular sportsbooks in America. As a result, they take heavy action from Average Joe bettors across the country. So, if a team is getting 65% or spread bets or more at DraftKings, that symbolizes a popular public play worth fading.

On the other hand, Circa Sports is based out of Vegas and considered one of the sharpest, market setting books that cater to sharp bettors and take in (and don't refuse or limit) smart money from pro bettors. With this in mind, if you see a team getting 45% of spread bets but 75% of spread dollars at Circa, that is further evidence of the desert wiseguys taking a position.

WORD OF CAUTION

Bet Splits are critically important to figuring out who the public likes and what teams sharp bettors are backing. Will every contrarian play or "low bets, higher dollars" sharp split win? Of course not. The key is to use bet splits as a piece of your handicapping puzzle but not the "end all, be all." With this in mind, bettors should also consult the VSiN NFL Odds page and compare the bet splits to the line movement, ensuring that the splits and movement are on the same page and not contradicting themselves.

For example, if the Bengals are taking in 40% of spread bets and 60% of spread dollars and have also moved from +3.5 to +3, that would be a data-driven play that "checks off all the boxes."

Lastly, keep in mind that the bet splits are constantly updating every five minutes based on new action coming in. As a result, they can fluctuate throughout the day and week leading to Sunday.

Bet Splits are always the strongest later in the week, especially in the final 24-48 hours leading up to kickoff because that's when the largest share of action is placed.

> " A line of demarcation for contrarian bettors is 65/35. This means betting against teams receiving 65% of spread bets or more and betting in favor of teams receiving 35% of spread bets or less. "

FANTASY POINTS DATA SUITE

PREPPING FOR YOUR FANTASY DRAFT

BY RYAN HEATH

The Fantasy Points Data Suite is the most valuable tool available for bettors and fantasy managers alike. To back up that claim, I've used it to pull a stat for all 32 NFL teams with major fantasy football or betting implications.

Feel free to read this article as a typical piece you'd use to prepare for your fantasy drafts. But it's also full of examples of how you can get the most out of the Data Suite. If you're feeling inspired, sign up today.

ARIZONA CARDINALS

Among 100 qualifying WRs and TEs, Marvin Harrison Jr. saw the fourth-highest share of his targets on the outside (89%) rather than over the middle of the field. Only Jahan Dotson, Amari Cooper, and George Pickens saw a larger percentage of their targets coming outside.

That's pretty bad, considering that targets over the middle are on average worth about 22% more yards than targets on the outside, especially after TE Trey McBride just vacuumed up the highest first-read target share by a TE in Fantasy Points Data history (33.6%) in that over-the-middle role.

Zooming in further, Corner and Go routes alone made up nearly a third of Harrison's route tree as a rookie, his frequency of each ranking above the 74th percentile. And these were by far his two worst routes from a separation perspective, ranking below the 30th percentile on each by Average Separation Score.

Harrison's strengths on in-breaking routes and over the middle simply weren't highlighted during his rookie season. Even after the team favorably adjusted his usage on crossers, his receiving YPG average increased only slightly from 49.4 to 55.9.

The Cardinals haven't signed any additional receivers with a history of playing this field-stretcher role and have given no indication they intend to change Harrison's deployment after retaining the same head coach and play caller. I'll be generally fading Harrison in favor of players like Davante Adams, Tee Higgins, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, or Rashee Rice.

ATLANTA FALCONS

Across the full 2024 season, Drake London led the NFL in end zone target share, seeing 56% of the Falcons' end zone targets.

London also commanded six end zone looks across Michael Penix's three starts. In other words, London averaged 117.3 receiving YPG and 2.0 end zone targets per game with Penix, paces that would have led all WRs over the past four seasons.

Given Penix's affinity for the deep ball (throwing 20+ yards downfield at the NFL's 6th-highest rate), the Falcons' suspect defense, and their only other pass-catcher over six feet tall in Kyle Pitts falling to a career-low 67.4% route participation rate last season, London strikes me as one of the better bets to reach double-digit TDs in 2025.

RECOMMENDED PROP
DRAKE LONDON OVER 6.5 RECEIVING TDS

BALTIMORE RAVENS

After a reportedly traumatic August car crash and tightrope surgery the previous November, Mark Andrews ran just a 54.9% route share over the first nine weeks of 2024, drawing 3.2 targets per game on just an 18% TPRR. All would have represented career lows since his rookie season.

But as Andrews' health improved from Week 10 on, his route share grew to 66.4%, commanding 5.0 targets per game on a 24% TPRR, numbers much closer to his career rates. He averaged 14.0 FPG over this stretch (~TE4).

Some of Andrews' late-season production was fueled by touchdown efficiency, and we've seen mixed results from players returning from Andrews' injury. But some other players like Tony Pollard have performed worse immediately following the same injury and procedure, before largely returning to form in the second year removed.

At Andrews' TE8 ADP (outside the top-100 overall players on platforms like Underdog), there's little risk in finding out whether he can return to form as Pollard did and reclaim an every-down role. TEs with multiple previous top-six fantasy seasons typically experience little to no falloff in production at age 30, which Andrews will be at the start of the season.

CAROLINA PANTHERS

Looking only at throws deemed "on-target", Bryce Young's receivers dropped the most air yards in the NFL last season (210).

Carolina's primary outside receivers — Xavier Legette and David Moore — combined for 11 drops while lined up out wide. Coincidentally, that's the same number of targets Adam Thielen drew from out wide all season (on the occasions the team tried him there out of desperation).

This is all to say that Young had no dependable outside WRs in 2024. Despite the lack of weapons, he ranked top-10 in accuracy and catchable throw rate on throws traveling 20 or more yards downfield, or top-15 in highly accurate throw rate when targeting an outside receiver (50.7%).

So it makes a lot of sense that the Panthers elected to use the No. 8 overall pick on X receiver Tetairoa McMillan. WRs drafted inside the top-10 by the NFL since 2021 have averaged ~7.5 targets per game and ~1,012 receiving yards as rookies, reflecting teams' intentions to give these players ample opportunity early on.

So long as Young's growth as a passer in 2024 translates into 2025, McMillan has an excellent shot to exceed 900 receiving yards.

RECOMMENDED PROP
TETAIROA MCMILLAN 900+ RECEIVING YARDS

BUFFALO BILLS

Rather than seeing increased playing time as many young players do, Dalton Kincaid's route share fell from 65.1% (~TE18) as a rookie to just 57.7% (~TE25) during his second season. This stemmed from Kincaid's inability to function as an inline blocker, meaning he mostly gets on the field in the slot or in 2-TE sets.

But Khalil Shakir broke out in 2024, amassing a career-high 100 targets and ranking top-five in catch rate on "true" chances (catchable and non-designed targets) while running 73.1% of his routes from the slot. With the slot position occupied, this eliminated one of Kincaid's only two paths to getting on the field.

And the other didn't prove fruitful either, as the Bills ranked just 17th in 12-personnel usage (21.4%) despite speculation they'd play significantly more 2-TE sets leading up to 2024.

Kincaid occupies an awkward spot in today's NFL. He's not big enough to block like a TE, but not shifty enough to outplay his team's slot receiver. In other words, as TE guru Max Toscano explains here, Kincaid fails the "WR test," making it very difficult for him to get on the field in 1-TE sets. (Sure enough, Kincaid ran just a 53.3% route share on plays the Bills were in 11-personnel.)

You can safely skip Kincaid as a late-round flyer in your fantasy drafts.

CHICAGO BEARS

D.J. Moore averaged a league-high 2.4 screen targets per game in 2024. Without them, he'd have averaged just 9.5 FPG (~WR57).

This matters because new Bears HC and former Lions play caller Ben Johnson has typically leaned toward designing screens for his RBs. Even Amon-Ra St. Brown — from Johnson's favorite slot position — has averaged just 1.0 screen target/game since 2022.

There's a chance these stats are more a reflection of poor effort in a lost season than Moore's actual skill, but he was less efficient than Rome Odunze (whose rookie season I've panned repeatedly) on "real" (non-screen) routes last year.

If Moore is still the most-skilled WR on the Bears (as I believe), I think he'll crush his WR23 ADP running the St. Brown-esque in-breakers for this offense. But the fact that he can't bank on screens in 2025 means there's a wide range of outcomes here, and many worlds exist in which he's scarcely involved if he's not so good as to force Johnson to use him over top-40 Draft picks Colston Loveland and Luther Burden.

On non-screens, Moore accumulated only 716 receiving yards in 2024. Sportsbooks have set his season-long yardage total higher than our projection (964.6), so I'm taking the opportunity to hedge here with his Under.

RECOMMENDED PROP
D.J. MOORE UNDER 1000.5 RECEIVING YARDS

CINCINNATI BENGALS

Ja'Marr Chase averaged 26.7 FPG in eight games the Bengals lost in 2024 (would have ranked WR1, and a full 7.0 points above the WR2). And Tee Higgins averaged 21.0 FPG (~WR2) in the four losses for which he was active.

The Bengals' Joe Burrow-led passing attack was so explosive in 2024 that the team trailed for only 31.1% of their offensive snaps (third-fewest).

But the defense — and the pass rush in particular — was so dreadful that the team lost eight games anyway. They generated the seventh-fewest sacks (36) while ranking just 19th in pressure rate (30.6%), despite NFL sack leader Trey Hendrickson (17.5) playing the entire season.

Hendrickson won't play for the Bengals this season without a new contract and is seeking a trade. There's a chance the team pays him, but there's also a very real chance this already-shaky defense is without its best player in 2025. That would likely lead to still more losses, or at minimum, more shootouts in which Burrow must play the hero.

Chase is the clear 1.01 in all (non-superflex) fantasy formats, while Higgins is closer to undervalued than not at his WR12 ADP.

CLEVELAND BROWNS

Across four healthy games as a full-time player (post Amari Cooper trade), Cedric Tillman led the Browns in first-read target share (25.7%) and targets per game (9.8), which would have ranked behind only Malik Nabers and Ja'Marr Chase over the full season. Tillman was seemingly in the midst of a Year 2 breakout before his season was prematurely ended by a concussion, averaging 18.6 FPG over this stretch.

Admittedly, most of this production occurred with Jameis Winston, the most fantasy-friendly QB in the NFL. Tillman won't have that luxury in 2025, but even after the Browns added little to their receiver group, he's not being drafted like it. He's just the WR66 on Underdog and will likely be a free selection in the final round of most managed redraft leagues.

And remember, Tillman (9.8 targets per game) out-targeted both Jerry Jeudy (8.5) and David Njoku (9.3) over this stretch. There's a real chance he's the best target earner on the roster, but he goes several rounds after the other two. The Browns will have to find an answer at QB for this to pay off, but the potential reward of getting a team's WR1 nearly for free is massive.

DALLAS COWBOYS

As a rookie in 2021, Javonte Williams forced a missed tackle on 27% of his touches (third-best among RBs). But since tearing his ACL and LCL in 2022, he's done so on just 14% and 13% of his touches in back-to-back seasons, ranking bottom-10 in each year.

Williams entered the NFL as one of the most elusive RBs in the league, showcasing elite tackle-breaking ability throughout college as well. But since his multi-ligament injury in 2022, he hasn't been anywhere close to the same player, respectively ranking fourth-worst, third-worst, and sixth-worst among 44 qualifying RBs in missed tackles forced per touch, yards from scrimmage per touch, and yards after contact per touch. Only Ezekiel Elliott and Kareem Hunt were less efficient over this period.

Per-touch efficiency stats don't translate directly into fantasy scoring. But in extreme cases where a player has so dramatically declined over multiple seasons, they provide a hint that he's unlikely to be breaking big plays that will motivate coaches to keep him on the field. On this same team last year, former UDFA Rico Dowdle fully overtook Ezekiel Elliott and his similarly dreadful efficiency by Week 9.

Round 5 rookie Jaydon Blue — who showed off his pass-catching skill set by amassing an impressive 42 receptions at Texas as soon as Bijan Robinson and Jonathon Brooks were out of the way — seems the most likely candidate to eat into Williams' playing time. He doesn't necessarily have the size or inside running ability to carry a full-time NFL workload (and never did so in college), but he's a solid late sleeper in managed leagues.

DENVER BRONCOS

Despite their lead back and primary pass-catching RB in 2024 being the aforementioned washed Javonte Williams, the Broncos led the NFL in target share to the backfield (21.3%).

And before that, Sean Payton's RBs have a long history of leading the NFL in fantasy points. None of the Broncos' backfield members crushed for fantasy last year due to the workload being split between several subpar options, but overall usage stats like the one above point to the massive potential fantasy value that remains here.

Explosive pass-catching RBs can be fantasy football gold in Payton's system. Williams never fit that mold, but Round 2 rookie R.J. Harvey sure does; he's athletically similar to Reggie Bush, and was the first RB Payton has selected on Day 2 since Alvin Kamara. Harvey is also an explosive and elusive runner, ranking behind only Ashton Jeanty in Graham Barfield's Yards Created per carry among the class.

Jeanty would likely need to miss some time or be held back by a mediocre Raiders' offense for the bet below to hit, but Harvey's OROY odds are quite appealing to me in a rookie class that lacks many standout QBs to compete for the award. Kamara notably won it back in 2017 over Deshaun Watson.

RECOMMENDED PROP
R.J. HARVEY TO WIN OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR (20/1)

DETROIT LIONS

Across four games (including playoffs) with David Montgomery out or limited, Jahmyr Gibbs averaged 165.5 yards from scrimmage per game. If that were extrapolated across a 17-game season, Gibbs would have cleared Chris Johnson's 2009 record by over 300 scrimmage yards. For further perspective, Montgomery has never reached 165 scrimmage yards in any of his 88 career games.

This isn't to say I'd ever expect Gibbs to maintain that pace over a full season, with Montgomery healthy or not. But the more actionable way to look at this stat is to consider that Gibbs accomplished this insane feat on an unremarkable 66.4% snap share, which would have ranked just 10th-highest in 2024, near backs like Tony Pollard and D'Andre Swift. This isn't that far off Gibbs' 54.4% snap share with Montgomery healthy. He just efficiently amassed all the high-value touches (including 13 of 17 inside the 10-yard line) with Montgomery out or limited.

If Dan Campbell and new Lions OC John Morton desire it, there's a path for Gibbs to play only a handful of additional snaps per game and likely be the most productive RB in the league. This was the NFL's most valuable fantasy backfield in 2024, even with Gibbs and Montgomery splitting work nearly evenly.

RECOMMENDED PROP
JAHMYR GIBBS OVER 1075.5 RUSHING YARDS

GREEN BAY PACKERS

The Packers offense averaged a -4.5% pass rate over expectation (PROE) in 2024, ranking as the third run-heaviest team (adjusted for situation and game script). But over the previous three seasons, HC Matt LaFleur's offenses ranked 14th-most, 20th-most, and fifth-most pass-heavy.

So what happened? When viewed on a week-by-week basis, we can see that the Packers' run-heavy game plans coincided with Malik Willis's starts (Weeks 2 and 3), and then with Jordan Love's groin injury that he played through from Week 8 on.

Across Love's five starts before the groin injury, he averaged 22.2 FPG (~QB5) on 35.8 pass attempts per game (~QB4). Across the full season, Love aggressively threw deep 16.5% of the time (second-most). With him now fully healthy, the pieces of a productive and high-volume passing attack are in place.

Jayden Reed averaged 18.3 FPG within this same split, while Romeo Doubs led the way with 7.3 targets per game (more than Jauan Jennings and DK Metcalf in 2024). This passing game died in the second half of 2024, but I see a real chance that Reed (ADP: WR44) or rookie Matthew Golden (WR43) help fantasy managers this year.

HOUSTON TEXANS

As with most QBs, pressure had a large impact on C.J. Stroud last year. Among 32 qualifying QBs, his "highly accurate" throw rate when pressured (28.3%) ranked sixth-worst in 2024. But that jumped to 56.8% on plays Stroud was kept clean (14th-best). And we can observe similar splits across most of his other stats:

Stroud was pressured on 38.0% of his dropbacks in 2024 (behind only Drake Maye), as the Texans' offensive line was among the worst in the NFL. The Texans responded to this problem by trading away Pro Bowl LT Laremy Tunsil and parting ways with two other 2024 starters, bringing in Cam Robinson and a slew of other free agents to replace them.

Overall, the Texans' personnel up front isn't obviously better than last year. Perhaps they'll perform better against opposing stunts, a test of communication and coaching — former offensive line coach Chris Strausser contemplated retirement before the 2024 season and led a unit that allowed the second-highest pressure rate on stunts in Fantasy Points Data history.

With this in mind, I'm a bit hesitant about both Nico Collins and Joe Mixon at ADP. Defenses had adjusted by the end of the year, limiting them to 14.9 (~WR19) and 15.2 (~RB17) FPG from Weeks 11-17, respectively. I believe Collins is a special player, but the dysfunctionality of the offensive line, paired with one of the best defenses in the league, could continue to encourage conservative play calling from new OC Nick Caley.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Josh Downs was targeted on 30% of his routes in 2024, ranking fourth-best behind only Puka Nacua, Malik Nabers, and Drake London.

In fact, eight of the top 10 WRs by targets per route run (TPRR) finished inside the top-13 at the WR position, with Downs and a washed-down-the-stretch Cooper Kupp the only exceptions. The list above consists of many of the NFL's biggest stars and Downs.

Anthony Richardson may be almost entirely to blame for this. He ranked at the bottom of the league in accuracy while targeting the horizontally breaking routes on which Downs specifically excels, resulting in Downs averaging just 10.7 FPG in Richardson's appearances.

In contrast, Downs averaged 15.5 FPG (~WR17) in Joe Flacco's games, and could be similarly productive if Daniel Jones were named the starter (as Michael Pittman and possibly even Shane Steichen himself seem to want). Downs is being criminally underdrafted as the Underdog WR49.

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Brian Thomas Jr. played through a chest injury (with which it was initially reported he'd miss up to 4 games) from Weeks 8-11. If we throw those games out, Thomas would have averaged 2.76 yards per route run (YPRR), the most by any rookie in Fantasy Points Data history.

Puka Nacua (2.75), Rashee Rice (2.62), and Ja'Marr Chase (2.58) would rank next after Thomas on that list. In their full games in Year 2, they respectively averaged 104.9, 96.0, and 87.2 receiving YPG, while all exceeded 20.0 FPG.

Across a conservative 15 games, that would come out to a minimum of 1,308 receiving yards for Thomas. We've projected an even more conservative number, but still sit comfortably above his 1,150.5-yard Over/Under. Even the addition of Travis Hunter shouldn't be a major hindrance after the departures of Christian Kirk and Evan Engram.

RECOMMENDED PROP
BRIAN THOMAS JR. OVER 1150.5 RECEIVING YARDS

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

Over the Chiefs' first three games with Rashee Rice active, over 50% of Xavier Worthy's routes were vertically breaking. Go routes alone made up 34% of his entire route tree over this period. Both rates would have ranked top-five among WRs across the full season.

If Worthy reverts to a primarily vertical role with Rice back on the field, that could spell trouble; he earned just a .006 Average Separation Score (77th among 106 qualifiers), 0.53 YPRR (100th), and a 9% TPRR (86th) on those routes over the full year. And those numbers didn't materially improve down the stretch: from Week 11 on (including playoffs), just 15% of Worthy's receiving yards came on vertically breaking routes, despite them making up 32% of his route tree.

I'm not very high on Worthy's ability to develop as a downfield threat, given how disfavorably he compares to other recent busts in these metrics. And I think it's very likely Rice regains his favorable horizontal routes; they've made up 41% of his routes over his first two seasons (would have ranked top-12 at the position last year), and he averaged an absurd and league-leading 5.13 YPRR on them (albeit on a tiny sample) in 2024. The team spent much of the year trying to recreate that between DeAndre Hopkins, Travis Kelce, and JuJu Smith-Schuster to little success.

To make a long blurb short, I'm very in on Rice at his WR17 ADP, but not nearly as interested in Worthy as the WR21. Worthy could have a serviceable Year 2 (especially if Travis Kelce continues to decline), but I'd be very surprised at a major breakout driven by downfield shots, given his struggles to separate and Patrick Mahomes' questionable deep accuracy.

LAS VEGAS RAIDERS

Brock Bowers averaged 2.11 yards per route run in 2024, the most by a rookie TE in Fantasy Points Data history. The rest of the Raiders' receivers averaged just 1.12 YPRR, the third-lowest mark in the NFL.

Yards per route run is a great stat, but it can be influenced by the quality of a team's QB and overall passing offense. Comparing each players' YPRR to the rest of their team is one way to account for this.

That Bowers averaged the most FPG (15.5) by a rookie TE since the Vietnam War and set the rookie receptions record (at all positions) despite this environment is extraordinary. There's an understandable temptation to get incredibly aggressive on him at his Round 2 ADP, but in truth, I'm hesitant about him (and more so Trey McBride) as such early selections for reasons I lay out here. Though the Raiders' offense should be much more efficient this year, it's also highly unlikely a team led by Pete Carroll and Chip Kelly amass the third-most dropbacks in the NFL, as the Raiders did last year. This makes it hard to project Bowers as a top-18 player for fantasy football.

The universe where I'm wrong is the one in which Bowers' talent is so transcendent that projections can't appropriately capture his greatness. I'd rather cover that outcome by throwing a unit on a (very) longshot bet than draft him over players like De'Von Achane or Drake London in fantasy football.

RECOMMENDED PROP
BROCK BOWERS TO WIN OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (60/1)

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

Ladd McConkey isn't just a slot receiver; he ranks top-five in first downs per route run (1D/RR) when lined up outside.

If you have a bias against slot WRs in fantasy football, McConkey is your chance to bury it. He turned his routes from the outside into chain-moving first downs as often as the league's premier X receivers like Mike Evans and Nico Collins. It's also instructive that McConkey ranks next to Amon-Ra St. Brown here, the poster boy of the "mostly-slot" archetype that many fantasy managers also foolishly faded after his rookie season.

Like St. Brown, CeeDee Lamb, Chris Godwin, and most other slot receivers that have sustained elite fantasy production, McConkey doesn't come off the field in 2-receiver sets. His 81.7% route participation rate ranked top-30, above players like Lamb, Godwin, Courtland Sutton, and Terry McLaurin.

RECOMMENDED PROP
LADD MCCONKEY OVER 1025.5 RECEIVING YARDS

LOS ANGELES RAMS

In their games together, Puka Nacua and Cooper Kupp effectively combined for a 67% TPRR. No other Rams player with at least 100 routes across these 11 games was targeted on more than 12% of their routes.

In other words, the Rams ran one of the most concentrated passing attacks we've ever seen, with both Nacua and Kupp ranking top-five in TPRR among all qualifying WRs. If Matthew Stafford dropped back with both Kupp and Nacua on the field, he was throwing to one of them roughly two-thirds of the time.

This was despite Kupp's separation abilities being visibly diminished at the end of the year. Enter Davante Adams, who just ranked top-five in first-read target share (35.1%) despite competing with Garrett Wilson, and who did not decline in the same way Kupp did last year, per our separation charters.

Adams is very likely a better overall target-earner than Kupp at this point in their respective careers, and the Rams have literally nobody else to throw to. This feels easy.

RECOMMENDED PROP
DAVANTE ADAMS OVER 950.5 RECEIVING YARDS

MIAMI DOLPHINS

Tyreek Hill was worse at separating on vertical routes in 2024 than in 2023. His Average Separation Score (ASS) on these plays was just .069 (33rd), compared to .233 (third-best) the year prior.

And the rest of Hill's per-route metrics (including yards and targets) declined in unison.

This suggests Hill's decline wasn't solely a result of the Dolphins' offensive line leaving HC Mike McDaniel no choice but to pivot to the short passing game. Hill's inherent ability to gain separation on the deep routes he'd previously feasted on was also clearly diminished. This makes it very plausible we're simply seeing an early age-related decline for a speed-reliant WR, as Hill turned 31 this offseason.

It's possible to argue in favor of Hill based on a much-improved schedule (especially schematically). But on the whole, the horrendous and unfocused vibes Hill is giving off this offseason probably outweigh that for me. He's the sort of player I'll take a few shots on in Underdog tournaments, but am content largely fading at a top-30 ADP.

MINNESOTA VIKINGS

Jordan Addison averaged a higher target share with T.J. Hockenson (19.8%) than without him (16.9%).

In fact, we can do this with several of Addison's stats. After Hockenson returned, Addison's receiving YPG (46.2 to 64.4), TPRR (18% to 21%), and most importantly, his FPG (10.0 to 16.3) all noticeably increased.

These splits are probably more a result of Addison's improved health later in the season after his Week 1 ankle injury than anything magical about Hockenson's presence on the field, but they still suggest he's grown into the clear No. 2 target on this Vikings offense that's ranked top-five in red zone pass rate during every year of Kevin O'Connell's tenure.

And 2024 even represented a slight tap of the brakes for one of the best pass-catching environments in the league; while the Vikings still ranked top-three in intended pass rate measured by PROE (+5.9%), their actual dropback volume (626) ranked just league-average, by far the lowest in O'Connell's history. If J.J. McCarthy (a top-10 NFL Draft pick and Brett Whitefield's QB1 in last year's draft class) is as promised and we see even slight regression from last year's top-three defense, this team could well throw even more in 2025. Addison's WR33 ADP is far too late.

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

Across Drake Maye's 10 full games, Hunter Henry led Patriots receivers in all of the following stats: targets per game (5.9), receiving YPG (44.9), first-read target share (21.1%), catchable targets (50), end zone targets (4), and expected fantasy points per game (10.5). He also ranked as the TE12 by Underdog FPG over this span.

And the last time Henry played under returning OC Josh McDaniels in 2021, he tied for the sixth-most end zone targets among all players (12), scored nine TDs, and finished as the TE13 by Underdog FPG (8.2). He's an incredibly attractive late-round value on the platform, going as just the TE22 by ADP with only a Round 3 rookie and a 31-year-old Stefon Diggs coming off an ACL tear as new target competition.

In managed redraft leagues, Henry is an ideal early-season streamer for managers who wish to punt the position, as he'll play the single-softest TE schedule in the NFL over the first five weeks, drawing the Raiders (who ranked top-3 in schedule-adjusted FPG allowed to TEs in 2024) as a 3.5-point favorite in Week 1.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

In 22 career games together with both receivers playing above a 50% snap share, Chris Olave averages 2.06 YPRR. Rashid Shaheed averages nearly the same (2.00 YPRR) in that sample, and he out-scored Olave by 3.3 FPG in their five games together in 2024.

In that smaller 2024 sample, Shaheed's 14.5 FPG would have ranked as the ~WR21 across the full season. He did this on an impossibly deep 17.7 aDOT, but his production wasn't just a case of running hot on a few big plays; he also clearly beat out Olave in volume stats like first-read target share (32.2% to 25.3%) and XFP/G (13.6 to 10.3).

Kellen Moore's offense will be quite different from former OC Klint Kubiak's deep shot-heavy attack. I won't pretend to have a strong vision of how Shaheed will fit in, but we have a three-year sample across multiple play callers telling us Shaheed is just as capable a fantasy producer as Olave. For some reason, Shaheed goes nearly four full rounds later on Underdog as just the WR56 by ADP.

NEW YORK JETS

By most metrics, it was Isaiah Davis, not Braelon Allen, who was the most efficient and explosive Jets rookie RB in 2024.

In fact, Allen ranked dead last among 51 qualifying RBs in explosive play rate (frequency of runs over 15 yards or receptions over 20 yards), behind plodders like Gus Edwards, Kareem Hunt, and a very injured Nick Chubb. Efficiency metrics aren't particularly predictive for RBs compared to volume, but descriptively, it is still concerning to see a rookie at the extreme low-end with washed veterans.

That's especially true when Allen's RB50 Underdog ADP (ahead of seemingly more locked-in handcuffs like Rico Dowdle, Jaylen Wright, and Will Shipley) appears predicated on the idea that he — and specifically not Davis (RB85/undrafted) — can wrestle volume away from Breece Hall. That's despite HC Aaron Glenn's original quote, which sent Hall's ADP plummeting, centering around playing all three RBs, not Allen in particular.

I'm unsure why drafters expect the Jets to maintain loyalty to Allen over Davis because the previous regime drafted him in Round 4 instead of in Round 5. These are similar bets, and we should have relatively low conviction about whether Allen or Davis is a more capable NFL running back. Davis is a great way to get unique in the final round of large-field Underdog tournament drafts.

NEW YORK GIANTS

Malik Nabers' 42.8% first-read target share was the highest of any player in Fantasy Points Data history. Higher than Cooper Kupp's triple crown-winning season in 2021. Higher than Ja'Marr Chase's when he performed the same feat in 2024. And higher than Davante Adams when his QB and best friend forced a mid-season trade and drove a franchise into the ground so that he could pepper him instead of Garrett Wilson.

And we can be assured this will likely always be the case. The Giants didn't add any target competition of note, and Nabers will always demand the ball regardless of performance. Locked into the most volume in the league, all Nabers has to worry about is efficiency.

And it will be pretty difficult for any combination of Jameis Winston, Russell Wilson, and Jaxson Dart to be worse than Nabers' QB play from last year. In 2024, the Giants ranked 4th-worst in catchable air yards per game, yet Nabers averaged 18.2 FPG (~WR7).

RECOMMENDED PROP
MALIK NABERS OVER 1150.5 RECEIVING YARDS

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

The Eagles posted just a 48% pass rate in 2024. That was the lowest of any offense over the past four seasons, including when the notoriously run-obsessed Arthur Smith's Falcons were quarterbacked by Marcus Mariota in 2022.

That explains pretty well why A.J. Brown's 16.7 FPG was his lowest since he played for Smith back in 2021. But whenever the Eagles threw, Brown was still electric, ranking second-best among 91 qualifying WRs in YPRR (3.22) and FP/RR (0.55). All he'll need for a big bounce-back in 2025 is some additional pass volume.

And that seems more likely to happen than not. On average, teams as run-heavy as the Eagles see a 20% increase in pass attempts per game the following season. That's because maintaining such a run-heavy approach requires both an elite defense and control of the game script week in and week out; advantages that are inherently hard to maintain for long. For example, the Eagles' pass rate ballooned to 58.2% while trailing last season, and their opponents in 2025 combine to rank top-five in Vegas win total. A tougher real-life schedule means more pass volume and more production for Brown (and DeVonta Smith).

Just for fun, with that average 20% increase in pass volume while holding his 2024 efficiency constant, Brown would have amassed 1,294 receiving yards over just 13 games, or 17.0 Underdog FPG (~WR2). That leaves a lot of room for him to smash his mid-Round 2 ADP.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS

After dealing with hamstring and knee injuries early in the season, Jaylen Warren narrowly out-snapped Najee Harris 275 (47.7%) to 257 (44.6%) across the Steelers' final nine games post-bye.

The team let Harris go in free agency, electing to draft big-bodied Iowa RB Kaleb Johnson out of Iowa in Round 3. My base expectation is for Johnson to more or less slide into Harris's old role (predominantly on early downs), with Warren's playing time in passing situations safe as Johnson works on his pass protection skills.

This would be a fantasy upside-limiting arrangement for both backs, especially considering that presumed 2025 Steelers QB Aaron Rodgers ensured the Jets led the NFL in pass rate inside the 10-yard line last year. The Jets' 75.4% green zone pass rate was a full 12% above the next-closest team (63.3%).

Rodgers likely won't have as much control under Mike Tomlin and Arthur Smith as he did with the Jets. But still, the possibility of somewhat fewer goal-line opportunities in an offense projected to average the seventh-fewest points per game by Vegas lookahead lines has me pretty uninterested at Johnson's RB25 Underdog ADP.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS

The 49ers' top receivers in 2025 are likely to be Jauan Jennings, Ricky Pearsall, and George Kittle. In those players' seven healthy games together last year, Kittle averaged 82.3 receiving YPG, which would have led all TEs over the past four seasons.

This sample included Deebo Samuel, who was traded to the Washington Commanders this offseason. In six games without Samuel, Kittle has averaged 19.6 FPG since 2022. In nine different games without Brandon Aiyuk (who's likely to start the season on PUP), Kittle averaged 16.3 FPG.

Admittedly, Kittle will turn 32 years old during the season — which can be the start of the decline for elite producers at the TE position — but he's shown no signs of slowing down. He leads all TEs in YPRR over the past four seasons (by a lot) yet still has some age-related decline priced in to his ADP. He goes outside the first four rounds on platforms like Underdog, behind WRs we project him to out-score straight up like Xavier Worthy and Jameson Williams. This one is pretty simple.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

During Klint Kubiak's two seasons as an OC, his backfields have ranked 10th and 1st in total targets. And Alvin Kamara averaged 1.8 screen targets per game under him in 2024, ranking behind only De'Von Achane.

Kenneth Walker is a logical candidate for this usage in 2025 after posting a career-best 12.7% targets share (~RB5), with the team committed to using him on all three downs. In the run game, Walker also fits Kubiak's outside zone scheme (according to both the data and the man himself).

Walker remains grossly underpriced as the Underdog RB19 after ranking eighth-best at the position in weighted opportunities per game (16.2) and 15th-best in Underdog FPG (14.4).

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Bucky Irving only ran more routes than Rachaad White in three of their 16 games together. In them, he averaged 22.2 FPG (~RB2).

I wouldn't expect Irving to dominate passing down snaps in 2025, as the team has consistently stated they want White to remain involved. But OC Josh Grizzard has also described his plans for the backfield rotation (per the CoachSpeak Index Discord) by saying "how we ended last season was essentially where we would take off." All three of the aforementioned games came at the end of last season, with Irving averaging 17.9 XFP/G (~RB6) across his five healthy post-bye games.

The party line in Tampa Bay has long been that they want all three of their RBs involved, but if "involved" in their minds mean Irving's post-bye usage (dominating carries with receiving work split near-evenly), Irving will smash his RB9 ADP.

TENNESSEE TITANS

Tony Pollard has ranked top-five among RBs in yards after contact per attempt during three of the past four seasons.

The only time he didn't was in 2023, coming off tightrope surgery and averaging a career-low 4.0 YPC. But he bounced back in 2024 in this somewhat blocking-agnostic efficiency metric.

HC Brian Callahan is suggesting Pollard will split work with Tyjae Spears for a second consecutive offseason. Despite similar comments last year, Pollard commanded 59.0% of the Titans' rush attempts (~RB10) in his healthy games alongside Spears.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

From 2021-2022, Kliff Kingsbury's offenses averaged 8.1 pass attempts per game at or behind the line of scrimmage (most in the NFL, or the same as the Miami Dolphins in 2024).

That fell to just 6.0 in 2024, or even further to 3.9 without Dyami Brown and Olamide Zaccheaus, neither of whom are on the Commanders in 2025.

In other words, there could be up to 4.1 targets per game behind the line of scrimmage in this offense instantly earmarked for new arrival Deebo Samuel. Over the past two seasons, Samuel averages just over 2.0 fantasy points per target on these looks (fourth-best). He's the perfect piece for Kingsbury's "horizontal raid", leading all WRs in yards after the catch per reception (min. 50 catches) during each of the past four seasons.

Samuel goes off the board as the WR38 on platforms like Underdog. I'd give him at worst a 40% chance to outscore Terry McLaurin (WR15).

VSIN COACH OF THE YEAR

BEST BETS

BY ADAM BURKE

There isn't a direct correlation between Most Improved Team and AP Coach of the Year, but it isn't a bad place to start. When it comes to handicapping the Coach of the Year market, you're either looking for a new guy or a recent hire who spearheads a huge turnaround. Sometimes it will be the coach of the team with the best record in the NFL.

The huge turnaround factor was on display last season for sure, as Kevin O'Connell beat out NFC North rival Dan Campbell by 70 points and five first-place votes to win the award. Even though O'Connell's Vikings were very good in his first year back in 2022 with a five-win improvement year-over-year, the fact that he spearheaded a seven-win improvement from 2023 to 2024 with Sam Darnold at QB gained him a lot of favor in the minds of the voters. By the way, O'Connell was only sixth back in 2022, which seems quite disrespectful.

While Campbell's Lions tied for the best record in the NFL, Detroit went from 12-5 to 15-2, so they were already viewed as a good team, whereas people were very skeptical of the Vikings. And, again, to do it with a guy like Darnold, who was third in Comeback Player of the Year voting, made O'Connell's performance stand out that much more.

Before we get the best bets from VSiN hosts and contributors for the Coach of the Year market, let's look at the last 10 winners and the attributes that allowed them to win.

STATS OF THE WINNERS

KEVIN O'CONNELL (2024)
Seven-win improvement (7-10 to 14-3); did it with Sam Darnold, who set extreme career-highs in yards, touchdowns, completions, completion percentage, and more

KEVIN STEFANSKI (2023, 2020)
2023: Four-win improvement (7-10 to 11-6); five different starting quarterbacks

2020: First-year head coach (6-10 to 11-5); Browns first playoff appearance since 2002

BRIAN DABOLL (2022)
First-year head coach; from 4-13 (Joe Judge) to 9-7-1; Giants first playoff appearance, first winning record since 2016

MIKE VRABEL (2021)
Followed up 11-5 season with a 12-5 record; got zero votes in 2020; second straight division title and third straight playoff appearance

JOHN HARBAUGH (2019)
14-2 record, +249 in point differential; four-win improvement over 2018

MATT NAGY (2018)
First-year head coach; from 5-11 to 12-4 (!); Bears first playoff appearance, division title since 2010

SEAN MCVAY (2017)
First-year head coach; from 4-12 to 11-5 (!); Rams first playoff appearance since 2004, first division title since 2003; Jared Goff first year as full-time starter

JASON GARRETT (2016)
13-3 record, nine-win improvement over 2015; Dak Prescott rookie year

RON RIVERA (2015)
Eight-win improvement; 15-1 best record in NFL

So, we've got success, significant improvement year-over-year, and adversity, which we aren't really able to handicap before the season, as the main ingredients for the Coach of the Year.

Now, let's turn it over to our VSiN hosts and contributors for their best bets in the Coach of the Year market.

MATT BROWN

SEAN PAYTON (25/1)
I'm higher than most on the Broncos this season. I have an AFC West ticket on them and played Over 9.5 wins. I was wrong about Bo Nix. He was a good NFL quarterback last season, especially for a rookie. The offensive line is good. There's playmakers at WR, TE, and now at RB with RJ Harvey. The defense has studs at every level with Surtain, Bonitto, Franklin-Myers, Greenlaw, and Jones. Their schedule lands them games to close out the season at the Chiefs on Christmas and at home (in cold weather) against the Chargers. A couple marquee wins that could win them the division and perhaps give them as many as 12-13 wins. And that would likely be plenty for Payton to take the award.

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

LIAM COEN (13/1)
There are two consistent themes from recent winners of the Coach of the Year Award: First-year head coaches and the maximizing of quarterback play.

Four of the last eight NFL Coach of the Year winners were first-year head coaches. We haven't had one since Brian Daboll in 2022. Meaning that

from 2017-2022 four of the six winners during that span were in their first season on the job. With non-first year leaders Kevin O'Connell and Kevin Stefanski securing this accolade the last two seasons, it feels like we should be in store for one of the 2025's class of new leaders to take home this hardware.

None of the men who have won this award were handed the talent Liam Coen inherits under center in Trevor Lawrence. You would be hard pressed to find another generational talent at QB in NFL history who has received worse head coaching to start a career (Urban Meyer 2-11, Doug Pederson 22-29).

Coen has been a hyped offensive name in football circles for years since learning under Sean McVay in Los Angeles. In his one season as Tampa Bay's offensive coordinator, he led Baker Mayfield to career highs in completion percentage, passing yards and passing touchdowns. Mayfield and Lawrence may have both been #1 overall picks, but Lawrence's physical skill set is on another level compared to his Buccaneer counterpart.

If Coen can do that with Tampa Bay's signal caller, he could be what O'Connell was to Sam Darnold a season ago. And we all saw how that story ended in this market.

ADAM BURKE

DAN CAMPBELL (22/1)
Most of the success of the Lions offense has been attributed to Ben Johnson, but he's now the head coach in Chicago. Campbell has to head into this season with two new coordinators, as his former OC and DC are both priced lower in the Coach of the Year market than he is.

But, what if the Lions are just really good? New OC John Morton is cut from the Jon Gruden/Sean Payton coaching tree and those guys have had some very productive offenses. New DC Kelvin Sheppard was a linebackers coach under Aaron Glenn and got into coaching shortly after his retirement from the NFL at his alma mater, LSU. He's only 37, so he has a direct line to the players and obviously knows what they are going through.

So, Campbell's coordinators should be just fine with a lot of similar plays and concepts. The Lions have won 27 games the last two seasons on his watch and still have a lot of the same personnel, despite the changes on the sideline. While this award usually has a bias towards newer coaches, another terrific season from the Lions without attribution to Johnson or somebody other than Campbell may push the voters to give him a ton of consideration, especially if Detroit is able to survive the NFC North gauntlet.

PAULY HOWARD

SEAN PAYTON (14/1); RAHEEM MORRIS, TODD BOWLES (40/1)
Denver could be one of the best teams in the league and Nix can take

a big step in becoming a franchise QB. Atlanta and Tampa Bay both have the chance to win the division and get to 11 wins. Philadelphia and Washington have difficult schedules and the North is brutal, which could help their chances in getting noticed.

WILL HILL

JONATHAN GANNON (20/1)
In a wide-open NFC West, the Cardinals have odds in the 4-1 range. If the Cardinals were to win the division, Jonathan Gannon would be squarely in the mix for this award, and this bet would nearly 5x the payout as the NFC West option. With an offense that was seventh in the league last year in yards per play on offense, the defense getting a bump could push this team into a legitimate playoff contender. With a draft that focused almost exclusively on defense, additions of Walter Nolen, Will Johnson, Jordan Burch, as well as free agent pass rusher Josh Sweat, could Gannon be re-creating the stout defense he had as a coordinator in Philadelphia? The Cardinals have the talent to compete for this division, and they also have a schedule conducive to getting off to a hot start. Rookie quarterbacks Tyler Shough and Cam Ward, as well as Bryce Young, Sam Darnold and Anthony Richardson (or Daniel Jones) are all on the schedule early in the first six games. The Cardinals were 6-4 last year before fading late, and they have the pieces to finish the job this year. Coach of the Year usually goes to a coach who gets his team to the playoffs after missing it in the previous season. Gannon checks a lot of boxes, and is very live at 20-1.

ZACHARY COHEN

MIKE VRABEL (+900) / LIAM COEN (14/1) / DAVE CANALES (18/1)
I'm taking three stabs at Coach of the Year this year, and I'm rolling with the coaches of three of the four teams I mentioned in my feature on sleepers.

I see Ben Johnson is listed as the favorite, and I do expect Chicago to be an improved team in 2025. That's why the Bears were on that list. The problem is that Chicago plays in a loaded division. So, while there's plenty of potential for a turnaround, I don't think the path to success is as clear as it is for the other three teams.

Instead, I'll take Vrabel, Coen and Canales, who will all lead talented teams that were miserable a year ago. If any of them can reach nine or 10 wins, they'll be treated like heroes.

JENSEN LEWIS
BEN JOHNSON (+650)

SEAN GREEN
ZAC TAYLOR (50/1)

ALTERNATE BELIEFS

TAKING STRONGER POSITIONS WITH NFL ALTERNATE WIN TOTALS

BY ADAM BURKE

Sports betting markets are very efficient, but they are not always accurate. To be fair, projecting out the entire season for all 32 NFL teams is not an easy task. Since the current division format was installed back in 2002, a team has gone worst to first in at least one division in every season except for three. Last year was actually one of them.

Football is a remarkably violent sport and injuries happen. Some of them even derail a full season, given how important the quarterback is. In other team sports, it is easier to replace somebody. In the NFL, the drop-off between a starting quarterback and a backup QB is often quite significant, sometimes upwards of a touchdown or more to the point spread, which dramatically impacts a team's win probability.

Think about it. If a team would be -7 with their starting QB and suddenly they're a pick 'em, their implied win probability drops more than 20%. You'd be hard-pressed to find another sport or another position where one player can alter the win probability that much by being absent.

Injuries aside, sometimes the odds are just wrong. Sometimes the betting market is just wrong. But, the degree to which the betting market is wrong is the important part. That is why I'm here to tell you about alternate NFL win totals and why you may want to take a stronger position on what you believe to be true or what you believe will happen.

NFL SEASON WIN TOTAL TRACKING

Season win totals are a pretty simple concept to understand. Will a team win more games than the line or fewer games than the line? Vig is then attached and is often the part that moves, as the number of wins itself usually takes a pretty heavy amount of exposure or some major piece of news to move.

With the help of Sports Odds History (SportsOddsHistory.com), I looked at season win total results from the last three seasons. To me, this is a good sample size, as it removes COVID from the equation and also illustrates the current landscape, both of the league with the 17-game schedule and of the sports betting sector, as well as player personnel.

I've separated the teams into three groups: +/- 1.5 Wins; +/- 2.5 Wins; +/- 3.5 wins using the closing win total numbers from Westgate Sportsbook, since that's what SOH had in their database. Note, 2022 Bengals only played 16 games, so bets would have been voided, but had 9 wins with a win total line of 12

There are a few ways to look at this. First, maybe it's unfair to include +/- 1.5 Wins as a metric, since that's still pretty accurate for a 17-game sample size. Nevertheless, with alt win total markets out there that you can bet into with this knowledge, I wanted to leave it in there.

Second, even excluding +/- 1.5 wins, we're still talking about 21 teams out of 96 that were +/- 2.5 Wins in the sample size and another 26 that were +/- 3.5 Wins in the sample size, so 47/96 (49%). So nearly half of the league's teams over a three-year span were mispriced fairly significantly or exceeded/fell well short of expectations for one reason or another.

Third, it does feel like bettors have the opportunity to attack this. Accurately predicting injuries, especially a significant one, is pretty impossible, but using context clues around how detrimental they might be is a viable betting angle. A team with no depth at important positions, especially QB, is going to be in trouble if injuries do happen. Teams likely to fire a coach or maybe tank late in the season could be candidates as well. Certainly, schedule analysis plays a part also.

I think the most notable ones are the teams that overachieved greatly. If you can isolate those teams, not only can you take an alt win total, but likely get some good futures prices for Yes/No Playoffs or Division odds. There are also some alternative props you could wager on, such as Exact Division Finish or maybe projecting out an entire division.

At the end of the day, though, this is simply validation for looking at alternate season win total odds in hopes of finding teams that you are very right about and how the juice can absolutely be worth the squeeze to swing for some bigger prices because this is a challenging market for sportsbooks to pin down and seemingly a lot of bettors as well.

2024

+/- 1.5 WINS (6)	+/- 2.5 WINS (6)	+/- 3.5 WINS (13)
FALCONS	BILLS	BEARS
RAVENS	COWBOYS	BROWNS
BENGALS	RAIDERS	BRONCOS
CHARGERS	SAINTS	LIONS
DOLPHINS	SEAHAWKS	JAGUARS
STEELERS	BUCCANEERS	CHIEFS
		VIKINGS
		GIANTS
		JETS
		EAGLES
		49ERS
		TITANS
		COMMANDERS

2023

+/- 1.5 WINS (10)	+/- 2.5 WINS (6)	+/- 3.5 WINS (5)
FALCONS	RAVENS	PANTHERS
BENGALS	LIONS	TEXANS
BROWNS	COLTS	CHARGERS
COWBOYS	JETS	RAMS
PACKERS	BUCCANEERS	PATRIOTS
RAIDERS	COMMANDERS	
DOLPHINS		
VIKINGS		
GIANTS		
TITANS		

2022

+/- 1.5 WINS (7)	+/- 2.5 WINS (9)	+/- 3.5 WINS (8)
COWBOYS	FALCONS	CARDINALS
TEXANS	BEARS	BRONCOS
SAINTS	BENGALS	COLTS
GIANTS	LIONS	CHIEFS
JETS	PACKERS	RAMS
STEELERS	JAGUARS	Vikings
TITANS	RAIDERS	Eagles
	49ERS	Seahawks
	BUCCANEERS	

FANTASY
OVER AND UNDER
ACHIEVERS

BY JOHN HANSEN

When it comes to preseason analysis in the fantasy space, my objective is pretty simple: I want to beat the markets. By the time August rolls around, most players will have an average draft position that is fairly easy to predict, so my goal is to isolate assets who I believe will exceed the market's expectations and outperform their ADPs, and those who will fall short.

I certainly have a list of overvalued players on my mind every year, but my true passion is on the positive side of things, and I've made a career out of identifying breakout players since my first official call in 1995, which was that Isaac Bruce was the next Jerry Rice. Bruce the year before had just 23 receptions for 272 yards as a rookie, but he exploded for 119/1781 in '95, and I've been chasing breakouts ever since. Bruce was a very young and ascending player, and the fantasy marketplace had not yet recognized him as a legit asset, so he was an incredible value for the few fantasy managers savvy enough to draft him, and that's the type of player I'm looking for first and foremost.

The days of plucking future Hall of Famers in the 18th round are mostly over, but there's still usually value to be had when backing young and unproven players who have breakout potential, so I've put together a list of 10 players who I think will out-perform their ADPs and present a strong ROI in fantasy drafts as well as in terms of season-long props. For good measure, I'll include five skill players who I see failing to meet expectations, just in case you're into turning buzzkills into profits.

OVERACHIEVERS

J.J. MCCARTHY (QB, MIN)
ADP: QB19
Prop Play: Over 3,450.5 Passing Yards (-110)

Eighteen different quarterbacks hit this number last year, including Sam Darnold, who crushed it with 4,319 yards in 17 games for the Vikings. McCarthy has studied this offense for over a year, and he has an excellent chance to be as good or better than the 2024 Darnold due to his superior play with his legs and outside of structure. The same coaching, scheme, and personnel that elevated Darnold last year is still in place, and once stud LT Christian Darrisaw is back, Minnesota should have a top-10 OL and an elite left side in front of him with #1 pick G/T Donovan Jackson added. Unlike last year, TJ Hockenson is healthy coming into the season, so with a deadly 1-2 punch at receiver and more, the Vikes are stacked. He is far and away the most optimized QB pick on the board in fantasy this year, given his combination of value and upside. If McCarthy is available for 14+ games, he'll be at least the quarterback value pick of the year, and he'll clear 3,451 passing yards with ease.

JAXON SMITH-NJIGBA (WR, SEA)
ADP: WR14
Prop Play: Over 950.5 Receiving Yards (-110)

JSN's price tag is way up this year, but for good reason. DK Metcalf is gone, and so is Tyler Lockett, so we're looking at the new alpha receiver in Seattle. Sam Darnold may be a slight downgrade from Geno Smith, but only Ja'Marr Chase had more fantasy points than Justin Jefferson with Darnold last year. New OC Klint Kubiak uses a lot of play action, and Darnold should be a good fit, having averaged 9.70 YPA on play action passes last year (5th-most). Even if Smith-Njigba sees a drop in target volume, he's still a great bet to hit this if healthy, since he crushed this number last year with 1,130 receiving yards with Metcalf and Lockett on the field. Darnold's opponents project as the fifth-easiest slate of games for a signal-caller, per Scott Barrett's projected SOS for QBs, and JSN has the fifth-easiest in Scott's projected SOS for WRs, so we're looking good.

BROCK PURDY (QB, SF)
ADP: QB12
Prop Play: Over 23.5 TD Passes (-115)

They did lose Deebo Samuel and the OL is shakier these days, but San Fran's schedule is as soft as a baby's buttocks, coming in as the third-best slate of games this year in Scott Barrett's projected SOS for QBs. That makes sense coming off a 6-11 season, but their schedule is littered with teams from the AFC and NFC South, which is usually ideal. You also love how Vegas is projecting the 49ers' opponents to rack up the fewest wins of any team, since Purdy sees a 34% boost to his FPG in wins. Purdy was rolling with an absurd career TD% of 7.3% heading into 2024, and he regressed to 4.4%. He tossed only 20 in 15 games, but he still ranked top-10 in fantasy points per dropback (FP/DB), and he played well, so I'm expecting a bump to his TD percentage this year. Brandon Aiyuk is likely headed to the PUP list, but a mid-season return is in play. If we can get a healthy Ricky Pearsall on the field, Purdy has more than enough weaponry to regain his scoring mastery.

BREECE HALL (RB, NYJ)
ADP: RB13
Prop Play: Over 925.5 Rushing Yards (-110)

This is a ballsy pick, given all the backfield committee talk with the Jets and new HC Aaron Glenn this offseason, and Glenn's indicated he may want to actively work a third back into the rotation this year. But with all due respect to the capable Braelon Allen and Isaiah Davis, they are not the needle-movers that Hall is, and Glenn's in the business of winning games. I have some lingering concerns about Hall's knee and repaired ACL being a prohibitive factor going forward, but that knee looked fine when he toted the rock 37 times for 178/1 rushing in the 2023 season finale, and he's had numerous strong showings since the injury, including last year. If Hall is relatively healthy and bringing it, I still see him getting 200+ carries in this run-heavy offense. The timing is also good with noted meathead Nate Hackett out as OC, the OL looking as good as it's looked in a decade, and with Hall entering the final year of his rookie deal with a schedule that looks quite advantageous.

DRAKE MAYE (QB, NE)
ADP: QB17
Prop Play: Over 3,200.5 Passing Yards (-115)

When I see a high-pedigree rookie acquit himself well in Year 1, I'm usually looking for buying opportunities before the markets are totally sold on the player and his team, and I'm feeling it with Maye and the Pats. They addressed their horrible OL and protection with a plug-and-play LT in Will Campbell, the fourth pick of the draft, along with the addition of stabilizing veteran RT Morgan Moses, so Maye's time-to-throw data should greatly improve, I also don't think the markets are positive enough about the addition of OC Josh McDaniels to go along with the leadership of new HC Mike Vrabel. The Patriots may have the most annoying receiving corps in fantasy history, but they at least have a high number of viable options (including, hopefully, Stefon Diggs), and while it's a new and complex system, McDaniels has been impressed by Maye's quick-learning in the early going. It will be a professional offense, unlike what we mostly saw from 2023-2025 in New England, and at 189 passing yards per game in his 12 starts last year, I'm confident that Maye can average at least 220 this season, which gets him over this number in 15 games.

RJ HARVEY (RB, DEN)
ADP: RB24
Prop Play: Over 725.5 Rushing Yards (-110)

While Denver's schedule ranked seventh-worst in Scott Barrett's projected SOS for RBs, it's at least promising to open the season against the Titans, Colts, Chargers, and Bengals. I know Harvey is a rookie, but I don't think the markets are fully realizing how weak the RB room is in Denver with Audric Estimé, Jaleel McLaughlin, and Tyler Badie. They will be looking at running backs all summer and will likely bring some guys in, but there isn't an unemployed back on the planet who can match Harvey's juice. My guy Maurice Jones-Drew is into his fellow short guy in Harvey, and MJD is a savant when it comes to scouting RBs, as is Brett Whitefield, who was considerably higher on Harvey than the entire industry in the Fantasy Points 2025 Prospect Guide (Harvey ended up being the fourth back taken). Harvey's biggest issue in year one may be his pass-pro deficiencies due to his lack of size, technique, and reps, which could limit his consistency in PPR leagues. But he has the tools to be an excellent weapon in the passing game, and Sean Payton will likely find spots to unleash him as a receiver. As for the prop, it's a rushing prop, and I think we're set with Harvey getting the most work as a runner.

QUINSHON JUDKINS (RB, CLE)
ADP: RB25
Prop Play: Over 625.5 Rushing Yards (-110)

Cleveland may open the season with Jerome Ford atop the depth chart, but his hold won't last long, and entering a contract year, he's been the subject of trade rumors since the draft. As for the 36th pick of the draft, Judkins immediately saw reps with the ones in their OTA practices, and it would be an upset if he wasn't in line to collect the bulk of the carries as a rookie over the course of the full season. His explosiveness and speed to go along with his good size stands out in a backfield where his biggest threat is fellow rookie in Dylan Sampson, who was selected 90 spots after him with the 126th pick. There are real concerns about the Browns routinely trailing in games and a tougher first-half schedule, but Judkins should be in line for 12+ starts, and Kevin Stefanski will certainly try like heck to run the rock. On the season, he has to average only 37 rushing yards a game in 17 contests to get this, so even if he opens the career a little flat in this tough spot, a healthy Judkins is talented enough to do what 30 other RBs did in 2024, which is to clear a measly 626 yards rushing. By the second half of the season, a foundational role for Judkins is extremely possible, so I'm willing to bet his talent if I'm looking for a back around the sixth round in redraft leagues this summer.

TRAVIS HUNTER (WR, JAX)
ADP: TBD
Prop Play: Regular Season TDs: Over 4.5 (-110)

Less than two years ago, Baker Mayfield's career was in the toilet, and he threw 41 TD passes last year (tied for second-most) under new Jaguar HC Liam Coen, so there is hope for Trevor Lawrence, who is in dire need of an offensive upgrade from the Doug Pederson mediocrity of the last two seasons in Jacksonville. I've been sold on Hunter's ball skills since I saw him do a spiderman impersonation in Week 1 last year, and other than Brian Thomas Jr., there is a serious dearth of receiver talent on the Jags, so he should handle a massive receiving role in this offense. I'm pretty damn sure Hunter will hit this by Thanksgiving.

DEEBO SAMUEL (WR, WAS)
ADP: WR34
Prop Play: Over 675.5 Receiving Yards (-110)

The first Deebo-related news item that came down the line after his trade to the Commanders was a video of him working out, and Deebo's training for the 2025 campaign has been a story all off-season. He's posted insane workout videos, including footage of him training as a boxer, and he's noticeably slimmer. Deebo's had a tendency to report to work a little too large in the summer, but that won't be a problem this year, as he plays on a one-year contract in search of what is likely a final big payday. Deebo will do plenty of "gadgety" stuff for (the improving) Kliff Kingsbury, but he also looks like their best RAC guy, so I'm seeing a few big run-after-the-catch plays, since he's teamed with a young stud in Jayden Daniels, who posted an impressive 69% completion rate as a rookie last year. DC has lost 814 receiving yards from last year with Olamide Zaccheaus and Dyami Brown departing, and they're still relying on 35-year old Zach Ertz, so Deebo's volume and role should be fine. Even if they use him plenty in the running game, Deebo had 42 carries in '24 (second-most in his career), and he still missed hitting 676 yards by only six yards (while playing fat).

TYLER WARREN (TE, IND)
ADP: TE12
Prop Play: Over 500.5 Receiving Yards (-110)

While it's admittedly a small leap of faith on a team with a weak quarterback situation, I'm using Brock Bowers last year as an example of how a high-end talent can rise above a seemingly suspect situation. Despite drafting TE Michael Mayer 35th overall the year before, Bowers was the man from Day 1, racking up a league-leading 21 targets and 18 receptions his first three games (Mayer totaled 4/21 in those three games). Colts TEs pathetically put up only 467 receiving yards last year, but Shane Steichen got 700+ receiving yards out of Dallas Goedert alone in Philly in 2022-2023, and I actually think Daniel Jones can stabilize the offense. In Jones' one good season in 2019, three of his top-four receivers were mostly inside guys (Golden Tate, Sterling Shepard, and TE/slot Evan Engram). We're projecting 606 yards for the rookie Warren over at Fantasy Points, and that checks in as only TE21 in our default PPR setting. Despite our conservative projection, it's over 20% higher than the prop. For fantasy, despite an abundance of quality targets on the roster, I'd draft Warren as, ideally, a very low-end TE1 or high-end TE2, on the chance that Steichen can quickly utilize his diverse skill set. Warren can pile up yardage in a lot of ways, so I'm expecting the rookie to absorb a healthy chunk of the 824 yards Alec Pierce put up last year. I'm also considering the injury-plagued season logged by Josh Downs and Michael Pittman last year, and the massive draft capital Indy used to acquire him.

UNDERACHIEVERS

SAQUON BARKLEY (RB, PHI)
ADP: RB1
Prop Play: Under 1,500.5 Rushing Yards (-110)

I'm usually wary of aging backs with injury concerns, but I was very into Saquon last summer in this ideal situation, and he obviously crushed. But you can have him in 2025 at this number, since 2024 was the first time he hit even 1,350 yards rushing. As a fantasy ageist, I'll gladly pass on Barkley for either Bijan Robinson or Jahmyr Gibbs, who are both over five years younger and who've combined for zero serious injuries in their four seasons total. The Eagles have won their division seven times over the last 20 years, but never consecutively in that span, so I'm not even sure Philly is a good bet to repeat as NFC East champions, which hasn't been done since they did it 2003-04. Philadelphia's schedule looks nasty, complete with tougher AFC games against KC, Buf, and Den, and a plethora of challenging out-of-division matchups against LAR, TB, Min, GB, and Det. Barkley is hardly a fossil at 28 years old, and the Philly OL and running game should be dominant again, but drafting a back with his profile at 1.1 is dangerous, as it was last year with CMC. As for Barkley's prop, I'll put it this way: not a lot has to go wrong for him to fail to average 100 yards a game for 15 games.

DAVID MONTGOMERY (RB, DET)
ADP: TBD
Prop Play: Under 775.5 Rushing Yards (-115)

I've been in on Monty for redraft purposes the last two seasons, but I'm probably going to let someone else take him this year because there are some potential pitfalls. Montgomery has been very durable, but the touches are starting to add up entering his age-28 season. But there are bigger concerns, like how the Lions have the single-toughest RB schedule on the board this year, per Scott Barrett's projected SOS for RBs. They also lost OC Ben Johnson, who might hold the secret sauce to maximizing this dual backfield with Jahmyr Gibbs, who I suspect will take on a slightly larger role this year. Even worse, Pro Bowl center Frank Ragnow has retired, which is a massive loss. With veteran G Kevin Zeitler also departing, they have to replace 40% of their OL, which will not be easy. Monty's role in the passing game picked up a little last year, but he's generally needed positive gamescripts in Detroit, yet the Lions have the 2nd-toughest schedule by opponent win total, so he's checking off a lot of negative boxes.

COOPER KUPP (WR, SEA)
ADP: WR34
Prop Play: Under 775.5 Receiving Yards (-110)

If you played the Under on Kupp's projected receiving yardage total in each of the last three years, you won all three bets. Heck, if you had played the Under on this relatively low total of 775.5 in each of the last three seasons, you'd have gone 2-1 with the only victory being a very close win (812 yards in 2022). The Washington state native is back in the Pacific Northwest, which is nice, but he's bringing a lot of injury baggage with him at 32 years old, and he's looking at a serious downgrade in terms of offensive system and quarterback. And for the first time ever, Kupp will not play under Sean McVay, who drafted Kupp in his first season as the head coach in LA in 2017. The Vikings were top-5 in his catchable ball rate under Sam Darnold last year, but I have concerns about their low number of dome games (3, sixth-fewest), since Darnold has averaged a strong 18.6 FPG in a dome compared to only 13.1 FPG outdoors, which represents a 41% drop in production. Give me the Under for the aging Kupp in a new offense with a downgrade in coaching and at quarterback.

RHAMONDRE STEVENSON (RB, NE)
ADP: RB35
Prop Play: Under 725.5 Rushing Yards (-115)

The search for ascending players is what gets me out of bed in the morning, while the prospect of backing a descending player scares the hell out of me, and it's pretty safe to say Rhamondre is a descending player. Already in his age-27 season, Stevenson will be damn near 28 by season's end, and his efficiency numbers have fallen off a cliff. That's why the Pats drafted TreVeyon Henderson with the 36th pick of the draft. Henderson may handle only 150 carries this year, but he's also going to neutralize Stevenson's role in the passing game, one that has been shrinking as of late.

KHALIL SHAKIR (WR, BUF)
ADP: WR38
Prop Play: Under 775.5 Receiving Yards (-110)

I loved Shakir as a fantasy pick last summer, and he delivered. I'm not totally against him as the 38th wideout off the board, but he's clearly much less appealing compared to last year, when he was the 53rd wideout drafted. We have him projected at Fantasy Points for 786 receiving yards, so his margin for error may be minimal if he's to hit this Over. I believed the Bills were going to need Shakir more than people thought last summer, and he led them in pass targets by a wide margin (100, next was 75), but I'm not so sure this time around. They added Josh Palmer to beat man coverage, something Shakir doesn't do very well, and it's fair to expect greater contributions this year from youngsters Keon Coleman and Dalton Kincaid. They also added Elijah Moore, who might actually be their best overall receiver.

KEY STATS TO PREDICT IMPROVEMENT & DECLINE

BY STEVE MAKINEN

One of the best ways to gain an advantage over the house on these options is to use stats from the prior season that have historically been very reliable for predicting the teams that are due to improve or decline.

Besides the return to normalcy that these unusual stats might bring on, I have forever believed that there are also three "C's" that can factor into this sudden change as well. The first is Coaching, either by a change to a new guy or from improvement by the current man. The second is Confidence, which can quickly transform after a solid offseason and/or first couple of good regular season games. The third is Cohesiveness, and this can also be impacted rather quickly, with the addition or departure of certain personnel.

Of course, there are certain statistical indicators that a team exhibits in one season that can illustrate how close they are to changing the status of those three C's and eventually, their fortunes the next season. Read through these findings, combine them with any coaching or free agent transactions each team made, as well as their draft results, and then head to the betting window.

SYSTEMS OF TEAMS THAT HAD A NEGATIVE TURNOVER DIFFERENTIAL THE PRIOR SEASON

Since 2009, there have been 43 teams that had a negative turnover differential and won less than six games against the spread. All BUT TWO of those improved their ATS winning percentage the next season, by an average of 22%. All but seven of these teams improved their outright winning percentage as well, by an average of about 20%, and 13 of them qualified for the playoffs. Note that Atlanta and New England qualify for this angle for a second straight season, part of an unusually high number of qualifiers for '25.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Atlanta, Cleveland, New England, NY Giants, NY Jets, San Francisco, Seattle, Tennessee

Since 2020, there have been 15 teams that endured a turnover differential of -0.6 per game or worse and did not make the playoffs. All but two of those teams improved the next season. The average regular season win improvement was 3.8 wins per season for the other 10 teams. The only two that didn't were the Bears from 2021 to 2022, and the Patriots last year, although they matched win-loss marks. The Vikings and Commanders qualified on this system last year, and improved by seven and eight regular season wins, respectively, so there is huge potential with this one. Do you see any teams on the list below capable of massive jumps in '25?

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Cleveland, Jacksonville, Las Vegas, New England, Tennessee

There have been 18 teams since 2009 that had a negative or even turnover differential yet still managed to win double-digit games against the spread. Eleven of those teams reached the postseason the next year, including the Lions and Rams last year. For this season, we have one of the three teams that qualified that even reached the postseason despite their lack of turnover luck: the Bucs.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Arizona, Jacksonville, Tampa Bay

Of the 32 teams that improved their win-loss percentage by 34% or more from one season to the next since '09, all but four had negative or even turnover differentials the prior season. Last year, the Chargers, Vikings, and Washington all met the criteria and were the only three teams to improve by that much, essentially 6+ wins.

TEAMS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED FOR 2025
Arizona, Atlanta, Carolina, Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Las Vegas, Miami, New England, New Orleans, NY Giants, NY Jets, San Francisco, Seattle, Tampa Bay, Tennessee

SYSTEMS OF TEAMS THAT HAD A POSITIVE TURNOVER DIFFERENTIAL THE PRIOR SEASON

Teams that had a positive turnover differential and won 10 or more games against the spread are FADE teams in the next season. Of these 94 teams since 2009, 63 of them had win-loss records that DECLINED by an average of 10% outright AND against the spread. Furthermore, of the 85 that reached the playoffs, 35 failed to do so the follow-up season, including Dallas and Miami last year. You'll see the number of qualifiers for '25 is 10, after only six a year ago.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Baltimore, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, LA Chargers, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington

Only two of the L21 teams since 2020 that had a turnover differential of better than +0.5 per game improved its record the next season. The average win-loss percentage decline of the other 11 teams was 16.1% (10% ATS), or about 2.7 wins per season. San Francisco was one of eight teams that qualified on this angle going into 2024 and saw the biggest drop from 12-5 to 6-11. None of those eight teams improved last year.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Buffalo, Detroit, Green Bay, Houston, LA Chargers, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh

Since 2009, there have been 45 teams with a turnover differential of +5 or better in a season and failed to reach the postseason. Only 13 reached the postseason the next year and only 16 improved their records. These are typically "play against" teams, as failing to reach the playoffs does not provide for momentum the next season. This group included Cincinnati, New Orleans, and the Giants a year ago.

TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2025
Chicago

Only 13 of the L47 teams that had a positive turnover differential and were less than .500 against the spread in a season reached the playoffs the next season, and only 19 improved. Four teams qualified on this system a year ago, but only two do in '25.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Houston, Kansas City

Of the 13 teams that saw a decline in their ATS win-loss percentage by 31% or more from one season to the next since '09, ALL had positive turnover differentials of +4 or better the prior season. No teams ended qualifying in this last season.

TEAMS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED FOR 2025
Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Green Bay, Houston, Kansas City, LA Chargers, LA Rams, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh

SYSTEMS OF TEAMS WHOSE OFFENSIVE/DEFENSIVE PRODUCTION OR POINT DIFFERENTIAL STATS THE PRIOR SEASON DIDN'T ACCURATELY REFLECT THEIR WIN-LOSS RECORD

Since 2001, there have been 52 teams that managed to win 10+ games despite scoring less than 23 points per game. In the follow up season, only 10 of these teams improved, while 38 dropped by an average of 4.3 games in the win column. Kansas City defied this system last year by going from 11-6 to 15-2. For 2025, we have an unusually high five teams qualifying, including the Chiefs and Steelers for a second straight season.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Houston, Kansas City, LA Rams, Pittsburgh, Seattle

There has been fairly steady season-to-season improvement made from the group of teams that have won less than 42% of their regular season games despite scoring 22+ PPG. Since '00, only four of the 31 teams were worse the next season, and the average win improvement was about 2.5 per season. Las Vegas qualified on this most recently in 2023 and improved by two games. Nobody qualified last season.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
San Francisco

Since 2000, there have been 77 teams that somehow won less than 42% of their games despite allowing 23 or less points per game. In the follow-up season, 50 of these teams, or 64.9% of them, improved in the win column, and the average improvement of that group was 3.6 wins per year! However, in a rare bucking of the system last year, three of six qualifiers declined, including Chicago, who qualifies for a second straight season.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Chicago

There has been consistent season-to-season decline made from the group of teams that have won 10 or more games despite allowing 23+ PPG. Over the L26 seasons, only five of the 34 teams were better the next season, and the average win drop off was 2.97 per season.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Washington

There have been 13 teams that have scored 27+ PPG in the last 22 seasons and did not make the playoffs. The combined record of those teams in the follow-up regular season was 129-81, good for 61.4% and an average of 9.92 wins per season. Only three of those teams did not make the playoffs, and two others, the 2009 Saints and 2020 Buccaneers, went on to win a Super Bowl title. The Chargers last qualified on this system in 2022 and went exactly 10-7, earning a playoff berth.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Cincinnati

If you examine teams with a positive point differential with a losing record, ONLY THREE of the LAST 19 teams that had this combination worsened their win total the next season. Two recent Super Bowl Champion teams met this criteria, the 2017 Eagles and the 2020 Buccaneers. The average win total for the 16 teams was 9.5, with eight of them winning at least 11 games, and the average win improvement was 2.94 per season. However, Las Vegas bucked this trend a year ago, dropping by four wins.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Arizona

When considering negative (or even) point differential with a .500 or better record, only nine of the L40 teams to achieve this dubious honor went on to a better season the next year, although three of them came in the last two years, including Seattle last year. The average drop for the other 31 teams was -2.4 wins per season. Those wins could be the difference in making the playoffs or not as the margin for teams like this is already small.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Houston, LA Rams

COMBINATION SYSTEMS USING STATISTICAL TRAITS DETAILED ALREADY

There have been nine teams that have gone sub-.500 in a season despite a positive turnover differential and scoring differential, SIX of them have turned around the next season and made the playoffs, improving by an average of 3.2 wins per season.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
NONE – Arizona was closest with a -3 TO differential

Nine of the L15 teams that had a negative turnover differential, but positive score differential, and didn't make the playoffs did so the next season, including Super Bowl champion Tampa Bay in 2020, as well as the Chargers in '22.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Arizona, Seattle

Only 12 of the L53 teams that had a positive turnover differential, but negative (or even) score differential, qualified for the playoffs in the next season, although two of the seven qualifiers did in '24, Denver and Pittsburgh. This year, we have just three teams qualifying.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Chicago, Houston, LA Rams

All but two of the 26 teams since 2009 that had a negative turnover differential and were outscored by more than 10 PPG improved their win-loss record the next season by an average of 24.8%, or 4.0 wins per team. Six of those teams made the playoffs, and 14 of them improved by four or more wins. Washington was the biggest winner on this system a year ago, winning eight more games and reaching the NFC title game.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Carolina, Cleveland

Only 10 of the 47 teams since 2009 that had a positive turnover differential, and who outscored opponents by more than 8.0 PPG, improved their win-loss record the next season. The average win-loss percentage decline was 13.8% (13% ATS), or about 2.4 wins per season. This included the Ravens, Cowboys, and 49ers a year ago.

TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2025
Baltimore, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Detroit

STEVE MAKINEN'S
POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
PHILADELPHIA	30.0
BALTIMORE	29.5
BUFFALO	29.0
KANSAS CITY	29.0
DETROIT	28.0
GREEN BAY	27.0
WASHINGTON	27.0
LA RAMS	26.5
TAMPA BAY	26.0
LA CHARGERS	25.5
SAN FRANCISCO	25.5
CINCINNATI	25.0
HOUSTON	24.5
ARIZONA	24.0
DENVER	24.0
MIAMI	24.0
MINNESOTA	24.0
PITTSBURGH	24.0
CHICAGO	23.5
DALLAS	23.0
ATLANTA	22.5
SEATTLE	22.5
NEW ENGLAND	22.0
INDIANAPOLIS	21.5
JACKSONVILLE	21.5
CAROLINA	21.0
LAS VEGAS	21.0
NY GIANTS	20.5
NY JETS	20.0
CLEVELAND	19.0
TENNESSEE	19.0
NEW ORLEANS	18.5

AFC EAST
preview

Coverage by
Jonathan Von Tobel

The AFC East seems destined to be ruled by a singular entity for as long as it exists. For over 15 years, the New England Patriots dominated the division. Since 2020, this has been the Buffalo Bills' division to lose.

Buffalo enters the 2025 season looking for a sixth consecutive division title. The Bills' run is second only to that of the Chiefs, who have won the AFC West for nine straight seasons. The betting odds suggest it is likely Buffalo wins its sixth AFC East title, as they are the biggest division favorite (-260) in the league.

There is no real challenger for the Bills this season.

New England is a team which has some strong upside, but it is all dependent on a second-year quarterback – Drake Maye – taking a meaningful step forward in his development. The Patriots have the second-highest win total in the division (8.5) but from a power rating standpoint it pales in comparison to that of the Bills.

Miami was once widely considered to be the strongest opposition to Buffalo in the division, but the Dolphins' trajectory is heading south. Mike McDaniel is coaching for his job by all accounts. Tyreek Hill could be on the move and Jalen Ramsey has already been traded to Pittsburgh.. Tua Tagovailoa – despite signing a contract extension last summer — is on thin ice.

New York owns the fourth-lowest division odds of any team in the league. The Jets have talent, but the franchise is stuck in an eternal rebuild and is relying on Justin Fields to lead its offense in 2025.

Should Buffalo not win the AFC East this season, it would be an utter disaster. When compared to the other contenders, one could argue the Bills are not among the strongest. But in the AFC East, Buffalo is Thanos with all of the Infinity Stones.

Inevitable.

VSiN staff division selections
BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

26	0	0	0

2025 projected standings
(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
BUFFALO	29.0	2.7	0.6	22.81 (31)	11.4	5.6	11.5
MIAMI	24.0	2.5	-0.4	23.6 (22)	8.7	8.3	8.5
NEW ENGLAND	22.0	1.6	0.3	22.88 (30)	8.1	8.9	8.5
NY JETS	20.0	1.6	-0.7	24.3 (12)	6.5	10.5	5.5

BUFFALO
BILLS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 15-5 SU & 12-8 ATS / 13-7-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Sean McDermott (9th)

Buffalo is a contender once again. Josh Allen is still in a Bills uniform, Joe Brady is calling plays and the AFC East is extremely weak. It all sets up for another double-digit win season and a crack at a championship.

OFFENSE

Allen, the reigning MVP, led the league in EPA per play and finished third in RBSDM's EPA+CPOE composite metric. He totaled 4,262 yards and 40 touchdowns despite not having a receiver which surpassed 850 yards. Khalil Shakir – Buffalo's leading receiver from last season – as well as Keon Coleman, Dawson Knox and Dalton Kincaid all return.

The offensive line is a strength for the Bills as well. Allen was pressured on just 176 of his dropbacks, which was 16th-most in the league. It's also a solid run-blocking unit which ranked eighth last season in adjusted line yards per carry (4.68). The group led the way for James Cook, who returns after rushing 1,009 yards and 16 touchdowns in the regular season.

The Bills finished second in EPA per play last season, and almost the entire offense returns for the 2025 season. The offense might not finish as high as second in the league, but it should be a top-10 unit at a minimum this season.

DEFENSE

Buffalo's biggest area of improvement will need to be on defense. Specifically, its pass defense. The Bills ranked 22nd in opponent EPA per pass in 2024. The secondary allowed the fifth-most air yards (2,449) and the eighth-most passing touchdowns (28). As a whole, Buffalo was 26th in Eckel rate – a metric which measures the percentage of drives that end with a touchdown or have a first down snap within the 40 yard line.

The Bills spent multiple draft picks on the secondary, including first-round cornerback Maxwell Hairston. This will likely be a below average defense on the backend once again, but there is at least clear effort on the part of the front office to make it better.

Up front, Buffalo is in much better shape. Greg Rousseau is coming off a season in which he totaled 63 pressures and nine sacks. Matt Milano has played fewer than 400 snaps over the last two seasons, he is one of the best outside linebackers in the league when healthy. The Bills measured out well against the run in 2024. They were fifth in opponent EPA per rush and adjusted line yards per carry allowed (3.95). That should be similar to the 2025 output for this team, and it could perhaps be even better if Milano turns in a full season.

OUTLOOK

Buffalo has a win total of 11.5 and it plays in one of the weakest divisions in football. It has the fifth-easiest schedule in the league as well. The Bills' consensus win total is 11.5 with varying juice. At most shops, bettors will lay a price on the Over, but it is worth the price, as Buffalo has everything it needs for a strong season once again.

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	BALTIMORE	-2.2	HOME TEAMS are on 11-2 ATS surge in BAL-BUF h2h set
9/14	at NY Jets	-8.4	BUFFALO has won L3 SU & ATS vs. NY Jets
9/18	MIAMI	-7.7	OVER the total is 9-1-1 in L11 MIA-BUF matchups at Buffalo
9/28	NEW ORLEANS	-13.3	FAVORITES are on 7-0 ATS win streak in NO-BUF series
10/5	NEW ENGLAND	-9	NEW ENGLAND is on 17-5 ATS extended run at Buffalo
10/13	at Atlanta	-5.2	ROAD TEAMS/DOGS are on 4-1 ATS run in BUF-ATL series
- BYE WEEK -			
10/26	at Carolina	-7	BUFFALO is on 3-0-1 ATS run vs. Carolina
11/2	KANSAS CITY	-2.6	OVER the total is 6-2 in L8 of KC-BUF h2h series
11/9	at Miami	-3.5	UNDER the total is 11-4-1 in BUF-MIA series at Miami since '10
11/16	TAMPA BAY	-6	TAMPA BAY is 5-1-1 ATS in L7 at Buffalo
11/20	at Houston	-2.8	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 of BUF-HOU h2h series
11/30	at Pittsburgh	-2.9	PITTSBURGH is 6-1 ATS in L7 hosting Buffalo, last win '13 though
12/7	CINCINNATI	-6.4	The L5 games of CIN-BUF h2h series went UNDER the total
12/14	at New England	-6.4	UNDERDOGS are 7-3 ATS in L10 of BUF-NE h2h series at Foxboro
12/21	at Cleveland	-8.1	FAVORITES are 6-0-1 ATS in L7 of BUF-CLE h2h series
12/28	PHILADELPHIA	-1.7	PHILADELPHIA is on 3-0 ATS streak vs. Buffalo
1/4	NY JETS	-12	BUFFALO is on 5-0 SU & 4-1 ATS run hosting NY Jets, avg MOV 17.4 PPG

SOS
22.81
(#31 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.7 / 0.6
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
+650

AFC
+350

AFC EAST
-260

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.9	2	21.6	11
YARDS PER POINT	11.6	1	15.8	10
PLAYS PER GAME	60.3	28		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:51	21		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	44.1%	7	43.8%	29
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	359.1	10	341.5	17
YARDS PER PLAY	6	6	5.5	21
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.9	9		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	131.2	9	115.5	12
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	11	4.5	19
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.6	26		
COMPLETION %	63.3%	23	68.5%	28
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	227.9	9	226.1	24
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.6	10	6.6	19
TURNOVERS	0.5	1	1.9	3

prediction

OVER 11.5 WINS

MIAMI
DOLPHINS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 7-10 ATS / 8-9-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Mike McDaniel (4th)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Indianapolis	+0	UNDERDOGS are 14-3-1 ATS in MIA-IND h2h series since '99
9/14	NEW ENGLAND	-3.8	MIAMI is on 9-0 ATS win streak vs. New England
9/18	at Buffalo	+7.7	OVER the total is 9-1-1 in L11 MIA-BUF matchups at Buffalo
9/29	NY JETS	-6.8	FAVORITES are 7-3 ATS in L10 of NYJ-MIA rivalry
10/5	at Carolina	-1	MIAMI is 6-1-1 ATS in L8 vs. Carolina
10/12	LA CHARGERS	-1.3	UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of LAC-MIA series in Miami
10/19	at Cleveland	-2.1	FAVORITES have won L3 ATS in MIA-CLE h2h series
10/26	at Atlanta	+0.8	FAVORITES are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of MIA-ATL h2h series
10/30	BALTIMORE	+3	OVER the total is on 5-1 run in BAL-MIA h2h series
11/9	BUFFALO	+3.5	UNDER the total is 11-4-1 in BUF-MIA series at Miami since '10
11/16	vs. Washington	+3	MIAMI has won L4 ATS vs. Washington
- BYE WEEK -			
11/30	NEW ORLEANS	-8.1	FAVORITES are on 4-0 ATS streak in NO-MIA h2h series
12/7	at NY Jets	-2.4	The L3 games of MIA-NYJ in New York went OVER the total
12/15	at Pittsburgh	+3.1	UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS run in L6 of MIA-PIT h2h set
12/21	CINCINNATI	-1.2	HOME TEAMS are on 6-0 ATS streak in CIN-MIA h2h series
12/28	TAMPA BAY	-0.8	TAMPA BAY is 6-1 SU & 7-0 ATS vs. Miami since '97
1/4	at New England	-0.4	MIAMI has won L4 ATS at New England

SOS
23.60
(#22 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.5 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
80-1

AFC
35-1

AFC EAST
+650

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.3	22	21.4	10
YARDS PER POINT	16	23	14.7	18
PLAYS PER GAME	63.6	9		
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:36	4		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.3%	25	35.9%	6
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	325.4	18	314.4	4
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	22	5.3	9
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.4	19		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	105.6	21	103.7	9
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	28	4.4	12
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.8	8		
COMPLETION %	69.9%	4	63.8%	9
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	219.8	15	210.7	9
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	20	6.3	5
TURNOVERS	1.2	17	0.9	27

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
24.0
(#18 of 32)

This has the makings of a pivotal season for Mike McDaniel and the Dolphins. McDaniel has only one double-digit win season, is 0-2 in the playoffs and coming off his first losing season at the helm. If Miami doesn't achieve something special, we could be discussing a new regime in South Beach.

OFFENSE
For the fourth time in his five seasons in the NFL, Tua Tagovailoa failed to play more than 13 games in the regular season in 2024. Even worse, Tagovailoa arguably regressed in his time on the field last year. PFF ranked him as the 25th passer among qualified quarterbacks. His 6.1 ADOT was the lowest of his career and his 7.2 yards per attempt was the lowest since his second season. Tagovailoa must bounce back this season, but it is uncertain whether his top target – Tyreek Hill – will even be on the roster, as the trade rumors around Hill are abound.

Miami's offensive line is also a mess on paper. Only two offensive linemen on the roster played over 1,000 snaps. Aaron Brewer is the only one among them that had a pass blocking grade higher than 70 (70.2). That does not bode well for a team which has an injury-prone signal-caller under center.

If Hill is gone, and Tagovailoa misses time, this team could once again finish in the bottom half of the league in offense — as it did last season.

DEFENSE
The secondary is going to be the biggest problem for the Dolphins. Jevon Holland departed in free agency and Jalen Ramsey was traded at the end of June. Kader Kohou – a 2022 undrafted free agent – is the most consistent corner on the roster once Ramsey is gone.

Miami will have to lean on its front seven, but that group also has some massive questions. Specifically, at edge rusher. Bradley Chubb missed the entirety of 2024 recovering from knee injuries. Jaelan Phillips tore his ACL last season. Chop Robinson – who totalled 56 pressures and seven sacks – is the most consistent pass-rusher on the roster right now.

The Dolphins only face six teams that finished 10th or higher in EPA per play on offense last season. Even so, this unit looks like a lock to take a massive step back.

OUTLOOK
There is a lot of noise around Miami in the offseason, and that is generally a bad sign for a team. The head coach is fighting for his job, and the quarterback could be doing the same without one of his best receivers. The Dolphins have the ninth-easiest schedule in the NFL, but all signs are pointing south. Miami is a solid bet to not only go Under its win total, but alternate numbers should be in play as well.

prediction

UNDER 8.5 WINS

NEW ENGLAND
PATRIOTS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 4-13 SU & 6-9-2 ATS / 11-6-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Mike Vrabel (1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	LAS VEGAS	-3.4	FAVORITES are on 8-1 ATS run in LVR-NE h2h series
9/14	at Miami	+3.8	MIAMI is on 9-0 ATS win streak vs. New England
9/21	PITTSBURGH	+0.2	NEW ENGLAND is 5-1-1 ATS in L7 hosting Pittsburgh
9/28	CAROLINA	-3.9	CAROLINA is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. New England
10/5	at Buffalo	+9	NEW ENGLAND is on 17-5 ATS extended run at Buffalo
10/12	at New Orleans	-1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 3-0 SU & ATS streak in NE-NO series
10/19	at Tennessee	-0.9	FAVORITES are 8-4-2 ATS in L14 of NE-TEN h2h series
10/26	CLEVELAND	-5.6	NEW ENGLAND is on 5-1 ATS run hosting Cleveland
11/2	ATLANTA	-1.9	NEW ENGLAND has won L7 ATS vs. Atlanta
11/9	at Tampa Bay	+6.2	NEW ENGLAND has won L5 ATS vs. Tampa Bay
11/13	NY JETS	-3.9	NEW ENGLAND is 9-1 SU & 7-2-1 ATS in L10 hosting NY Jets
11/23	at Cincinnati	+5.2	NEW ENGLAND is 7-2 ATS in L9 vs. Cincinnati
12/1	NY GIANTS	-3.8	NY GIANTS are 8-2 ATS in L10 vs. New England
- BYE WEEK -			
12/14	BUFFALO	+6.4	UNDERDOGS are 7-3 ATS in L10 of BUF-NE h2h series at Foxboro
12/21	at Baltimore	+10.1	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of NE-BAL h2h series
12/28	at NY Jets	-1.1	UNDER the total is 8-1 in L9 of NE-NYJ rivalry in New York
1/4	MIAMI	+0.4	MIAMI has won L4 ATS at New England

SOS
22.88
(#30 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.6 / 0.3
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
60-1

AFC
28-1

AFC EAST
+475

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17	30	24.5	22
YARDS PER POINT	17.2	30	14	23
PLAYS PER GAME	60.4	25		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:12	26		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.9%	29	43.3%	26
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	292	31	342.9	22
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	29	5.5	19
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.2	20		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	115.8	13	131.4	23
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	13	4.4	14
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.1	24		
COMPLETION %	64.7%	17	64.9%	12
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	176.2	32	211.5	10
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.3	28	6.7	21
TURNOVERS	1.4	21	0.7	30

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
22.0
(#23 of 32)

For the second time in as many seasons, the New England Patriots have a new coaching staff. It is also another former linebacker, as Mike Vrabel takes over the once proud franchise. The front office spared no expense for Vrabel. New England doled out the most money in free agency this offseason, in hopes of accelerating the team's growth.

OFFENSE
The heights which this offense can reach depend on the development of second-year quarterback Drake Maye. He averaged 6.7 yards per pass attempt in 2024 and finished 20th among other signal-callers in EPA/CPOE composite. He also displayed a multifaceted game and finished ninth among all quarterbacks in rushing yards (421).

Maye will need to be better protected than he was last season – he was pressured on 37.4% of his dropbacks. The front office did its part in improving the offensive line with the selection of Will Campbell fourth overall, and the signing of both Garrett Bradbury and Morgan Moses.

The skill positions still need some work. Stefon Diggs comes in after a busy offseason in which he was recovering from a torn ACL so his effectiveness is unknown. But Josh McDaniels is one of the best offensive coordinators in the league. He helped get the most out of Mac Jones his rookie season, and he will likely be able to raise the floor of this group as a whole. Even if this team crawls up to average, it is a massive step forward. It very well could do that this season.

DEFENSE
Cornerback Christian Gonzalez was named to the AP All-Pro second team in his first full season in the league. He finished with a 78.2 PFF coverage grade, intercepted two passes and broke up seven in 978 snaps. New England gave him some help on the other side by bringing in Carlton Davis from Detroit. Jabrill Peppers played well in limited playing time last season. If he can continue that over a larger sample size, the secondary could be a real strength.

New England's run defense needs to improve – it finished 28th in adjusted line yards per carry allowed – and the additions of Robert Spillane at linebacker and Milton Williams at defensive tackle should go a long way toward doing just that. Keion White led the team in pressures (45) and sacks (6), but he desperately needs some assistance. K'Lavon Chaisson could help alleviate some of that pressure, but this is still a group that will likely struggle when it comes to rushing the passer.

OUTLOOK
New England's arrow is undoubtedly pointing up. Whether or not it can meet the expectations set by the betting market is the question. Despite winning only four games last season, the win total for the Patriots is 8.5 at every shop. It does have the second-easiest schedule in the league, and the coaching staff is widely considered to be an upgrade. Given how weak the division around them looks – outside of Buffalo – it is certainly plausible this team meets the expectations set upon it this season.

prediction
OVER 8.5 WINS

NEW YORK
JETS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 6-11 ATS / 10-6-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Aaron Glenn (1st)

It is a season of change for New York after a disastrous 2024 campaign. Aaron Rodgers is gone and a new coaching staff and quarterback are in place. A new Aaron – Aaron Glenn – is now charged with bringing the franchise back to glory. The former Lions defensive coordinator has a somewhat talented roster which should allow for some optimism in the Big Apple.

OFFENSE
The Jets' new general manager went with the cheap option at quarterback for the 2025 season and brought in Justin Fields. On 197 dropbacks, Fields posted a 71.0 PFF offensive grade, threw five touchdowns to just one interception and – most importantly to some – went 4-2 as a starter. The former first-round pick will learn under offensive coordinator and former Lions passing game coordinator Tanner Engstrand.

Detroit has been one of the best offenses in the league in recent years, but the system has had a more traditional dropback passer in Jared Goff. How Engstrand uses a much more dynamic athlete in Fields will be the biggest question for the Jets.

Fields' skill-position weapons are solid. Garrett Wilson has posted three straight 1,000-yard seasons despite subpar quarterback play. Breece Hall has averaged 5.5 yards per touch in his three seasons in the league. New York has a dynamic athlete at each of the key positions. If Engstrand plays his cards right, this offense could sneak up on the NFL this season.

DEFENSE
New York finished 2024 21st in opponent EPA per play. It was a shocking drop from its third-place finish the season prior. Injuries were a part of the regression – FTN has the Jets defense with the sixth-most adjusted games lost to injury – but so too was poor play.

The biggest culprit was Sauce Gardner. The two-time First-Team All-Pro posted the lowest PFF defensive grade of his career (70.2) and defended just nine passes.

No edge rusher outside of Will McDonald had more than 23 pressures, and New York finished 24th in total takeaways (17) a year after finishing ninth.

The positive news for this unit is that if players like Gardner revert back to a higher level of play, this is a group that could make a sizable leap in the rankings. Glenn is a great defensive mind that can get the most out of his defense. Bettors should expect improvement from the Jets defense this season, and it wouldn't be shocking to see it back inside the top 10 in 2025.

OUTLOOK
New York has the lowest win total in the AFC East. It has an average schedule and the most important position is in the hands of a quarterback that is on his third team in as many seasons. However, this roster is not devoid of talent. If Fields can provide a steady hand on offense, and the key defensive pieces find their footing again, this could be a team that achieves more than is expected by the betting market.

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	PITTSBURGH	+2.2	NY JETS are 4-1 ATS in L5 hosting Pittsburgh
9/14	BUFFALO	+8.4	BUFFALO has won L3 SU & ATS vs. NY Jets
9/21	at Tampa Bay	+9.2	NY JETS are 6-1 ATS in L7 versus Tampa Bay
9/29	at Miami	+6.8	FAVORITES are 7-3 ATS in L10 of NYJ-MIA rivalry
10/5	DALLAS	+1.6	DALLAS is 4-1-1 ATS in L6 vs. NY Jets
10/12	vs. Denver	+4	DENVER is 8-4 ATS in L12 vs. NY Jets
10/19	CAROLINA	-1.9	FAVORITES are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 of CAR-NYJ h2h series
10/26	at Cincinnati	+8.2	HOME TEAMS are 8-2-1 ATS in NYJ-CIN series since '04
- BYE WEEK -			
11/9	CLEVELAND	-3.6	FAVORITES are on 11-2 ATS surge in CLE-NYJ h2h series
11/13	at New England	+3.9	NEW ENGLAND is 9-1 SU & 7-2-1 ATS in L10 hosting NY Jets
11/23	at Baltimore	+13.1	FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in NYJ-BAL h2h series
11/30	ATLANTA	+0.1	UNDER the total is 3-1 in L4 of ATL-NYJ set in New York
12/7	MIAMI	+2.4	The L3 games of MIA-NYJ in New York went OVER the total
12/14	at Jacksonville	+4.4	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of NYJ-JAC h2h series
12/21	at New Orleans	+1.2	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2 ATS in L8 of NYJ-NO h2h series
12/28	NEW ENGLAND	+1.1	UNDER the total is 8-1 in L9 of NE-NYJ rivalry in New York
1/4	at Buffalo	+12	BUFFALO is on 5-0 SU & 4-1 ATS run hosting NY Jets, avg MOV 17.4 PPG

SOS
24.30
(#12 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.6 / 0.7
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
250-1

AFC
100-1

AFC EAST
18-1

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.9	24	23.8	20
YARDS PER POINT	15.6	21	13.2	27
PLAYS PER GAME	59.4	30		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:02	27		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	14	38.6%	16
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	310.3	24	313.8	3
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	20	5	3
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	21.4	32		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	91.8	31	121.1	17
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	16	4.1	6
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.7	5		
COMPLETION %	63.4%	21	62.8%	7
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	218.5	16	192.6	4
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.6	25	6.3	6
TURNOVERS	1.1	11	1	20

prediction
OVER 5.5 WINS

AFC NORTH
preview

Coverage by Zach Cohen

The AFC North has long been the NFL's most gritty and unpredictable division, and the 2025 season promises to be no exception. Last year, the division lived up to its reputation as the league's toughest battleground, with competitive games even in what was considered a down year for this foursome of teams.

The Ravens ultimately secured another division crown — their second straight — behind an explosive offense and a defense that stifled opponents after a slow start to the year. With MVP candidate Lamar Jackson, and a stellar defense, back in the fold, Baltimore enters the season as the odds-on favorite to win the division again. However, winning it in 2025 won't be as easy as it was in 2024.

The Bengals, despite battling injuries and defensive lapses, showcased their trademark offensive firepower last season. Joe Burrow and company will be knocking on the door in 2025. Cincinnati is hoping that the change from defensive coordinator Lou Anarumo to Al Golden — who was highly effective calling the shots for Notre Dame's defense — will get the team back into contention.

Meanwhile, the Steelers and Browns each experienced rollercoaster campaigns last season, highlighted by question marks at the quarterback position, but both groups are hoping to be back in the mix in 2025, though that's more likely for one than the other.

Pittsburgh has a real shot at making things happen in 2025, having added Aaron Rodgers and DK Metcalf on offense. If the Steelers are even half as good offensively as they usually are defensively, they could give the Ravens and Bengals a serious run for their money.

Conversely, this is likely a transition year for Cleveland. The Browns have talent on the defensive side of the ball, and playing at Huntington Bank Field is never easy. But Cleveland's offense could be a mess. Kevin Stefanski is a proven play caller, but having Kenny Pickett or Joe Flacco under center doesn't excite anyone. And rookies Dillon Gabriel and Shedeur Sanders likely aren't ready to contribute right away, so in a loaded division, this could be another messy year for the Browns.

Regardless, the AFC North offers the perfect storm of elite talent, storied rivalries and high-stakes drama — where every game can swing the playoff picture and no outcome is ever certain. Let's break down each team's outlook in detail.

VSiN staff division selections
BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

15	10	1	0

2025 projected standings
(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
BALTIMORE	29.5	2.5	0.4	23.84 (18)	11.1	5.9	11.5
CINCINNATI	25.0	2.1	0.7	23.83 (19)	9.1	7.9	9.5
PITTSBURGH	24.0	2.3	0.2	24.21 (14)	8.4	8.6	8.5
CLEVELAND	19.0	2.1	-0.6	25.11 (3)	5.6	11.4	4.5

BALTIMORE
RAVENS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 13-6 SU & 11-7-1 ATS / 14-5-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: John Harbaugh (18th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Buffalo	+2.2	HOME TEAMS are on 11-2 ATS surge in BAL-BUF h2h set
9/14	CLEVELAND	-13.2	L3 games of CLE-BAL rivalry went OVER the total
9/22	DETROIT	-4.1	BALTIMORE is 4-0 SU & ATS in L4 hosting DET, avg MOV 28.5 PPG
9/28	at Kansas City	+1.8	KANSAS CITY is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore
10/5	HOUSTON	-8	BALTIMORE has won L5 ATS versus Houston
10/12	LA RAMS	-6	BALTIMORE is 4-1-1 ATS in L6 vs. LA Rams
	- BYE WEEK -		
10/26	CHICAGO	-9.6	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in CHI-BAL h2h series
10/30	at Miami	-3	OVER the total is on 5-1 run in BAL-MIA h2h series
11/9	at Minnesota	-3.5	The L5 games of BAL-MIN h2h series went OVER the total
11/16	at Cleveland	-9.2	BALTIMORE is on 13-4 ATS run at Cleveland
11/23	NY JETS	-13.1	FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in NYJ-BAL h2h series
11/27	CINCINNATI	-5.9	ROAD TEAMS are 13-4 ATS in L17 of CIN-BAL h2h series
12/7	PITTSBURGH	-7.4	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of PIT-BAL series in Baltimore
12/14	at Cincinnati	-3.2	BALTIMORE is on 6-1 ATS run at Cincinnati
12/21	NEW ENGLAND	-10.1	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of NE-BAL h2h series
12/28	at Green Bay	+0	BALTIMORE has won L3 ATS vs. Green Bay
1/4	at Pittsburgh	-4	UNDERDOGS are 9-0-2 ATS in L11 of BAL-PIT series in Pittsburgh

SOS
23.84
(#18 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.5 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
+650

AFC
+350

AFC NORTH
-145

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.5	3	21.2	9
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	11	15.3	15
PLAYS PER GAME	62.1	16		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:53	6		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.2%	3	39.8%	18
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	424.9	1	324.2	10
YARDS PER PLAY	6.8	1	5.2	6
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.6	2		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	187.6	1	80.1	1
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.8	1	3.6	1
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.1	31		
COMPLETION %	66.7%	10	63.4%	8
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	237.4	7	244.1	31
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.8	1	6.6	18
TURNOVERS	0.6	3	1	20

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS   29.5   (#2 of 32)

The Ravens looked like a completely different team offensively in 2024, so there was hope they'd be able to get over the hump. Nope. Buffalo earned a 27-25 win over Baltimore in the AFC Divisional Round, with Mark Andrews dropping an easy catch on a two-point conversion attempt that would have tied the game up with a little over a minute remaining.

This year, the Ravens will be hoping that their fortunes will change. There's some real scar tissue with this group, but all you can do is give yourself enough bites at the apple. Eventually it'll happen. Perhaps this is the year.

OFFENSE
How important was Derrick Henry? In addition to him rushing for 1,921 yards and 16 touchdowns, Baltimore finished first in the league in EPA per play (0.199) and second in Rush EPA per play (0.053). The Ravens weren't awful offensively in 2023, but they became far more explosive with King Henry.

Of course, Lamar Jackson was MVP runner-up, throwing for 4,172 yards with 41 touchdowns and four picks, while also running for 915 yards and four scores. But having Henry barreling between the tackles opened up this offense. The running game became elite, the team thrived in short-yardage situations and the threat of the run made Jackson more dangerous than ever.

Baltimore shouldn't skip a beat in 2025. Everybody from last year is back, and the Ravens also scooped five-time Pro Bowler DeAndre Hopkins. While his best days are behind him, Hopkins is still a big body that can contribute.

This is the most loaded group Baltimore has had in some time, and they have the right guy pushing all the buttons in coordinator Todd Monken.

DEFENSE
The Ravens didn't look like themselves the first half of last year, which probably had something to do with Mike Macdonald leaving for the Seahawks. Baltimore also saw some talent go out the door. But from Week 9 to the end of the regular season, the Ravens were second in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (-0.105).

Baltimore should be able to build on a strong second half of 2024, especially with Zach Orr in his second year as the team's coordinator. He's going to be more comfortable in 2025, and he has some more talent to work with.

The Ravens added some good defensive depth, plus they drafted a starting-caliber safety in Malaki Starks and a good pass rusher in Mike Green. On top of that, they were able to sign Jaire Alexander after the Packers released him. The two-time Pro Bowler was solid in coverage last year, and he adds to an impressive group of defensive backs.

OUTLOOK
The Ravens don't have a great schedule in 2025, but it's hard not to go Over on 11.5 wins. This team has won at least 12 games five times under head coach John Harbaugh, and this is arguably the most talented team he has ever had. If the Ravens can avoid the injury bug, they should have one of the best records in the AFC.

prediction

OVER 11.5 WINS

CINCINNATI
BENGALS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 9-8 SU & 10-7 ATS / 11-6-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Zac Taylor (7th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Cleveland	-5	CINCINNATI is 9-3 ATS in L12 games at Cleveland
9/14	JACKSONVILLE	-6.4	JACKSONVILLE is 6-3 ATS in L9 visits to Cincinnati
9/21	at Minnesota	+0.7	HOME TEAMS are 7-0-1 ATS in L8 of CIN-MIN h2h series
9/29	at Denver	+0.8	CINCINNATI is on 5-0 ATS win streak at Denver
10/5	DETROIT	+0.8	CINCINNATI is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Detroit
10/12	at Green Bay	+4.2	ROAD TEAMS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of CIN-GB h2h series
10/16	PITTSBURGH	-2.5	PITTSBURGH has won L3 SU & ATS at Cincinnati
10/26	NY JETS	-8.2	HOME TEAMS are 8-2-1 ATS in NYJ-CIN series since '04
11/2	CHICAGO	-4.7	UNDER the total is 5-2 in L7 of CHI-CIN h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/16	at Pittsburgh	+0.2	PITTSBURGH is on extended 12-6 ATS run hosting Cincinnati
11/23	NEW ENGLAND	-5.2	NEW ENGLAND is 7-2 ATS in L9 vs. Cincinnati
11/27	at Baltimore	+5.9	ROAD TEAMS are 13-4 ATS in L17 of CIN-BAL h2h series
12/7	at Buffalo	+6.4	The L5 games of CIN-BUF h2h series went UNDER the total
12/14	BALTIMORE	+3.2	BALTIMORE is on 6-1 ATS run at Cincinnati
12/21	at Miami	+1.2	HOME TEAMS are on 6-0 ATS streak in CIN-MIA h2h series
12/28	ARIZONA	-3	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in ARI-CIN h2h series
1/4	CLEVELAND	-8.3	CINCINNATI is 8-2 ATS in L10 hosting Cleveland

SOS
23.83
(#19 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.1 / 0.7
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
20-1

AFC
10-1

AFC NORTH
+230

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.8	6	25.5	25
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	5	13.6	25
PLAYS PER GAME	63.5	11		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:31	12		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	46.7%	5	42.0%	23
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	365.5	9	348.3	25
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	9	5.4	17
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.4	30		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	92.6	30	124.8	19
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	20	4.4	16
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.4	2		
COMPLETION %	70.6%	3	64.9%	13
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	272.9	1	223.5	21
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	11	6.6	17
TURNOVERS	1.3	19	1.5	7

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS **25.0** (#12 of 32)

In 2021, the Bengals went 10-7, won the AFC North and went all the way to the Super Bowl, losing 23-20 to the Rams in a tight game. The following year, Cincinnati improved to 12-4, won the AFC North for a second straight year and then lost to Kansas City in the AFC Championship. It's been all downhill since then.

The Bengals have gone 9-8 in back-to-back seasons, failing to make the postseason in both. Joe Burrow and the offense still have a ton of juice, and the front office invested heavily in keeping that group together. But the defense was a nightmare last year, and it's unclear how things will look on that side of the ball in 2025. That's not good for head coach Zac Taylor, who likely needs to show his bosses something in order to keep his job.

OFFENSE
Many people thought Tee Higgins would be heading elsewhere this season, but the Bengals locked him in for four years, $115 million. The band is now fully back together for an offense that was seventh in the NFL in EPA per play (0.108) last year — and fifth (0.124) from Week 9 to the end of the regular season.

Joe Burrow was PFF's second-best quarterback last year, finishing with a grade of 94.0 to go along with 4,918 passing yards and 43 touchdowns. With Burrow slinging it out to Higgins and Ja'Marr Chase, the best pass-catching duo in football, Cincinnati will be elite offensively again. That's especially true with Chase Brown having emerged as a stud out of the backfield.

DEFENSE
The Bengals defense was a mess last year. They were 28th in the NFL in Rush EPA per play allowed (0.000), making it way too easy for opposing offenses to set up short-and-manageable situations. That will have to change this year, but there are reasons to believe things will be better.

Al Golden's Notre Dame defenses were dominant at every level, and just bringing in a new voice should be refreshing for Cincinnati. Lou Anarumo is a highly-respected defensive mind, but it's clear that a change was needed.

The Bengals also added a productive linebacker in Oren Burks, who played well during the Eagles Super Bowl run. They also signed T.J. Slaton, who should help beef up the defensive line a bit. Cincinnati was also aggressive in targeting defensive talent in the draft, as the team took edge rusher Shemar Stewart 17th overall. The Bengals also used the 49th pick on linebacker Demetrius Knight Jr.

The Bengals just need Cam Taylor-Britt and DJ Turner II to grow, and they need to do it fast. This secondary needs to be better in 2025.

OUTLOOK
Cincinnati's offense can score with anyone, but did this team make the best use of its money in the offseason? Bringing back Higgins instead of identifying some quality defensive talent could end up being a big mistake. Also, is there any reason to trust that the Bengals will start the season better? They should beat the Browns to start the year, plus a home game against the Jaguars in Week 2 could mean a 2-0 start. But things get tough after that.

prediction
UNDER 9.5 WINS

CLEVELAND
BROWNS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 4-13 ATS / 7-10-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Kevin Stefanski (6th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	CINCINNATI	+5	CINCINNATI is 9-3 ATS in L12 games at Cleveland
9/14	at Baltimore	+13.2	L3 games of CLE-BAL rivalry went OVER the total
9/21	GREEN BAY	+5.9	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-1 ATS run in GB-CLE h2h series
9/28	at Detroit	+12.8	L4 games of CLE-DET series in Detroit went OVER the total
10/5	vs. Minnesota	+5	FAVORITES are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of MIN-CLE h2h series
10/12	at Pittsburgh	+7.5	PITTSBURGH is 10-3-1 ATS in L14 hosting Cleveland
10/19	MIAMI	+2.1	FAVORITES have won L3 ATS in MIA-CLE h2h series
10/26	at New England	+5.6	NEW ENGLAND is on 5-1 ATS run hosting Cleveland
- BYE WEEK -			
11/9	at NY Jets	+3.6	FAVORITES are on 11-2 ATS surge in CLE-NYJ h2h series
11/16	BALTIMORE	+9.2	BALTIMORE is on 13-4 ATS run at Cleveland
11/23	at Las Vegas	+4.9	UNDERDOGS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in CLE-LVR h2h series
11/30	SAN FRANCISCO	+4.5	CLEVELAND is on 4-0 ATS run hosting San Francisco
12/7	TENNESSEE	-3	CLEVELAND is on 5-1-1 ATS run vs. Tennessee
12/14	at Chicago	+7.6	FAVORITES are on 6-1-1 ATS run in CLE-CHI h2h series
12/21	BUFFALO	+8.1	FAVORITES are 6-0-1 ATS in L7 of BUF-CLE h2h series
12/28	PITTSBURGH	+3.5	CLEVELAND is 6-2 ATS in L8 hosting Pittsburgh
1/4	at Cincinnati	+8.3	CINCINNATI is 8-2 ATS in L10 hosting Cleveland

SOS
25.11
(#3 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.1 / 0.6
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
250-1

AFC
100-1

AFC NORTH
30-1

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	15.2	32	25.6	27
YARDS PER POINT	19.8	32	13.4	26
PLAYS PER GAME	65.8	1		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:12	16		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	29.5%	32	36.2%	8
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	300.8	28	342.1	19
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	31	5.6	24
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	23	28		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	94.6	29	129.7	21
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	23	4.5	20
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.9	1		
COMPLETION %	59.8%	31	61.8%	3
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	206.2	22	212.4	12
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.9	32	7.1	26
TURNOVERS	2	31	0.7	30

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS 19.0 (#31 of 32)

The Browns won 11 games twice in Kevin Stefanski's first four years, and he won Coach of the Year in both of those double-digit win seasons. It felt like Cleveland was on the right path, but the Deshaun Watson trade changed everything. This team is coming off a 3-14 season in 2024, Watson hasn't played well and he also happens to be recovering from an Achilles tear.

Cleveland will now have to navigate a tough schedule with one of the strangest quarterback rooms in the league. It's a bit of a shame considering some of the studs on this roster. But we have seen Stefanski make chicken salad out of chicken poo before. Maybe he can do it again.

OFFENSE
In Watson's final year with the Texans, he had a PFF grade of 92.4. He was one of the best quarterbacks in football. Since then, it's been nothing but poor play, off-field incidents and injuries for Watson, who has had a PFF grade of 67.3 or lower in each of his three years under center in Cleveland.

The Browns haven't ruled out the possibility of Watson returning, but the team won't be expecting much. He has been bad even when healthy, and he's now approaching 30 years old — and has torn his Achilles twice. The mobility that made him a special player is waning, and he's not a good processor anymore.

Cleveland does have some weapons. Jerry Jeudy and David Njoku are dangerous play makers, and rookie tight end Harold Fannin Jr. is a player. The same goes for running back Quinshon Judkins, who was awesome in college. But none of that will matter without competent QB play.

Who will be under center? Cleveland would like for Kenny Pickett to win the job. But Pickett isn't exciting anyone. And while Joe Flacco led the Browns to the playoffs two years ago, he's 40 years old and didn't have the same magic with the Colts last season. Dillon Gabriel and Shedeur Sanders don't seem like viable options yet either.

DEFENSE
Myles Garrett is still an elite player, as he's coming off a season in which he racked up 14.0 sacks. Isaiah McGuire is another good player on the edge, and the team is expecting Mason Graham, the fifth pick in the draft, to be a stud when it comes to stuffing the run — and providing some pass-rushing juice from the inside.

Cleveland was 16th in the league in Rush EPA per play allowed (-0.091) last season, and it's reasonable to expect the team to be a top-10 group in that regard in 2025. Rookie Carson Schwesinger should make an impact there, too.

The play in the secondary is more of a question mark. After a good 2022 season, Martin Emerson Jr. hasn't looked like the same player in coverage, nor has Denzel Ward. And the Browns don't have the firepower to keep up in high-scoring games.

OUTLOOK
I sometimes like going Over on bad teams. People tend to underrate some of the weaker teams in the league, and Cleveland is more talented than your average division basement dweller. However, it's hard to find even three good spots on the schedule. In fact, there's a real chance that a December 7th date with the Titans will be the only game this year in which the Browns will be favorites. That makes the Under the only reasonable option.

prediction

UNDER 5.5 WINS

PITTSBURGH
STEELERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 10-8 SU & 11-7 ATS / 8-10-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Mike Tomlin (18th)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at NY Jets	-2.2	NY JETS are 4-1 ATS in L5 hosting Pittsburgh
9/14	SEATTLE	-3.7	ROAD UNDERDOGS are 2-1 SU & 3-0 ATS in L3 of SEA-PIT series
9/21	at New England	-0.2	NEW ENGLAND is 5-1-1 ATS in L7 hosting Pittsburgh
9/28	vs. Minnesota	+0	FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in MIN-PIT h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
10/12	CLEVELAND	-7.5	PITTSBURGH is 10-3-1 ATS in L14 hosting Cleveland
10/16	at Cincinnati	+2.5	PITTSBURGH has won L3 SU & ATS at Cincinnati
10/26	GREEN BAY	+0.7	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-PIT h2h series
11/2	INDIANAPOLIS	-5.3	HOME TEAMS are on 8-2 ATS surge in PIT-IND h2h series
11/9	at LA Chargers	+3	PITTSBURGH is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Chargers
11/16	CINCINNATI	-0.2	PITTSBURGH is on extended 12-6 ATS run hosting Cincinnati
11/23	at Chicago	+1.8	CHICAGO is on a 4-0 ATS run vs. Pittsburgh
11/30	BUFFALO	+2.9	PITTSBURGH is 6-1 ATS in L7 hosting Buffalo, last win '13
12/7	at Baltimore	+7.4	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of PIT-BAL series in Baltimore
12/15	MIAMI	-3.1	UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS run in L6 of MIA-PIT h2h set
12/21	at Detroit	+7	UNDERDOGS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of DET-PIT h2h series
12/28	at Cleveland	-3.5	CLEVELAND is 6-2 ATS in L8 hosting Pittsburgh
1/4	BALTIMORE	+4	UNDERDOGS are 9-0-2 ATS in L11 of BAL-PIT series in Pittsburgh

odds

SOS
24.21
(#14 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.3 / 0.2
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
35-1

AFC
17-1

AFC NORTH
+550

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.4	16	20.4	8
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	12	16	8
PLAYS PER GAME	63.6	10		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:47	7		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	15	35.3%	2
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	319.4	23	326.7	12
YARDS PER PLAY	5	26	5.4	14
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.4	4		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	127.4	11	98.7	6
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	25	4.1	5
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.4	29		
COMPLETION %	64.3%	19	65.6%	19
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	192	27	228	25
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.2	15	6.7	20
TURNOVERS	1	10	1.9	1

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS   **24.0**   (#15 of 32)

Everybody is tired of hearing about Mike Tomlin having never had a losing season, but it is an impressive stat. To have a winning percentage of .500 or better in 18 straight seasons says a lot about his ability to lead, especially considering the Steelers once started a man named Devlin "Duck" Hodges at quarterback.

Pittsburgh enters this year after having won 10 games in back-to-back seasons, and there is a little bit of buzz in the Steel City. While Russell Wilson wasn't awful under center last season, Aaron Rodgers is in to man the quarterback spot. Sure, he's 41 years old and collects checks from Pat McAfee, but he looked solid in the second half of last season and could give this offense a jolt — especially with the newly-acquired DK Metcalf on the outside.

OFFENSE
Pittsburgh looked competent with Wilson at quarterback, but he had an underwhelming finish to the season. The team is hoping that Rodgers can take things to another level. Things didn't work out in New York for the four-time MVP, but injuries had a lot to do with that. And Rodgers did show some real signs of life towards the end of 2024. In the final 10 games he played for the Jets, Rodgers threw for 18 touchdowns and four interceptions.

If Pittsburgh's offensive line can keep Rodgers upright — which seems like a real possibility — this Steelers offense could be dangerous. Obviously, losing a talent like George Pickens is rough for a team that needs playmakers, but Metcalf is going to raise the level of the group himself. He has had three 1,000-yard seasons in the last five years, and his ability to take the top off a defense is something else.

Will the Steelers suddenly look like the Lions? No. But Pittsburgh had a negative EPA per play (-0.027) in 2024. The team should get back in the green in 2025.

DEFENSE
Pittsburgh's defense should be better in 2025 than it was in 2024, and the group was pretty tough last year. Things weren't perfect by any means, but they finished ninth in EPA per play allowed (-0.019), and they went out and added Darius Slay on a one-year, $10 million deal. Then, they traded for star corner Jalen Ramsey late in June. Those two should help stabilize the secondary.

Pittsburgh also used the 21st pick in the draft on Derrick Harmon, who should immediately help the Steelers against the run.

It's just hard to imagine this failing to be a top-10 defense, and the upside is there for it to be a top-five group. T.J. Watt is still as good as any pass-rusher in the league, and he's not alone when looking for defensive stars on the depth chart.

OUTLOOK
This Steelers team has a tough schedule. However, Pittsburgh has always been a very difficult place to play, and Tomlin has done nothing but pump out winning seasons. Is that really going to change with this roster? Rodgers is the best quarterback the Steelers have had since Ben Roethlisberger, and Metcalf is the best wideout the team has had since Antonio Brown. I'm obviously not a fan of the Rodgers circus, but this team has talent on both sides of the ball.

prediction

OVER 8.5 WINS

AFC SOUTH
preview

Coverage by
Zach Cohen

The AFC South is arguably the league's most intriguing and unpredictable division. In recent years, the Texans have emerged as the class of the group, capturing the division crown in each of the last two seasons — and six times in the past decade. Last year, Houston finished 10-7 in what was a shaky sophomore season for quarterback C.J. Stroud. Meanwhile, Indianapolis, Jacksonville and Tennessee all struggled to find consistency.

The Texans remain the team to beat, even after losing left tackle Laremy Tunsil. The team retooled the offensive line with veteran additions and focused on depth in the draft, hoping to keep Stroud upright and productive. Houston's offense, led by Stroud, Joe Mixon and Nico Collins, is expected to be explosive, but questions linger about pass protection and defensive depth. Still, the team's recent success and roster continuity makes the Texans the early favorites.

The Colts are looking to break their division title drought and took steps forward this offseason. They drafted a highly talented tight end in Tyler Warren and made targeted free agency moves to bolster their roster. With a young core that includes quarterback Anthony Richardson, Indianapolis is banking on internal development and improved health to close the gap with Houston. Their draft was well-received, and if their young talent matures, the Colts could be a dark horse in the division. But if Richardson doesn't step up and secure the starting job, Daniel Jones is lurking in the shadows. There's been some buzz about Jones' play in practice, and he could offer the team the solution it's looking for at quarterback.

The Jags, meanwhile, underwent a major overhaul, bringing in new head coach Liam Coen and trading up in the draft to select two-way star Travis Hunter. The offense is expected to be more dynamic, and there's optimism that the new regime can spark a turnaround after a disappointing 2024 campaign.

There isn't as much hope for the Titans, but the team did draft Miami quarterback Cameron Ward with the first pick in the 2025 NFL Draft. They're very much rebuilding and playing the long game, but the hope is that Ward will be the franchise player they've been looking for. If he is, Tennessee isn't too far away from being a factor in this weak division.

For bettors, the AFC South could offer some long-term value. This is one of the NFL's most wide-open races, and it's one in which the favorite really isn't head-and-shoulders above the competition. Houston could very well win the division for a third year in a row, but nobody would be too surprised if Indianapolis or Jacksonville takes that spot.

VSiN staff division selections

BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

18	8	0	0

2025 projected standings

(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
HOUSTON	24.5	1.9	-0.1	23.71 (20)	8.9	8.1	9.5
INDIANAPOLIS	21.5	1.7	-0.1	23.4 (26)	7.6	9.4	7.5
JACKSONVILLE	21.5	1.8	-0.4	23.35 (27)	7.6	9.4	7.5
TENNESSEE	19.0	2.0	-0.5	23.19 (29)	6.4	10.6	5.5

HOUSTON
TEXANS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 11-8 SU & 9-10 ATS / 7-11-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: DeMeco Ryans (3rd)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at LA Rams	+2.4	LA RAMS are on 4-1 SU & ATS run all-time vs. Texans
9/15	TAMPA BAY	-0.7	HOUSTON is 3-0 SU & ATS all-time hosting Tampa Bay
9/21	at Jacksonville	-1.5	UNDER the total is 5-1 in L6 of HOU-JAC h2h series
9/28	TENNESSEE	-7.5	ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS run in TEN-HOU rivalry
10/5	at Baltimore	+8	BALTIMORE has won L5 ATS versus Houston
- BYE WEEK -			
10/20	at Seattle	+0.2	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in HOU-SEA h2h series
10/26	SAN FRANCISCO	-0.8	SAN FRANCISCO is 4-0-1 ATS all-time versus Texans
11/2	DENVER	-3.1	UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of DEN-HOU h2h series
11/9	JACKSONVILLE	-4.9	UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of JAC-HOU rivalry in Houston
11/16	at Tennessee	-3.8	HOUSTON has won L4 ATS at Tennessee
11/20	BUFFALO	+2.8	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 of BUF-HOU h2h series
11/30	at Indianapolis	-1.6	FAVORITES are 6-1 ATS in L7 of HOU-IND series in Indianapolis
12/7	at Kansas City	+7.3	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of HOU-KC h2h series
12/14	ARIZONA	-2.3	HOME TEAMS are 4-2 ATS all-time in ARI-HOU series
12/21	LAS VEGAS	-6.2	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of LVR-HOU series
12/28	at LA Chargers	+2.8	The L3 games of HOU-LAC h2h series went OVER the total
1/4	INDIANAPOLIS	-4.6	INDIANAPOLIS is 11-1-1 ATS at Houston since '13

SOS
23.71
(#20 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.9 / 0.1
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
35-1

AFC
17-1

AFC SOUTH
+115

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.9	19	21.9	14
YARDS PER POINT	14.6	14	14.4	19
PLAYS PER GAME	62.2	15		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:54	5		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.7%	20	35.9%	7
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	319.7	22	315	6
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	21	5.1	4
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.5	22		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	112.3	15	114	11
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	15	4.3	11
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	11		
COMPLETION %	62.6%	25	58.8%	1
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	207.4	21	201	6
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.9	18	6.2	2
TURNOVERS	1.1	11	1.7	5

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
24.5
(#13 of 32)

The Texans enter the season looking to take another step under head coach DeMeco Ryans. After years of rebuilding and inconsistency, Houston surged back into relevance in 2023 and 2024, posting back-to-back 10-7 records and making playoff appearances both seasons.

The 2024 campaign saw the Texans start hot at 5-1 and win the AFC South, but offensive struggles and injuries led to a late-season stumble. They did manage a wild-card victory over the Chargers, but a fourth-quarter collapse ended their run in Kansas City. Despite the disappointment, the Texans' defense emerged as an elite unit, and the front office responded to offensive shortcomings with sweeping changes. Let's see if they work.

OFFENSE
The big story for the Texans offense is the arrival of Nick Caley as offensive coordinator, replacing Bobby Slowik after a season in which C.J. Stroud regressed and tossed 12 interceptions. Caley is tasked with revitalizing an offense that averaged just 21.9 PPG and finished 21st in EPA per play (-0.038).

The offensive line, a major weakness last year, has been completely retooled. Laremy Tunsil was traded to Washington, and Houston went out and signed Cam Robinson and Laken Tomlinson. Tytus Howard shifts inside to guard, with Blake Fisher at right tackle and Jake Andrews at center. Howard says the goal is to be "more nasty up front," but none of these guys have really proven themselves — at least when looking at PFF grades.

If the line delivers and does a better job of pass-protecting, the hope is that Stroud will take a step forward after taking a small step back in 2024. He has a good group of pass-catchers, so there will be no excuses if he has time to throw.

The running game should also be better in 2025. Joe Mixon's 1,016 rushing yards and 11 rushing touchdowns seemed good on the surface, but this was an inefficient running game last year. It'll need to be better this season.

DEFENSE
Houston's defense is the clear strength of the team and among the NFL's best. The front seven is anchored by pass rushers Will Anderson Jr. and Danielle Hunter, who helped the Texans finish fourth in sacks in 2024 with 49. The defensive line is deep, and the linebacker group is fast and physical.

The secondary is also incredibly tough, with corners Derek Stingley Jr. and Kamari Lassiter making up one of the league's top tandems. Safety Jalen Pitre and C.J. Gardner-Johnson round out an aggressive ball-hawking group.

Ryans and coordinator Matt Burke really know what they're doing with the talent on the roster, and they're good at developing the young guys. This defense was sixth in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (-0.054), and the team should be back in that range again.

OUTLOOK
The Texans will face a first-place schedule, and they have several marquee matchups against AFC contenders — along with some tough road games. Ultimately, none of that will matter if the offensive line is better, but I have my doubts. So, while there's a lot on this roster to like, I can't say I see another season with double-digit wins coming. It also doesn't help that the Colts and Jaguars should be much better.

prediction

UNDER 9.5 WINS

INDIANAPOLIS
COLTS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 9-8 ATS / 9-7-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Shane Steichen (3rd)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	MIAMI	+0	UNDERDOGS are 14-3-1 ATS in MIA-IND h2h series since '99
9/14	DENVER	+0.1	DENVER is on 4-1 ATS run vs. Indianapolis after losing prior 9
9/21	at Tennessee	-0.8	INDIANAPOLIS has won L4 ATS vs. Tennessee
9/28	at LA Rams	+5.4	The L7 games of IND-LAR series went OVER the total
10/5	LAS VEGAS	-3	ROAD TEAMS have won L6 ATS in LVR-IND h2h series
10/12	ARIZONA	+0.9	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ARI-IND h2h series
10/19	at LA Chargers	+5.8	LA CHARGERS are on 9-2 ATS run vs. Indianapolis
10/26	TENNESSEE	-4.3	INDIANAPOLIS has won L2 ATS hosting TEN after 4 straight L's
11/2	at Pittsburgh	+5.3	HOME TEAMS are on 8-2 ATS surge in PIT-IND h2h series
11/9	vs. Atlanta	+1	FAVORITES are on 6-1 ATS run in ATL-IND h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/23	at Kansas City	+10.3	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 of IND-KC h2h series
11/30	HOUSTON	+1.6	FAVORITES are 6-1 ATS in L7 of HOU-IND series in Indianapolis
12/7	at Jacksonville	+1.5	JACKSONVILLE is 8-1 ATS in L9 hosting Indianapolis but lost LY
12/14	at Seattle	+3.2	FAVORITES are 5-1 ATS in L6 of IND-SEA h2h series
12/22	SAN FRANCISCO	+2.4	INDIANAPOLIS has swept L3 ATS vs. San Francisco
12/28	JACKSONVILLE	-1.7	JACKSONVILLE is on 7-2 ATS surge at Indianapolis
1/4	at Houston	+4.6	INDIANAPOLIS is 11-1-1 ATS at Houston since '13

SOS
23.40
(#26 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.7 / 0.1
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
120-1

AFC
50-1

AFC SOUTH
+380

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.2	17	25.1	24
YARDS PER POINT	15.1	17	14.4	20
PLAYS PER GAME	61.2	19		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:44	30		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.9%	18	44.4%	30
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	334.8	13	361.2	29
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	14	5.5	22
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.2	7		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	137.1	8	131.8	24
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	8	4.2	8
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.2	27		
COMPLETION %	56.3%	32	69.4%	30
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	197.7	25	229.4	26
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	17	7.2	28
TURNOVERS	1.7	29	1.5	7

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS 21.5 (#24 of 32)

The Colts are entering Year 3 under Shane Steichen. In two seasons with the former Eagles offensive coordinator, Indianapolis is 17-17. Not great, not terrible. But this team expects to compete with Houston atop the standings.

Indianapolis' defense is rapidly improving, and things should be better on that side of the ball in 2025. But how will the offense look? We all know Jonathan Taylor is one of the best running backs in football, but poor quarterback play has plagued this team since Steichen took over. The Colts are hoping that Anthony Richardson will take some steps forward, but Daniel Jones could end up stealing the job. Regardless, Steichen needs his team to be better through the air or he could be looking for work.

OFFENSE
Taylor had a good season in 2024, rushing for 1,431 yards with 11 touchdowns. However, the passing game didn't do him any favors.

This year, Indianapolis is going to need Richardson to be better as a passer — and take care of himself when he decides to run. But it definitely feels like Jones has a shot at winning this job. He's similarly big, mobile and talented, but he's a bit sharper as a passer.

Whoever starts will have a nice group of weapons. Michael Pittman Jr. has shown that he's a good contested-catch, jump-ball option, and Josh Downs was tremendous out of the slot last year. Tyler Warren also happened to fall to Indianapolis at 14 in the 2025 NFL Draft. He should immediately make a presence in the passing game, especially with his ability to make plays after the catch.

This offensive line should also be strong. The left side is as good as any in the league with Bernhard Taimann and Quenton Nelson forming a monster duo. And if things stabilize on the right side, Indianapolis could get back to having one of the best lines in the NFL.

DEFENSE
The Colts are talented up front. DeForest Buckner is still a stud — even if he has lost a half-step — and there's plenty of talent surrounding him in the front seven.

The secondary does need to improve in 2025, though. Last year, the Colts were 23rd in the league in Dropback EPA per play allowed (0.101). Maybe Charvarius Ward can change that. Last season was rough for Ward, but he was one of the better corners in football in 2022 and 2023.

It'll also be interesting to see what defensive coordinator Lou Anarumo can do. Anarumo's time in Cincinnati had run its course, but being in a new environment, with some decent talent to work with, should change things for the experienced play caller.

OUTLOOK
The Colts have a tough road schedule, as they'll face five teams that made the playoffs a year ago, plus a Seahawks team that missed out despite winning 10 games. Indianapolis probably needs to win 2-3 road games in order to win eight or nine games, but I'm still playing the Over. While the quarterback situation is messy, the Colts are good everywhere else. And I have always been a Danny Dimes truther. Let's see him put that time in Minnesota to good use.

prediction

OVER 7.5 WINS

JACKSONVILLE
JAGUARS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 4-13 SU & 10-7 ATS / 9-8-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Liam Coen (1st)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	CAROLINA	-3.6	FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in CAR-JAC h2h series
9/14	at Cincinnati	+6.4	JACKSONVILLE is 6-3 ATS in L9 visits to Cincinnati
9/21	HOUSTON	+1.5	UNDER the total is 5-1 in L6 of HOU-JAC h2h series
9/28	at San Francisco	+7.1	SAN FRANCISCO has won L6 ATS vs. Jacksonville
10/6	KANSAS CITY	+5.8	KANSAS CITY is on 4-0 ATS run at Jacksonville
10/12	SEATTLE	-0.7	HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in SEA-JAC h2h series
10/19	vs. La Rams	+5	LA RAMS are 5-1 SU & 6-0 ATS all-time vs. Jacksonville
- BYE WEEK -			
11/2	at Las Vegas	+2.2	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of JAC-LVR series at Raiders
11/9	at Houston	+4.9	UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of JAC-HOU rivalry in Houston
11/16	LA CHARGERS	+1.9	OVER the total is 12-2 all-time in LAC-JAC h2h series
11/23	at Arizona	+4.7	ARIZONA has won four straight ATS vs. Jacksonville
11/30	at Tennessee	-0.5	UNDERDOGS have won L3 ATS of JAC-TEN series in Nashville
12/7	INDIANAPOLIS	-1.5	JACKSONVILLE is 8-1 ATS in L9 hosting Indianapolis but lost LY
12/14	NY JETS	-4.4	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of NYJ-JAC h2h series
12/21	at Denver	+5.4	JACKSONVILLE has won its L4 ATS at Denver
12/28	at Indianapolis	+1.7	JACKSONVILLE is on 7-2 ATS surge at Indianapolis
1/4	TENNESSEE	-4.4	UNDER the total is 10-4 in L14 of TEN-JAC series at Jacksonville

SOS
23.35
(#27 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.8 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
80-1

AFC
35-1

AFC SOUTH
+260

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.8	26	25.6	27
YARDS PER POINT	16.3	26	15.2	16
PLAYS PER GAME	58.4	32		
TIME OF POSSESSION	26:59	32		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.3%	22	43.1%	25
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	306.2	25	389.9	31
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	18	5.9	31
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.4	26		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	101.7	26	132.6	25
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	19	4.4	15
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.1	20		
COMPLETION %	62.8%	24	67.1%	24
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	204.5	24	257.4	32
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	21	7.5	32
TURNOVERS	1.4	24	0.5	32

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
21.5
(#25 of 32)

The Jaguars are one of the teams I highlighted when looking for this year's version of the Broncos and Commanders. Not only is Liam Coen a brilliant offensive coach, but he filled his staff with fresh, innovative football minds. Also, new general manager James Gladstone did great work as a scout for the Rams. He's a sharp decision maker that should get things right in Jacksonville.

This team was also more talented than last year's 4-13 record. Honestly, the Jaguars were 2-8 in one-score games in 2024, so they were close to having an entirely different season. It just shouldn't surprise anybody if some fresh faces can help Jacksonville rise above last year's ineptitude, making the Jaguars a real contender to win the division.

OFFENSE
Coen's Tampa Bay offense was fifth in the NFL in EPA per play (0.133). Not only did he have the passing game clicking, but he also turned the Bucs into a great running team. They were sixth in Rush EPA per play (0.012), giving them an element they didn't have the year before. So, there's a real chance Coen does some great things with the Jags.

Jacksonville finished the 2024 season just 19th in the NFL in EPA per play (-0.023), which was unacceptable considering the talent. Trevor Lawrence hasn't lived up to the immense pre-draft hype he received coming out of Clemson, but he's a big quarterback with a good arm and some real mobility. Coen should be able to turn Lawrence into a borderline top-10 starter, and there's plenty of talent around him.

Brian Thomas Jr. has the potential to be an elite receiver in this league, and No. 2 pick Travis Hunter should be another dangerous weapon. The Jaguars also have a decent group of running backs, and the offensive line play shouldn't be a problem.

DEFENSE
This was a lousy defense in 2024. The Jaguars were 31st in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (0.131), and they had the worst Dropback EPA per play allowed (0.241). Jacksonville is hoping that new coordinator Anthony Campanile can patch things up.

The Jaguars are strong along the defensive line. Josh Hines-Allen is one of the best defensive ends in the league, and Travon Walker, the No. 1 pick in 2022, is starting to become a problem. The team also has a good group of linebackers, with Devin Lloyd and Foyesade Oluokun being the standouts.

The secondary is the big question mark. Jacksonville added Jourdan Lewis to the mix, but it'll take stronger play from Tyson Campbell and Montaric Brown for this group to be better than it was last year. Also, Hunter can definitely help whenever he's out there on defense. We just don't know how often that'll be.

OUTLOOK
The Over on Jacksonville's win total is one of my favorite plays heading into the season. If the Jaguars had some better luck, or coaching, last year, they probably would have won closer to seven or eight games. Well, not only should they have better coaching in 2025, but they also have a better roster — and an easier schedule. That said, not only is the Over on 7.5 a play, but I'd look into some alternates — and the Jags to make the postseason.

prediction

OVER 7.5 WINS

TENNESSEE
TITANS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 2-14-1 ATS / 10-6-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Brian Callahan (2nd)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Denver	+8	DENVER has swept L5 ATS in hosting Tennessee
9/14	LA RAMS	+5	TENNESSEE is 6-0-1 ATS vs. LA Rams since '99
9/21	INDIANAPOLIS	+0.8	INDIANAPOLIS has won L4 ATS vs. Tennessee
9/28	at Houston	+7.5	ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS run in TEN-HOU rivalry
10/5	at Arizona	+7.3	ARIZONA is on 3-0-2 ATS run vs. Tennessee
10/12	at Las Vegas	+4.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-2 ATS run in TEN-LVR series
10/19	NEW ENGLAND	+0.9	FAVORITES are 8-4-2 ATS in L14 of NE-TEN h2h series
10/26	at Indianapolis	+4.3	INDIANAPOLIS has won L2 ATS hosting TEN after 4 straight L's
11/2	LA CHARGERS	+4.2	HOME TEAMS are on 7-0-1 ATS run in LAC-TEN h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/16	HOUSTON	+3.8	HOUSTON has won L4 ATS at Tennessee
11/23	SEATTLE	+1.6	TENNESSEE is on 6-1-1 ATS run vs. Seattle
11/30	JACKSONVILLE	+0.5	UNDERDOGS have won L3 ATS of JAC-TEN series in Nashville
12/7	at Cleveland	+3	CLEVELAND is on 5-1-1 ATS run vs. Tennessee
12/14	at San Francisco	+9.7	The L3 games of TEN-SF series in San Francisco went OVER
12/21	KANSAS CITY	+8.1	TENNESSEE is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Kansas City, all as underdog
12/28	NEW ORLEANS	-2.6	ROAD TEAMS have won L6 ATS in NO-TEN h2h series
1/4	at Jacksonville	+4.4	UNDER the total is 10-4 in L14 of TEN-JAC series at Jacksonville

SOS
23.19
(#29 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2 / 0.5
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
200-1

AFC
80-1

AFC SOUTH
+650

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.3	27	27.1	30
YARDS PER POINT	16.6	28	11.5	32
PLAYS PER GAME	60.7	22		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:31	11		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.7%	19	41.3%	22
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	304.2	26	311.2	2
YARDS PER PLAY	5	27	5.2	8
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.5	16		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	109.1	19	133.9	26
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	22	4.5	21
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.2	23		
COMPLETION %	63.4%	22	66.4%	23
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	195.1	26	177.3	2
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	19	6.4	9
TURNOVERS	2	31	1.1	16

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
19.0
(#30 of 32)

The Titans went 3-14 last season. That's not what the Tennessee front office was hoping for when hiring Brian Callahan. The Titans wanted their new coach to turn Will Levis, a second-round pick in 2023, into a serviceable starter. But bottoming out and landing the top pick in the 2025 NFL Draft wasn't the worst thing.

Cameron Ward, who threw for 4,313 yards with 39 touchdowns for Miami, offers some hope. He's the type of dynamic playmaker that teams are looking for at the quarterback position.

Just don't expect this team to deliver the way Washington and Denver did with rookies under center last season.

OFFENSE
The TItans were 30th in the NFL in EPA per play (-0.104) last year, and Levis' play was a big part of the reason. In 12 games, Levis threw 12 interceptions and had a QBR of 27.8. Levis showed some flashes as a rookie, but it was clear in Year 2 that the team needed to move on.

Ward has good size, he's dangerous throwing on the run and he's not afraid to take shots. In college, he almost looked like Patrick Mahomes. The difference is that Ward's arm isn't as big, he isn't as good at making reads and he's a little more mistake-prone. But hey, not everybody stacks up well compared to an all-time great. And Tennessee isn't expecting Mahomes. The Titans will be happy with a good starter. Ward can be that.

However, this team does lack weapons. Calvin Ridley is the No. 1 wideout, but he hasn't looked like a top option since 2020. And while the team did sign Tyler Lockett, his best football is behind him as a smaller 33-year-old. The Titans also had a lousy running game in 2024.

Fortunately, the offensive line should be better in 2025. JC Latham and Peter Skoronski should improve, and the team signed Kevin Zeitler, who had a PFF grade of 86.5 last season. That'll help everybody.

DEFENSE
The Titans gave up 27.1 points per game last season. They were a little better when it came to EPA per play allowed (0.050), finishing tied for 23rd in the league. However, none of that is going to cut it with a young quarterback. And really, it's hard to be overly optimistic about the team improving on this side of the ball.

Tennessee does have some players along the defensive line, as Jeffery Simmons and T'Vondre Sweat make up a scary duo. Sebastian Joseph-Day is also solid. This team just has an unimpressive group of linebackers and edge rushers. When you couple that with a rough group of defensive backs, you're looking at a defense that should struggle to get stops again.

OUTLOOK
The Over on Tennessee's 5.5-win total is heavily juiced, so there's some betting interest with this team. But I'm not there. While the Titans do play an easy schedule, expecting six wins is asking a lot of Ward. He'll need to deliver immediately, and he'll need to be more than just average. That's not a reasonable expectation with his group of pass-catchers, and the porous defense putting him in brutal situations. I'm expecting another rough year in Nashville.

prediction
UNDER 5.5 WINS

AFC WEST
preview

Coverage by
Matt Youmans

For as long as VSiN has been in existence, the Chiefs have won the AFC West. The streak of division titles for Kansas City is now at nine, and during the stretch from 2016 to 2024, coach Andy Reid's teams averaged 12.4 regular-season wins. It has become trendy for some bold handicappers to step out on a limb and predict "this will be the year" the Chiefs slip, fall back to the pack and finish second. It never happens, and the limb snaps as those handicappers take the fall. It will happen eventually, and could it be this year?

The truth is Kansas City addressed its flaws in the offseason and reloaded a roster that's improved from a year ago. It's also true the other three teams are on the rise and closing the gap, making this arguably the strongest division in the NFL.

Jim Harbaugh is not conceding anything to Kansas City, and neither are Sean Payton and Pete Carroll. The division's four head coaches all have Super Bowl experience, with Reid winning three in the past six seasons. In Harbaugh's first season in Los Angeles, the Chargers finished 11-6, four games behind the 15-win Chiefs. In Payton's second season in Denver, the Broncos finished 10-7 and reached the playoffs. In Carroll's first season in Las Vegas, the Raiders are eyeing a return to relevance after sinking somewhere near rock bottom.

In a division featuring four quality quarterbacks, Patrick Mahomes remains the undisputed king. Since becoming the starter in Kansas City, Mahomes owns a 35-5 record against division opponents — 13-1 against the Broncos, 12-2 against the Raiders and 10-2 against the Chargers. However, Mahomes' 5-0 record in division games last season included three wins by exactly two points. The Chiefs remain odds-on division favorites (-122) at Circa Sports, followed by the Chargers (+300), Broncos (+350) and Raiders (18-1).

VSiN staff division selections

14	6	6	0

2025 projected standings

(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
KANSAS CITY	29.0	2.3	0.5	23.85 (17)	11.0	6.0	11.5
LA CHARGERS	25.5	1.3	0.1	24.22 (13)	9.1	7.9	9.5
DENVER	24.0	2.1	-0.3	23.87 (16)	8.6	8.4	9.5
LAS VEGAS	21.0	1.9	-0.4	23.95 (15)	7.1	9.9	6.5

DENVER
BRONCOS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 10-8 SU & 12-6 ATS / 10-7-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Sean Payton (3rd)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	TENNESSEE	-8	DENVER has swept L5 ATS in hosting Tennessee
9/14	at Indianapolis	-0.1	DENVER is on 4-1 ATS run vs. Indianapolis after losing prior 9
9/21	at LA Chargers	+2.7	UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of DEN-LAC series at Chargers
9/29	CINCINNATI	-0.8	CINCINNATI is on 5-0 ATS win streak at Denver
10/5	at Philadelphia	+9	FAVORITES are on 5-1 ATS run in DEN-PHI h2h series
10/12	vs. Ny Jets	-4	DENVER is 8-4 ATS in L12 vs. NY Jets
10/19	NY GIANTS	-6.3	DENVER is on 5-1 ATS run vs. NY Giants
10/26	DALLAS	-2.9	UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS in DAL-DEN h2h series
11/2	at Houston	+3.1	UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of DEN-HOU h2h series
11/6	LAS VEGAS	-5.1	FAVORITES are on 3-0 ATS run in LVR-DEN series after 2-9 ATS skid
11/16	KANSAS CITY	+3.8	DENVER has won L4 ATS hosting Kansas City
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/30	at Washington	+5	WASHINGTON is on 7-3 ATS surge vs. Denver
12/7	at Las Vegas	-1.2	RAIDERS are 8-1 ATS in L9 hosting Denver but lost LY
12/14	GREEN BAY	+0.9	HOME TEAMS are on 7-1-1 ATS run in GB-DEN h2h series
12/21	JACKSONVILLE	-5.4	JACKSONVILLE has won its L4 ATS at Denver
12/25	at Kansas City	+7.2	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of DEN-KC rivalry in Kansas City
1/4	LA CHARGERS	-0.1	OVER the total is 8-3 in L11 of LAC-DEN rivalry in Denver

SOS
23.87
(#16 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.1 / 0.3
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
25-1

AFC
13-1

AFC WEST
+300

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25	10	18.3	3
YARDS PER POINT	13	4	17.3	2
PLAYS PER GAME	62.1	16		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:54	19		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.6%	13	37.3%	11
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	324.6	19	317.1	7
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	19	4.9	2
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.1	13		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	112.2	16	96.4	3
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	21	3.9	2
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	11		
COMPLETION %	66.5%	11	64.9%	11
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	212.4	20	220.7	19
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	24	6.2	3
TURNOVERS	1.1	11	1.5	7

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
24.0
(#14 of 32)

Sean Payton is giving the Broncos what they paid for, and they paid him a lot at $18 million per year. In Payton's second season as coach, Denver won 10 games and stopped its eight-year streak of missing the playoffs. The Broncos swept the Raiders and proved they could hang with the Chiefs, falling 16-14 at Kansas City in November before winning the rematch 38-0 in Week 18, when Patrick Mahomes and most KC starters took the day off. Most importantly, Denver's defense is legit and Payton seems to have picked the right quarterback for the franchise's future in Bo Nix.

OFFENSE
It's not a certainty that a quarterback will improve after an impressive rookie season, but Nix shows no signs of being a first-year fluke. He passed for 3,775 yards and accounted for 33 touchdowns (29 passing, four rushing) while limiting the number of negative plays (12 interceptions, 24 sacks). He's also got the right coach to develop his skills. In Payton's first season, the Broncos ranked 19th in scoring offense (21.0 PPG). Last season, Payton and Nix elevated the offense to 10th in scoring at 25 PPG. Nix was the 12th overall pick of the 2024 draft, and the sixth QB to be picked, but only Washington's Jayden Daniels has been better.

Courtland Sutton (81 receptions, 1,081 yards, eight TDs) is the go-to receiver, and Nix has other promising options in Marvin Mims Jr., Devaughn Vele, Troy Franklin, Pat Bryant and tight end Evan Engram.

The running backs — rookie second-round pick RJ Harvey, Jaleel McLaughlin and Audric Estime — look more than capable. Garett Bolles, Mike McGlinchey, Quinn Meinerz and Ben Powers headline a line that ranks among the league's elite.

DEFENSE
Pat Surtain II, a lockdown corner who had four interceptions, was voted the NFL's Defensive Player of the Year. Edge rusher Nik Bonitto (13.5 sacks) helped Denver lead the league in sacks (63), and coordinator Vance Joseph's unit ranked third in scoring (18.3 PPG).

The defense is now much deeper with the additions of linebacker Dre Greenlaw, safety Talanoa Hufanga and corner Jahdae Barron, a first-round pick from Texas. Zach Allen and D.J. Jones anchor the middle, with linebackers Jonathon Cooper and Alex Singleton complementing Bonitto. It's a potentially dominant defense.

OUTLOOK
The time to buy low on the Broncos was last summer, when their win total dipped to 5.5 and Payton produced a 10-7 record despite starting 0-2. The win-total hurdle is much higher now. On the optimistic side, Denver returns 20 starters and made key additions to a roster that suddenly ranks among the strongest in the NFL on both sides of the ball. Skeptics will say the non-division schedule is tougher with the presence of Philadelphia, Washington, Cincinnati and Green Bay. Don't worry much about the schedule. Assuming Nix doesn't take a step back, this team is loaded and primed to go to the next level. Denver opens with Tennessee (Circa Survivor pick?) as one of its nine home games. Payton will win 10 again.

prediction
OVER 9.5 WINS

KANSAS CITY
CHIEFS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 17-3 SU & 8-11-1 ATS / 9-11-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Andy Reid (13th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/5	vs. LA Chargers	-3.5	KANSAS CITY is on 9-2-1 ATS run in neutral/road games vs Chargers
9/14	PHILADELPHIA	-1.3	UNDERDOGS have swept L3 SU & ATS in PHI-KC h2h series
9/21	at NY Giants	-7.1	NY GIANTS are 8-1 ATS vs. Kansas City since '92
9/28	BALTIMORE	-1.8	KANSAS CITY is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore
10/6	at Jacksonville	-5.8	KANSAS CITY is on 4-0 ATS run at Jacksonville
10/12	DETROIT	-3.4	OVER the total is 7-1 in DET-KC series since '96
10/19	LAS VEGAS	-10.3	LAS VEGAS is on 3-0 ATS run at Kansas City
10/27	WASHINGTON	-4.5	KANSAS CITY is perfect 8-0 SU & ATS vs. Washignton since '92
11/2	at Buffalo	+2.6	OVER the total is 6-2 in L8 of KC-BUF h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/16	at Denver	-3.8	DENVER has won L4 ATS hosting Kansas City
11/23	INDIANAPOLIS	-10.3	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 of IND-KC h2h series
11/27	at Dallas	-3.5	UNDER the total is 6-2 in L8 of KC-DAL h2h series
12/7	HOUSTON	-7.3	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of HOU-KC h2h series
12/14	LA CHARGERS	-5.3	The L4 games of LAC-KC series in Kansas City went UNDER
12/21	at Tennessee	-8.1	TENNESSEE is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Kansas City, all as underdog
12/25	DENVER	-7.2	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of DEN-KC rivalry in Kansas City
1/4	at Las Vegas	-7	OVER the total is 9-3 in L12 of KC-LVR series at Raiders

SOS
23.85
(#17 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.3 / 0.5
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
+800

AFC
+400

AFC WEST
-120

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.6	15	19.2	4
YARDS PER POINT	14.5	13	16.7	5
PLAYS PER GAME	64.2	7		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:45	8		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.5%	2	43.3%	26
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327.6	16	320.6	9
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	23	5.3	12
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.5	16		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	105.3	22	101.8	8
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	29	4.1	7
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.3	6		
COMPLETION %	67.3%	9	65.9%	20
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	222.4	14	218.8	18
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	23	6.5	13
TURNOVERS	0.8	4	1.2	14

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS   29.0
(#4 of 32)

In the hunt for history — shooting for the first three-peat in the Super Bowl era — the Chiefs were humbled in February. In the final minute of the third quarter, the Philadelphia Eagles had rolled to a 34-0 lead en route to a 40-22 victory. Patrick Mahomes' two touchdown passes in the final three minutes only lessened the humiliation by making the final score look somewhat respectable. After Kansas City was crushed by an opponent that dominated on both lines, general manager Brett Veach and coach Andy Reid will be challenged to avoid the Super Bowl loser hangover. The Chiefs' 12-0 record in one-score games last season could be attributed to Mahomes' magic and a luck factor that was off the charts. Is regression coming?

OFFENSE
It's often said Mahomes is the most important player in the league, but there are some numbers to dispute that opinion. Mahomes had 41 touchdown passes in 2022, when the Chiefs led the NFL in scoring at 29.2 PPG. In 2023, he dipped to 27 TD passes as the offense slipped to 21.8 PPG and ranked 15th, and in 2024, he had 26 TD passes and the offense again ranked 15th at 22.6 PPG. An alarming stat: Kansas City scored 31 points or more in only four of its 41 games the past two seasons, including once in 20 games (a 32-29 playoff victory over Buffalo) last season.

Of course, Mahomes has been forced to play Superman to overcome the offense's deficiencies. Injury-riddled pass catchers Marquise "Hollywood" Brown, Rashee Rice and Xavier Worthy never played together last season. With those three healthy, and with running back Isiah Pacheco returning from an injury plus a potential bounce-back year from tight end Travis Kelce, expect more explosive plays. Another big factor is a rebuilt line led by All-Pro center Creed Humphrey, guard Trey Smith and tackle Jawaan Taylor. The Chiefs, who traded guard Joe Thuney to Chicago, will plug the holes with Jaylon Moore, Kingsley Suamataia and tackle Josh Simmons, a first-round pick from Ohio State.

DEFENSE
Veteran tackle Chris Jones, a wrecking ball in the middle, had only five sacks last season as the team's sack total declined from 55 in 2023 to 39. Jones is surrounded by more talent with Charles Omenihu and George Karlaftis returning and joined by high draft picks Omarr Norman-Lott and Ashton Gillotte.

The linebacker trio of Nick Bolton, Leo Chenal and Drue Tranquill is solid, and corner Trent McDuffie anchors a good secondary. Steve Spagnuolo is an elite defensive coordinator overseeing another strong unit that has ranked top 5 in scoring two straight years.

OUTLOOK
Mahomes took over as starter for the 2018 season, and KC has since cranked out regular-season records of 12-4, 12-4, 14-2, 12-5, 14-3, 11-6 and 15-2. Last year's record was an outlier due to close-game luck, and this schedule is more difficult. The Sept. 5 opener versus the Chargers in Brazil could foreshadow where the Chiefs are headed, with the likely destination being 10 to 12 wins.

prediction
UNDER 11.5 WINS

LAS VEGAS
RAIDERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 4-13 SU & 8-9 ATS / 9-8-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Pete Carroll (1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at New England	+3.4	FAVORITES are on 8-1 ATS run in LVR-NE h2h series
9/15	LA CHARGERS	+3.1	FAVORITES are on 5-0-1 ATS run in LAS-LVR rivalry
9/21	at Washington	+8.1	WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS versus Raiders
9/28	CHICAGO	-0.5	CHICAGO in on 8-2 ATS run vs. Raiders
10/5	at Indianapolis	+3	ROAD TEAMS have won L6 ATS in LVR-IND h2h series
10/12	TENNESSEE	-4.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-2 ATS run in TEN-LVR series
10/19	at Kansas City	+10.3	LAS VEGAS is on 3-0 ATS run at Kansas City
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/2	JACKSONVILLE	-2.2	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of JAC-LVR series at Raiders
11/6	at Denver	+5.1	FAVORITES are on 3-0 ATS run in LVR-DEN series after 2-9 ATS skid
11/17	DALLAS	+0.3	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of DAL-LVR h2h series
11/23	CLEVELAND	-4.9	UNDERDOGS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in CLE-LVR h2h series
11/30	at LA Chargers	+5.8	UNDER total is 20-4 in LVR-LAC series at Chargers since '01
12/7	DENVER	+1.2	RAIDERS are 8-1 ATS in L9 hosting Denver but lost LY
12/14	at Philadelphia	+12.1	RAIDERS are on 6-1 ATS run vs. Philadelphia
12/21	at Houston	+6.2	OVER the total is 5-1 in L6 of LVR-HOU series
12/28	NY GIANTS	-3.1	The L3 games of NYG-LVR h2h series went UNDER the total
1/4	ARIZONA	-1.5	UNDER the total is 11-6 in ARI-LAR set at Los Angeles since '08

SOS
23.95
(#15 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.9 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
120-1

AFC
50-1

AFC WEST
20-1

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.2	29	25.5	25
YARDS PER POINT	16.7	29	13	28
PLAYS PER GAME	62.6	12		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:20	24		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.8%	30	39.8%	17
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	303.2	27	333.1	15
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	28	5.4	15
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.4	30		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	79.8	32	116.9	13
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	32	4.4	13
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.4	4		
COMPLETION %	64.6%	18	66.0%	21
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	223.4	13	216.2	15
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	26	6.6	14
TURNOVERS	1.7	29	0.8	29

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
21.0
(#26 of 32)

To paraphrase late, great basketball coach Bob Knight, we could call the Raiders a Mickey Mouse operation, but that would be an insult to Mickey Mouse. Las Vegas owner Mark Davis has been running a circus in his front office. Finally, Davis might have it right. After bringing in Tom Brady as a minority partner, Davis allowed Brady to hire the respected John Spytek as general manager. After clowning around with failed former coaches Josh McDaniels and Antonio Pierce, the new leadership team tabbed a proven winner, Pete Carroll, as coach.

Carroll, Brady and Spytek struck a deal with Seattle to acquire veteran quarterback Geno Smith. Davis' bowl haircut aside, the Raiders have a new and improved look from the top down. But they still will be looking up at three playoff teams in the division, a tall mountain to climb.

OFFENSE
Another new face with a big reputation is offensive coordinator Chip Kelly, who's a run-first play caller. Allowing Josh Jacobs to run to Green Bay was a mistake, and the Raiders had a pitiful rushing attack that needed to be fixed, so Boise State star Ashton Jeanty was drafted No. 6 overall. Jeanty will be a workhorse for an offense with great depth at running back.

The Raiders came up short in their play for the Rams' Matthew Stafford, and Smith, who started for Carroll for two years with the Seahawks, was the fallback option. Tight end Brock Bowers was a rookie sensation, totaling 112 receptions for 1,194 yards, and veteran receiver Jakobi Meyers added 87 catches for 1,027 yards. Las Vegas is loaded with weapons, but is the line strong enough?

Kelly has an outstanding track record for building offensive lines, and he's got left tackle Kolton Miller and other promising players to work with, but it's an area of concern.

DEFENSE
If healthy, and injuries were a major issue last year, Maxx Crosby, Christian Wilkins and Malcolm Koonce could form the foundation for one of the league's toughest defensive fronts.

The linebacker corps has questions to answer after Las Vegas curiously let Robert Spillane, a 17-game starter in the middle who made 158 tackles, leave via free agency to New England. Carroll retained coordinator Patrick Graham, who did great work in 2023 before injuries crippled all three levels of the defense last season.

OUTLOOK
Clumsy leadership is in the past. This franchise now has respected winners making the major decisions. Since moving from Oakland to Las Vegas, the Raiders have parted ways with three head coaches, three general managers and three starting quarterbacks. The biggest bet the new regime has made is on Smith, who must play like a top 10 quarterback if Las Vegas' season is not another lost cause. The reward for 4-13 incompetence is a weaker schedule with non-division home games against the Bears, Titans, Jaguars, Cowboys, Browns and Giants. The Raiders upset the Ravens in Baltimore in Week 2 last year, so anything is possible. The floor for this team is five wins and the ceiling is eight.

prediction
OVER 6.5 WINS

LOS ANGELES
CHARGERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 11-7 SU & 12-5-1 ATS / 9-9-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Jim Harbaugh (2nd)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/5	vs. Kansas City	+3.5	KANSAS CITY is on 9-2-1 ATS run in neutral/road games vs Chargers
9/15	at Las Vegas	-3.1	FAVORITES are on 5-0-1 ATS run in LAS-LVR rivalry
9/21	DENVER	-2.7	UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of DEN-LAC series at Chargers
9/28	at NY Giants	-3.2	LA CHARGERS have won L5 SU & ATS vs. NY Giants
10/5	WASHINGTON	+0	FAVORITES are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of WAS-LAC h2h series
10/12	at Miami	+1.3	UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of LAC-MIA series in Miami
10/19	INDIANAPOLIS	-5.8	LA CHARGERS are on 9-2 ATS run vs. Indianapolis
10/23	MINNESOTA	-3	MINNESOTA is 3-0 ATS in L3 road games vs. Chargers
11/2	at Tennessee	-4.2	HOME TEAMS are on 7-0-1 ATS run in LAC-TEN h2h series
11/9	PITTSBURGH	-3	PITTSBURGH is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Chargers
11/16	at Jacksonville	-1.9	OVER the total is 12-2 all-time in LAC-JAC h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/30	LAS VEGAS	-5.8	UNDER total is 20-4 in LVR-LAC series at Chargers since '01
12/8	PHILADELPHIA	+3.2	The L4 games of PHI-LAC series went OVER the total
12/14	at Kansas City	+5.3	The L4 games of LAC-KC series in Kansas City went UNDER
12/21	at Dallas	+0.4	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS run in LAC-DAL h2h series
12/28	HOUSTON	-2.8	The L3 games of HOU-LAC h2h series went OVER the total
1/4	at Denver	+0.1	OVER the total is 8-3 in L11 of LAC-DEN rivalry in Denver

SOS
24.22
(#13 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.3 / 0.1
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
28-1

AFC
14-1

AFC WEST
+310

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.6	11	17.7	1
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	10	18.3	1
PLAYS PER GAME	59.8	29		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:40	9		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.3%	11	35.7%	5
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	324.2	20	324.4	11
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	15	5.3	13
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.2	11		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	110.7	17	117.5	14
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	24	4.7	27
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30	28		
COMPLETION %	65.9%	13	65.0%	14
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	213.5	19	206.9	7
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.6	9	6.2	4
TURNOVERS	0.5	2	1.2	13

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
25.5 (#10 of 32)

Believe the hype when it comes to Jim Harbaugh. The second-year coach has created a winning culture within the Chargers, who have long been known for underachieving. A year ago, the skeptics said he needed a year or two to rebuild. The recommendation here was to play the Chargers Over 8.5 wins as a best bet, and Harbaugh delivered an 11-6 record. Harbaugh took over a 5-12 team and turned it around immediately with the help of a soft schedule. The degree of difficulty will be higher with a tougher schedule in 2025, yet Harbaugh and general manager Joe Hortiz are building the roster the right way.

The next step is to win in the playoffs, and quarterback Justin Herbert should be motivated after his four-interception flop in a 32-12 wild-card loss at Houston.

OFFENSE
In 17 regular-season games, Herbert passed for 23 touchdowns with only three interceptions. He was everything Harbaugh hyped him up to be — until the postseason. After throwing four picks against the Texans, Herbert showed accountability and took the blame. He finished ninth in the NFL with 3,870 passing yards last season, and he's not a smart bet to lead the league in passing yards due to Harbaugh's dedication to the ground attack.

The Chargers' young tackles, Rashawn Slater and Joe Alt, are about as good as it gets. The interior line needed an upgrade, so right guard Mekhi Becton was acquired via free agency from Philadelphia.

The running back position is stronger with the additions of Najee Harris from Pittsburgh and first-round pick Omarion Hampton. Second-year receiver Ladd McConkey is Herbert's go-to guy, but other pass catchers such as Quentin Johnston need to emerge. The Chargers will be better after ranking 20th in total offense, 17th in rushing and 11th in scoring (23.6 PPG).

A strength is kicker Cameron Dicker, who went 68-for-71 on extra points and 70-for-75 on field goals the past two seasons.

DEFENSE
Harbaugh brought coordinator Jesse Minter from Michigan, and it was a wise move as the Chargers ranked in the top 15 in all major categories, including No. 1 in scoring (17.7 PPG). There are some questions about the line after losing nose tackle Poona Ford to the Rams and Joey Bosa to the Bills, but Khalil Mack, Junior Colson and Bud Dupree lead a talented group of linebackers. The best player on this side of the ball continues to be safety Derwin James. The run defense will be the biggest concern.

OUTLOOK
The Chargers obviously took advantage of a last-place schedule last season, beating up on the Panthers, Patriots and Titans on the way to 11 wins. Harbaugh also went 4-2 in division games by sweeping the Broncos and Raiders. The schedule is more challenging this time, making the Chargers a risky bet to overachieve. Based on opponents' win totals, Kansas City has the most difficult schedule in the division. The Chiefs are vulnerable in the top spot, with the Chargers and Broncos closing fast, and those three teams should wind up with 10 to 12 wins apiece.

prediction

OVER 9.5 WINS

NFC EAST
preview

**Coverage by
Adam Burke**

One of the most interesting statistical anomalies in the NFL is that the NFC East Division has not had a repeat champion since 2001-04 when the Philadelphia Eagles ripped off four in a row. Since then, the Eagles and the Dallas Cowboys have won it seven times, while the New York Giants and Washington Redskins/Football Team have won it three times apiece.

In that span, the division has claimed four Super Bowl titles and one other NFC Championship. Parity has kind of been a thing in this division over the last 20 years, but it sure feels like the Eagles and the Cowboys have been the teams to beat going into most of the recent seasons. That dynamic seems to have changed now thanks to a new kid on the block.

On the heels of a stunningly successful season for rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels, the Commanders enter the 2025 season with high hopes. How could they not after their first postseason win in nearly 20 years? Washington's playoff push came with a 12-5 record, the franchise's best since 1991 and only their fourth double-digit winning season since the George H. W. Bush administration.

While other teams have had strong seasons here and there, the picture of consistency in the NFC East is the Eagles, who have bookended a stretch of seven playoff appearances in eight seasons with Super Bowl victories. The Eagles completely dismantled the Chiefs in Super Bowl LIX to get revenge for their loss to former head coach Andy Reid in Super Bowl LVII in 2023.

The run for Philly started in "special" fashion against the Patriots in Super Bowl LII and they've only finished lower than second in the division once, which happened during the weird 2020 COVID season that wound up being the last under Doug Pederson.

The Eagles and Commanders stand out, but the most intriguing team in the division may very well be the Cowboys. It feels like Dallas has been a punching bag for fans and the media over the last 18 months, even though they had three straight 12-5 seasons that resulted in playoff appearances and scored over 500 points in two of them before last year's disappointing 7-10 effort. Of course, maybe ending a 30-year NFC Championship Game drought would help change the narrative.

With the Giants ready to bring up the rear, many expect a two-horse race, but are the Cowboys ready for a renaissance?

VSiN staff division selections

20	5	1	0

2025 projected standings
(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
PHILADELPHIA	30.0	2.3	0.4	24.74 (8)	11.0	6.0	11.5
WASHINGTON	27.0	1.3	0.2	24.83 (6)	9.6	7.4	9.5
DALLAS	23.0	2.6	0.6	24.41 (10)	7.8	9.2	7.5
NY GIANTS	20.5	1.5	-0.3	25.9 (1)	5.9	11.1	5.5

DALLAS
COWBOYS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 7-10 SU & 7-10 ATS / 11-6-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Brian Schottenheimer (1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/4	at Philadelphia	+8.3	FAVORITES have won L5 SU & ATS of DAL-PHI series at Philadelphia
9/14	NY GIANTS	-5	L6 games of NYG-DAL series in Dallas went OVER total, avg 58 PPG
9/21	at Chicago	+2.4	The L8 games of DAL-CHI series went OVER the total
9/28	GREEN BAY	+1.4	GREEN BAY has won L5 SU & ATS at Dallas
10/5	at NY Jets	-1.6	DALLAS is 4-1-1 ATS in L6 vs. NY Jets
10/12	at Carolina	-1	FAVORITES are on 6-1 SU & ATS streak in DAL-CAR h2h series
10/19	WASHINGTON	+2	DALLAS is on 7-1 ATS run hosting Washington
10/26	at Denver	+2.9	UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS in DAL-DEN h2h series
11/3	ARIZONA	-1.5	ARIZONA is on 7-1 ATS run vs. Dallas, all as underdog
- BYE WEEK -			
11/17	at Las Vegas	-0.3	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of DAL-LVR h2h series
11/23	PHILADELPHIA	+5.2	FAVORITES are 9-1 ATS in L10 of PHI-DAL rivalry in Dallas
11/27	KANSAS CITY	+3.5	UNDER the total is 6-2 in L8 of KC-DAL h2h series
12/4	at Detroit	+7.6	ROAD TEAMS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of DET-DAL h2h series
12/14	MINNESOTA	-1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0 ATS streak in MIN-DAL h2h series
12/21	LA CHARGERS	-0.4	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS run in LAC-DAL h2h series
12/25	at Washington	+4.3	DALLAS is on 8-3 ATS surge at Washington
1/4	at NY Giants	-2	UNDERDOGS are 10-6 ATS in DAL-NYG series in New York since '09

SOS
24.41
(#10 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.6 / 0.6
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
60-1

NFC
28-1

NFC EAST
+600

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.6	21	27.5	31
YARDS PER POINT	15.9	22	12.9	29
PLAYS PER GAME	64.9	4		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:16	25		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.8%	23	36.6%	9
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327.5	17	355.2	28
YARDS PER PLAY	5	25	5.8	29
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.2	24		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	100.3	27	137.1	29
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	30	4.8	30
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.5	3		
COMPLETION %	62.5%	26	68.2%	27
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	227.2	11	218.1	17
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	27	7.2	30
TURNOVERS	1.6	28	1.3	12

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
23.0
(#20 of 32)

Owner, president, general manager, and Landman actor Jerry Jones turns 83 one day after the Cowboys' Week 6 game against Carolina. Three days later, first-time NFL head coach Brian Schottenheimer turns 52. Maybe some of the negative sentiment about the team comes from the fact that Jones simply promoted a career assistant in Schottenheimer from OC after the dismissal of Mike McCarthy.

At least the rest of the coaching staff has been revamped, as Klayton Adams, most recently the offensive line coach for Arizona, and Matt Eberflus, who was fired as the Bears head coach in Week 13, hold the two coordinator positions. We can certainly debate the merits of Eberflus as a head coach, but he was a highly-regarded DC with the Colts for four seasons after getting hired away from his position as the Cowboys linebackers coach for seven seasons.

OFFENSE
As we look at the 2025 season, let's start with the obvious. Dak Prescott has to stay healthy. Prescott started eight games with a disappointing 11/8 TD/INT ratio and the team only went 3-5 in his starts. When Prescott played all 17 games during the 2023 season, he led the league in completions and passing touchdowns en route to a runner-up finish for the MVP award. That is one of just two full seasons for Prescott over the last five campaigns.

But, it wasn't all about Prescott last season. Dallas had a dearth of depth, as Rico Dowdle ran for 1,079 yards and nobody else ran for more than 226. Dowdle had three times more carries (235) than the next closest guy (74). Similarly, CeeDee Lamb's 101 catches dramatically outpaced everybody else and so did his 152 targets. Dowdle is gone, but Javonte Williams and Miles Sanders should form something of a tandem and the Cowboys traded for George Pickens to put with Lamb, Jalen Tolbert, and TE Jake Ferguson.

DEFENSE
It has to be a good sign for the culture of the locker room under Schottenheimer and some of the other new hires that Micah Parsons showed up to voluntary OTAs despite his ongoing - and very public - contract negotiation. Parsons was limited to 13 games last season and still paced the team with 12 sacks. With DeMarvion Overshown out virtually all season, Parsons will have to step up even more and so will Osa Odighizuwa, whose 23 QB Hits were a career-best last season.

The Eberflus defenses with the Colts and also the Bears were big on stopping the run and forcing takeaways. Inheriting a defense that was third in sacks with 52 is a good start, but the Cowboys were 29th in yards per carry allowed, so there is work to be done there.

OUTLOOK
Four of the six NFC East games look tough and the Cowboys drew the NFC North and AFC West, plus the Jets, Panthers, and Cardinals with the third-place schedule. The dark McCarthy cloud regarding his future has dissipated now and that should mitigate some distractions. The Cowboys were 31st in red zone offensive success and 32nd in red zone defensive success and positive regression in those two areas could come with a healthy Prescott and new coordinators.

prediction
OVER 8.5 WINS

NEW YORK
GIANTS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 5-12 ATS / 6-11-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Brian Daboll (4th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Washington	+7.7	NY GIANTS are 5-2 SU & 6-1 ATS in L7 trips to Washington but lost LY
9/14	at Dallas	+5	L6 games of NYG-DAL series in Dallas went OVER total, avg 58 PPG
9/21	KANSAS CITY	+7.1	NY GIANTS are 8-1 ATS vs. Kansas City since '92
9/28	LA CHARGERS	+3.2	LA CHARGERS have won L5 SU & ATS vs. NY Giants
10/5	at New Orleans	+0.3	OVER the total is 7-1 in L8 of NYG-NO series in New Orleans
10/9	PHILADELPHIA	+8.8	UNDER the total is 10-4 in L14 of PHI-NYG h2h series
10/19	at Denver	+6.3	DENVER is on 5-1 ATS run vs. NY Giants
10/26	at Philadelphia	+11.7	UNDER the total is 12-4 in L16 of NYG-PHI series at Philly
11/2	SAN FRANCISCO	+3.6	SAN FRANCISCO is on 5-1 ATS run vs NY Giants
11/9	at Chicago	+5.8	The L4 games of NYG-CHI h2h series went UNDER the total
11/16	GREEN BAY	+5	HOME TEAMS are 6-2-2 ATS in L10 of GB-NYG h2h series
11/23	at Detroit	+11	NY GIANTS are 5-1 ATS at Detroit since '96
12/1	at New England	+3.8	NY GIANTS are 8-2 ATS in L10 vs. New England
- BYE WEEK -			
12/14	WASHINGTON	+5.6	UNDER the total is 6-1-1 in L8 of WAS-NYG series at New York
12/21	MINNESOTA	+1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0 ATS surge in MIN-NYG h2h series
12/28	at Las Vegas	+3.1	The L3 games of NYG-LVR h2h series went UNDER the total
1/4	DALLAS	+2	UNDERDOGS are 10-6 ATS in DAL-NYG series in New York since '09

SOS
25.90
(#1 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.5 / 0.3
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
200-1

NFC
80-1

NFC EAST
25-1

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	16.1	31	24.4	21
YARDS PER POINT	18.4	31	14.2	22
PLAYS PER GAME	62.5	14		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:12	17		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.3%	27	40.3%	19
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	294.8	30	346.8	24
YARDS PER PLAY	4.7	30	5.6	25
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.9	25		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	104.9	23	136.2	27
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	18	4.6	24
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.8	8		
COMPLETION %	61.9%	29	69.4%	31
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	189.9	28	210.6	8
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	31	7.1	27
TURNOVERS	1.4	21	0.9	28

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS   20.5
(#28 of 32)

The quest to find a franchise quarterback continues for the Giants, who bid adieu to Daniel Jones last season. The Giants haven't had a QB throw at least 10 TD passes since 2022 and at least 20 TD passes since 2019. Veteran signal caller Russell Wilson (or Jameis Winston!) could snap that trend this season, but the Giants are still the third betting choice for the "Fewest Wins." Perhaps 25th overall pick Jaxson Dart is the answer and the Giants probably need to find that out this season at some point.

Brian Daboll gets another kick at the can despite a 3-14 showing last season and an 18-32-1 record overall. No chef can make a Michelin Star dish with these ingredients, but John Mara, Joe Schoen, and others have to decide if Daboll is who they want to lead the future of the franchise following another lost season.

OFFENSE
Amongst the doom and gloom in the NYC area, some bright spots did emerge last season. Malik Nabers is a legitimate stud, as he caught 109 balls on 170 targets over 15 games and Wan'Dale Robinson looks like a bona fide NFL player with 93 grabs on 140 targets, though he did only have 699 yards. Perhaps the inclusion of Wilson and Dart will give the Giants a bit more of a deep threat, as New York had just an 11.1% Explosive Pass Play Percentage.

Late-round pick Tyrone Tracy Jr. emerged as a competent rusher with 4.4 yards per carry, plus the Giants added some depth on the offensive line and retained Greg Van Roten. Honestly, for a group that finished 30th in yards per play, 31st in possessions ending in points, 32nd in red zone efficiency, and 28th in EPA/play, there is talent and a lot of room for improvement.

DEFENSE
With numerous needs and the No. 3 pick in hand, the Giants opted for Abdul Carter. For a defense that was third in Sack% and tied for eighth in sacks, it might seem like overkill. However, the Giants only had five interceptions as a team and allowed the second-highest completion percentage. The 2025 Draft wasn't big on cornerbacks, so the Giants will hope that an even stronger pass rush aids the secondary.

In a lot of areas, aside from the turnover department, this wasn't a poor defense. The Giants were 11th in red zone efficiency, 19th in third-down defense, and had those solid sack numbers. But, they were 29th in EPA/play because of the lack of takeaways and the coverage breakdowns. In a division like the one that the Giants are in, those can be killers and they certainly were a big part of the 3-14 season with an 0-6 record against the NFC East.

OUTLOOK
By no means would I argue that the Giants will be a good team, but assuming there is no blatant tanking and Dart isn't a total bum, this team can be better than expected. The schedule is miserable, especially up front, so I wouldn't bet a win total Over now, but I think we can give an in-season Over a shot beginning in Week 5. For the full season, it's a different story.

prediction

UNDER 5.5 WINS

PHILADELPHIA
EAGLES

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 18-3 SU & 14-7 ATS / 10-11-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Nick Sirianni (5th)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/4	DALLAS	-8.3	FAVORITES have won L5 SU & ATS of DAL-PHI series at Philadelphia
9/14	at Kansas City	+1.3	UNDERDOGS have swept L3 SU & ATS in PHI-KC h2h series
9/21	LA RAMS	-6.3	ROAD TEAMS are on 6-0 ATS win streak in LAR-PHI series
9/28	at Tampa Bay	-1.9	HOME TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS surge in PHI-TB h2h series
10/5	DENVER	-9	FAVORITES are on 5-1 ATS run in DEN-PHI h2h series
10/9	at NY Giants	-8.8	UNDER the total is 10-4 in L14 of PHI-NYG h2h series
10/19	at Minnesota	-4	HOME TEAMS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of PHI-MIN h2h series
10/26	NY GIANTS	-11.7	UNDER the total is 12-4 in L16 of NYG-PHI series at Philly
- BYE WEEK -			
11/10	at Green Bay	-0.5	FAVORITES are on 9-4 ATS run in GB-PHI h2h series
11/16	DETROIT	-4.4	The L9 games of DET-PHI h2h series went OVER the total
11/23	at Dallas	-5.2	FAVORITES are 9-1 ATS in L10 of PHI-DAL rivalry in Dallas
11/28	CHICAGO	-9.9	The L4 games of CHI-PHI h2h series went UNDER the total
12/8	at LA Chargers	-3.2	The L4 games of PHI-LAC series went OVER the total
12/14	LAS VEGAS	-12.1	RAIDERS are on 6-1 ATS run vs. Philadelphia
12/20	at Washington	-2.5	WASHINGTON is on 6-3-1 ATS run hosting Philadelphia
12/28	at Buffalo	+1.7	PHILADELPHIA is on 3-0 ATS streak vs. Buffalo
1/4	WASHINGTON	-4.7	OVER the total is 9-3 in L12 of WAS-PHI series in Philly

SOS
24.74
(#8 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.3 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
+650

NFC
+300

NFC EAST
-135

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.2	7	17.8	2
YARDS PER POINT	13.5	6	15.6	11
PLAYS PER GAME	65.5	3		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:22	1		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.7%	10	35.6%	3
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	367.2	8	278.4	1
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	11	4.7	1
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.5	1		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	179.3	2	104.2	10
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.9	5	4.3	9
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.4	32		
COMPLETION %	67.6%	8	62.2%	6
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	187.9	29	174.2	1
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	7	5.5	1
TURNOVERS	0.9	6	1.5	6

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
30.0
(#1 of 32)

Good organizations have a knack for seeing into the future. They draft and develop well, as players have time to learn and get accustomed to the playbook before having to deploy them as every-down guys. In the case of the Eagles, they'll be entering the 2025 season with one of the younger defenses in the NFL.

Veterans like Darius Slay, Avonte Maddox, C.J. Gardner-Johnson, Brandon Graham, Josh Sweat, and others have moved on, but they've been replaced by younger contributors with untapped upside. It is not hard to see why the Eagles have made the playoffs in seven of the last eight seasons and have two Lombardi Trophies and one Super Bowl defeat to show for it.

OFFENSE
While there are a lot of new, inexperienced faces on defense, the Eagles offense is nearly intact from last season. The addition of Saquon Barkley may very well have been what put Philly over the top, as he was the AP Offensive Player of the Year with 2,005 rushing yards and 15 total touchdowns. Add in 630 yards on the ground from Jalen Hurts, not to mention the 18/5 TD/INT ratio and just over 2,900 passing yards, and this team is among the league leaders in returning production.

One person who is not returning is OC Kellen Moore, who is now the head coach of the Saints. But, the more things change, the more they should mostly stay the same, as Kevin Patullo, the team's associate head coach and pass game coordinator, is the new OC. He's worked with Nick Sirianni for a long time and is cut from the Frank Reich tree, so this will once again be an outstanding offense more than capable of finishing sixth in EPA/play or better after landing there last season.

DEFENSE
DC Vic Fangio did stick around and he gets to mold and shape a bunch of young, hungry, talented players into the same type of ferocious defense that the Eagles had last season. They were third in EPA/play, third in third-down defense, sixth in red zone defense, and sixth in takeaways. While this wasn't the sack-happy defenses of yesteryear under Jonathan Gannon, Philly still led the league in yards per play allowed with 4.7.

Returnees Zack Baun and Nakobe Dean combined for 279 tackles, so the middle of the defense is in great shape. Where the Eagles need to find more production will be in the secondary. CJGJ led the team with six interceptions and was tied for second in pass breakups. Slay led the team with 13. So, now it falls on Quinyon Mitchell and Kelee Ringo, plus a new face at safety in second-rounder Andrew Mukuba. With Reed Blankenship and Cooper DeJean back, there are enough guys to make plays.

OUTLOOK
Good team, high expectations, tough schedule. Lather, rinse, repeat. Along with the division games, the Eagles draw the AFC West and NFC North, plus the first-place schedule brings Tampa Bay, Buffalo, and the LA Rams to the table. There is no reason to believe this team regresses in grand fashion, but they have gone 11-6 and 9-7 following their last two Super Bowl appearances.

prediction

UNDER 11.5 WINS

WASHINGTON
COMMANDERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 14-6 SU & 12-7-1 ATS / 13-7-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Dan Quinn (2nd)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	NY GIANTS	-7.7	NY GIANTS are 5-2 SU & 6-1 ATS in L7 trips to Washington but lost LY
9/11	at Green Bay	+2.7	WASHINGTON is 4-1 ATS in L5 vs. Green Bay
9/21	LAS VEGAS	-8.1	WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS versus Raiders
9/28	at Atlanta	-2.8	WASHINGTON is on 4-0 ATS run at Atlanta
10/5	at LA Chargers	+0	FAVORITES are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of WAS-LAC h2h series
10/13	CHICAGO	-5.9	WASHINGTON is on extended 12-4 ATS run vs. Chicago
10/19	at Dallas	-2	DALLAS is on 7-1 ATS run hosting Washington
10/27	at Kansas City	+4.5	KANSAS CITY is perfect 8-0 SU & ATS vs. Washignton since '92
11/2	SEATTLE	-5.7	WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS vs. Seattle
11/9	DETROIT	-0.4	OVER the total is 3-0 in L3 of DET-WAS series, total PPG 65.3
11/16	vs. Miami	-3	MIAMI has won L4 ATS vs. Washington
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/30	DENVER	-5	WASHINGTON is on 7-3 ATS surge vs. Denver
12/7	at Minnesota	-0.8	L2 of WAS-MIN series went UNDER the total after 6 straight OVER's
12/14	at NY Giants	-5.6	UNDER the total is 6-1-1 in L8 of WAS-NYG series at New York
12/20	PHILADELPHIA	+2.5	WASHINGTON is on 6-3-1 ATS run hosting Philadelphia
12/25	DALLAS	-4.3	DALLAS is on 8-3 ATS surge at Washington
1/4	at Philadelphia	+4.7	OVER the total is 9-3 in L12 of WAS-PHI series in Philly

SOS
24.83
(#6 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.3 / 0.2
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
18-1

NFC
+900

NFC EAST
+205

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.5	5	23	18
YARDS PER POINT	13	3	14.2	21
PLAYS PER GAME	64.8	5		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:29	13		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	45.6%	6	38.2%	15
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	369.6	7	326.9	13
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	10	5.4	16
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	5		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	154.1	3	137.5	30
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	4	4.8	28
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	25		
COMPLETION %	69.5%	6	61.9%	4
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	215.6	17	189.5	3
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	12	6.5	12
TURNOVERS	0.9	8	1	20

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
27.0
(#7 of 32)

Some decent, if not very good, quarterbacks have come through the Washington organization over the years, but Jayden Daniels seems like the hero that the team needed. The other hero is owner Josh Harris, who took over from Dan Snyder and seemingly changed the culture and the reputation of the franchise overnight. It sure seemed like the good vibes impacted everybody.

Having a good year, or even a great year, can happen to any team. Staying at the level of those newfound standards is where the tricky part comes in. Nobody will take the Commanders lightly from this point forward and head coach Dan Quinn and his wunderkind QB have gone from the hunter to the hunted.

OFFENSE
To call the offensive turnaround "dramatic" would be an understatement. The Commanders scored 485 points, the most that they had scored since winning the Super Bowl in 1991. In fact, it was the first time since 2012 that the team had eclipsed 400 points and the first time since 2016 that they got over 350 points. The question now is whether or not that performance was an outlier, indicative of a new baseline, or just the start.

The Commanders were still just 10th in yards per play and Daniels still only had 25 TD passes in 17 games. But, Daniels also led the team in rushing yards and had help from Brian Robinson Jr. and Austin Ekeler with over 1,700 total yards from scrimmage combined. Not only does most of the offense return, but Deebo Samuel is now on the roster and represents a fun weapon for a team that tied for eighth in turnovers and ranked in the top five in EPA/play.

DEFENSE
Using the 29th pick on offensive tackle Josh Conerly Jr. probably makes sense to protect the prized investment, but it was clear to everybody that the Commanders defense needed some help for the team to really move forward. They had 17 takeaways and 10 of them were fumble recoveries, so the ball happened to bounce their way. With limited takeaways and a bottom-five run defense, the Commanders ranked 22nd in EPA/play.

In hopes of fixing the problems, the Commanders either signed or re-signed 12 players, including DL Javon Kinlaw and S Will Harris. With better depth at the primary positions and another year of growth from youngsters like Mike Sainristil and Quan Martin, who were fourth and fifth on the team in tackles, Washington may be entering a legitimate window of contention, with the tip of the iceberg visible last season. Of course, they do have to find replacements for leading sack man Dante Fowler and second-leading tackler Jeremy Chinn in the process.

OUTLOOK
Like the rest of the NFC East, the Commanders have to contend with the NFC North and AFC West, along with the Falcons, Seahawks, and Dolphins with their second-place schedule. All but two of their road games are back-to-backs, plus a trip to Madrid in mid-November. Teams will plan better for Kliff Kingsbury's offense this season and I could see a little bit of a slide.

prediction

UNDER 9.5 WINS

NFC NORTH
preview

The NFC North was the best division in the NFL last season as three teams (Lions, Vikings and Packers) won at least 11 games, and those three made the playoffs. We could actually argue the former "Black-and-Blue Division" (as the old NFC Central used to be called back in my youth) had one of the best divisional seasons ever as the four teams set an all-time winning percentage record at 45-23 (66.2%) – and if you take away the 9-9 record they had vs. each other, they were 36-14 (72%) against all other divisions.

The Lions swept their three rivals by going 6-0 despite the tough competition. With the bulk of their team back (though they lost both coordinators), they are the +140 favorites to win the NFC North for the third straight season. If the Lions do that, it will be the first time Detroit has won three straight titles of any kind since 1952-54.

Prior to this run, the Packers had won the division title in eight of the previous 12 years, all under Aaron Rodgers. The Packers are the second choice at +260 with the Vikings dropping to +425 with second-year quarterback JJ McCarthy being handed the reins to the offense from the departed Sam Darnold (and don't forget that before last season, the Vikings were only favored in one game in preseason advance lines, so their 14-3 record was a major overachievement). The Bears bring up the rear at +450 with Caleb Williams looking to improve in his second year as starter.

Another sign that the NFC North could put up similar win numbers is the fact that the lowest Over/Under Season Win Total of the four teams is 8.5 (basically .500 in a 17-game schedule, though the Vikings are favored to the Over with the Bears favored to the Under). More on those on the individual team pages.

VSiN staff division selections
BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

12	11	2	1

2025 projected standings
(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
DETROIT	28.0	2.8	0.3	24.75 (7)	10.0	7.0	10.5
GREEN BAY	27.0	2.5	0.4	24.37 (11)	9.8	7.2	9.5
MINNESOTA	24.0	2.0	0.2	24.91 (5)	8.0	9.0	8.5
CHICAGO	23.5	2.1	-0.7	25.39 (2)	7.6	9.4	8.5

CHICAGO BEARS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 9-7-1 ATS / 7-10-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Ben Johnson (1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/8	MINNESOTA	-1	MINNESOTA is on 4-0-1 ATS run at Chicago
9/14	at Detroit	+7.6	UNDERDOGS are 8-3 ATS in L11 of CHI-DET h2h series
9/21	DALLAS	-2.4	The L8 games of DAL-CHI series went OVER the total
9/28	at Las Vegas	+0.5	CHICAGO in on 8-2 ATS run vs. Raiders
- BYE WEEK -			
10/13	at Washington	+5.9	WASHINGTON is on extended 12-4 ATS run vs. Chicago
10/19	NEW ORLEANS	-7.2	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of NO-CHI series in Chicago
10/26	at Baltimore	+9.6	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in CHI-BAL h2h series
11/2	at Cincinnati	+4.7	UNDER the total is 5-2 in L7 of CHI-CIN h2h series
11/9	NY GIANTS	-5.8	The L4 games of NYG-CHI h2h series went UNDER the total
11/16	at Minnesota	+2.8	L2 games of CHI-MIN series in Minnesota went UNDER the total
11/23	PITTSBURGH	-1.8	CHICAGO is on a 4-0 ATS run vs. Pittsburgh
11/28	at Philadelphia	+9.9	The L4 games of CHI-PHI h2h series went UNDER the total
12/7	at Green Bay	+6.3	GREEN BAY is 12-5 ATS since '08 hosting Chicago
12/14	CLEVELAND	-7.6	FAVORITES are on 6-1-1 ATS run in CLE-CHI h2h series
12/20	GREEN BAY	+2.2	GREEN BAY is on 14-1 SU & 12-3 ATS run at Chicago
12/28	at San Francisco	+5.4	SAN FRANCISCO is 6-2 ATS hosting Chicago since '95
1/4	DETROIT	+3.1	OVER the total is 5-3 in L8 of DET-CHI series in Chicago

SOS
25.39
(#2 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.1 / 0.7
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
40-1

NFC
19-1

NFC NORTH
+425

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.2	28	21.8	13
YARDS PER POINT	15.5	20	16.3	6
PLAYS PER GAME	62.6	12		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:01	18		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	32.9%	31	37.6%	13
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	283.5	32	354.2	27
YARDS PER PLAY	4.5	32	5.9	30
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.4	23		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	102	25	136.3	28
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	27	4.8	29
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.3	13		
COMPLETION %	62.4%	27	64.6%	10
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	181.5	31	217.9	16
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.3	29	7.4	31
TURNOVERS	0.9	8	1.4	10

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
23.5
(#19 of 32)

Last year, Heisman Trophy winner and overall No. 1 draft pick Caleb Williams was supposed to be the best Chicago QB since Jim McMahon. Williams struggled early, but the Bears still started 4-2 and were in the thick of the playoff hunt – but then came the infamous loss on Jayden Daniels' Hail Mary in Washington, DC, and that started a 10-game losing streak for the Bears that only ended in the season-finale vs. the Packers.

Chicago fired coach Matt Eberflus after another embarrassing loss to the Lions on Thanksgiving. After the season, they hired Detroit offensive coordinator Ben Johnson as their new coach.

OFFENSE
Contributing to Williams' subpar rookie season was a poor offensive line that ranked last in pass-blocking efficiency, according to Pro Football Focus, allowed a league-high 68 sacks and had him often throwing on the run. Williams still threw for 3,541 yards (ranking No. 17) with 20 TDs and just six INTs to his credit, but overall the offense was No. 32 in the NFL at 284.8 yards per game and No. 28 in scoring at just 18.2 points per contest.

The running game was a little stronger at 102 yards per game (ranking No. 24) with former Lion D'Andre Swift leading the way with 959 yards and Roschon Johnson adding 150 yards and six TDs.

The Bears have a decent WR room (if Williams has time to get them the ball), with DJ Moore (98 catches, 966 yards), Rome Odunze (54 catches, 734 yards), and Missouri rookie Luther Burden III. They also have a solid TE in Cole Kmet and added Michigan TE Colston Loveland with the No. 10 pick in this spring's draft. But the most important newcomers could be center Drew Dahlman, plus guards Joe Thuney and Jonah Jackson, as that's where the Bears needed the most help.

DEFENSE
Just like the offense and the team overall, the Bears' defense started strong and then had a hard time keeping them in games during the 10-game losing streak. They finished No. 29 against the run, No. 31 against the pass and No. 27 overall at 354.2 yards per game. The Bears' D did have a few positive signs as they ranked No. 13 in third-down conversion percentage and No. 10 in tackling efficiency.

LB Tremaine Edwards led the team with 110 total tackles and has topped the century mark in all seven of his NFL seasons, with his first five years in Buffalo. The Bears also have a new defensive coordinator in Dennis Allen and also added DE Dayo Odeyingbo and DT Grady Jarrett via free agency and DT Shemar Turner with their second-round pick.

OUTLOOK
Everyone is obviously waiting to see if Johnson can have the same impact on Williams that he had on Goff in Detroit, but the Bears should also see improvement on the defensive side of the ball under Allen. Don't expect the Monsters of the Midway, but they should far exceed their five wins of a year ago (and remember they were 4-2 at one point, though mostly done with mirrors). With plus-money on the Over 8.5, we have to play it that way.

prediction
OVER 8.5 WINS

DETROIT
LIONS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 15-3 SU & 12-5-1 ATS / 10-7-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Dan Campbell (5th)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Green Bay	+0.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in DET-GB rivalry
9/14	CHICAGO	-7.6	UNDERDOGS are 8-3 ATS in L11 of CHI-DET h2h series
9/22	at Baltimore	+4.1	BALTIMORE is 4-0 SU & ATS in L4 hosting DET, avg MOV 28.5 PPG
9/28	CLEVELAND	-12.8	L4 games of CLE-DET series in Detroit went OVER the total
10/5	at Cincinnati	-0.8	CINCINNATI is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Detroit
10/12	at Kansas City	+3.4	OVER the total is 7-1 in DET-KC series since '96
10/20	TAMPA BAY	-5.1	ROAD TEAMS are 9-2 ATS in L11 of TB-DET h2h series
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/2	MINNESOTA	-6.2	DETROIT is on 9-game ATS winning streak vs. Minnesota
11/9	at Washington	+0.4	OVER the total is 3-0 in L3 of DET-WAS series, total PPG 65.3
11/16	at Philadelphia	+4.4	The L9 games of DET-PHI h2h series went OVER the total
11/23	NY GIANTS	-11	NY GIANTS are 5-1 ATS at Detroit since '96
11/27	GREEN BAY	-3	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-DET series in Detroit
12/4	DALLAS	-7.6	ROAD TEAMS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of DET-DAL h2h series
12/14	at LA Rams	-1.5	The L4 games of DET-LAR h2h series went UNDER the total
12/21	PITTSBURGH	-7	UNDERDOGS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of DET-PIT h2h series
12/25	at Minnesota	-2.7	DETROIT has won L4 ATS at Minnesota
1/4	at Chicago	-3.1	OVER the total is 5-3 in L8 of DET-CHI series in Chicago

SOS
24.75
(#7 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.8 / 0.3
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
10-1

NFC
+450

NFC NORTH
+140

2024 stats

		OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
		STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME		33.2	1	20.1	7
YARDS PER POINT		12.3	2	17	4
PLAYS PER GAME		65.8	1		
TIME OF POSSESSION		32:06	3		
3RD DOWN CONV. %		47.6%	4	32.4%	1
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME		409.5	2	342.4	20
YARDS PER PLAY		6.2	3	5.7	27
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME		31.4	3		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME		146.4	6	98.4	5
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT		4.7	9	4.5	22
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME		32.4	16		
COMPLETION %		72.4%	1	61.2%	2
PASSING YARDS PER GAME		263.2	2	244	30
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT		8.6	2	6.8	22
TURNOVERS		0.9	6	1.4	10

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
28.0
(#5 of 32)

The Lions followed up their 12-5 season in 2023 by going 15-2 last year to win their second straight NFC North divisional title and secure the No. 1 seed in the NFC. However, they ultimately underachieved as they lost to the Commanders in the divisional round of the playoffs, their first game after the first-round bye. They're loaded again this year (and get Aidan Hutchinson back on defense), but face the challenge of losing both their offensive and defensive coordinators to head coaching jobs with Ben Johnson moving to the Bears in the division and Aaron Glenn to the Jets.

OFFENSE
The Lions were an offensive juggernaut in 2024 as they led the NFL with 454 points (26.7 points per game) and were No. 2 in total offense with 6,962 yards (409.5 yards per game), second only to the Ravens, and averaged 6.3 yards per play, also ranking second.

QB Jared Goff set franchise records for completion percentage (72.4%) and passer rating (111.8) and was an MVP candidate as he led the high-powered offense. Detroit lost center Frank Ragnow to retirement and guard Kevin Zeitler to free agency, but the rest of the core group is back, highlighted by the skill positions with the RB tandem of Jahmyr Gibbs and David Montgomery. WR corps led by Amon-Ra St. Brown and Jameson Williams, plus TE Sam LaPorta.

The big question is if the offense continues to excel under new coordinator John Morton, who was with the Lions in 2022 as senior offensive assistant under Johnson before spending the last two years as Denver's passing game coordinator.

DEFENSE
A lot of times, when a team's offense is lighting up the scoreboard, the defense suffers statistically, but the Lions' D did its part, ranking No. 7 in the league with 342 points allowed (20.1 points per game) despite ranking No. 20 in total defense with 324.4 yards per game. The run defense ranked No. 5 with just 98.4 rushing yards per game.

That's because opponents were usually playing from behind, which is where the passing defense numbers look worse than they really were, ranking No. 30 at 244 air yards per game as teams tried to get in shootouts with the Lions. And that was all after losing edge rusher Hutchinson in Week 6 with a broken tibia and fibula. The Lions were only tied for No. 23 in sacks, so Hutchinson's return should make the Lions even better on D.

OUTLOOK
The Lions are short +140 favorites to win the NFC North despite the tough division. It would be a major disappointment if they didn't get to double-digit wins. We feel their Over/Under win total is actually set low at 10.5 and priced to the Under at -145 with the Over +125 at Circa Sports. There should be regression expected from 15 wins, but 11 is certainly attainable. We'll take the plus-price.

prediction

OVER 10.5 WINS

GREEN BAY
PACKERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 11-7 SU & 8-9-1 ATS / 8-9-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Matt LaFleur (7th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	DETROIT	-0.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in DET-GB rivalry
9/11	WASHINGTON	-2.7	WASHINGTON is 4-1 ATS in L5 vs. Green Bay
9/21	at Cleveland	-5.9	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-1 ATS run in GB-CLE h2h series
9/28	at Dallas	-1.4	GREEN BAY has won L5 SU & ATS at Dallas
- BYE WEEK -			
10/12	CINCINNATI	-4.2	ROAD TEAMS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of CIN-GB h2h series
10/19	at Arizona	-1.6	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of GB-ARI series in Arizona
10/26	at Pittsburgh	-0.7	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-PIT h2h series
11/2	CAROLINA	-9.8	HOME TEAMS are 6-1 ATS in L7 of CAR-GB h2h series
11/10	PHILADELPHIA	+0.5	FAVORITES are on 9-4 ATS run in GB-PHI h2h series
11/16	at NY Giants	-5	HOME TEAMS are 6-2-2 ATS in L10 of GB-NYG h2h series
11/23	MINNESOTA	-4.9	OVER the total is 12-6 in MIN-GB series at Green Bay since '08
11/27	at Detroit	+3	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-DET series in Detroit
12/7	CHICAGO	-6.3	GREEN BAY is 12-5 ATS since '08 hosting Chicago
12/14	at Denver	-0.9	HOME TEAMS are on 7-1-1 ATS run in GB-DEN h2h series
12/20	at Chicago	-2.2	GREEN BAY is on 14-1 SU & 12-3 ATS run at Chicago
12/28	BALTIMORE	+0	BALTIMORE has won L3 ATS vs. Green Bay
1/4	at Minnesota	-1.8	OVER the total is 4-1 in L5 of GB-MIN series at Minnesota after 0-6 skid

SOS
24.37
(#11 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.5 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
20-1

NFC
10-1

NFC NORTH
+260

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.1	8	19.9	6
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	9	15.8	9
PLAYS PER GAME	60.4	25		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:35	10		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	15	37.5%	12
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	370.5	5	314.5	5
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	5	5.2	5
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	5		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	146.8	5	99.4	7
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	6	4	3
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.2	30		
COMPLETION %	64.3%	20	67.4%	25
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	223.6	12	215.2	13
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.2	4	6.5	11
TURNOVERS	1.1	11	1.8	4

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS 27.0
(#6 of 32)

The Packers won 11 games last season but only finished third in the NFC North behind the Lions and Vikings. However, they did make the playoffs for the second straight year under QB Jordan Love (and fifth time in six years) and 37th time in franchise history (most in the NFL). They made an early exit from the playoffs as they drew the eventual Super Bowl champion Eagles in the wild-card round.

OFFENSE
After having basically just two quarterbacks from 1992 to 2022 in Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers, Love has stepped right in with two solid seasons as the starting QB, throwing for 3,389 yards (ranked 19th in the league) and 25 touchdowns (tied No. 10 with a QBR of 69.3 (No. 5) in leading the Packers to No. 5 in total offense at 370.8 yards per game and No. 8 in scoring.

Josh Jacobs, formerly of the Raiders, replaced Aaron Jones as the leading rusher in Green Bay with 1,329 yards on the ground and added 36 receptions out of the backfield.

The Packers haven't had a clear-cut WR1 since trading Davante Adams to the Raiders in 2022, but they have a deep receiving room as Jayden Reed led the team with 55 catches for 857 yards, followed by Christian Watson (29 catches, 620 yards), Romeo Doubs (46 catches, 601 yards), Dontayvion Wicks (39 catches, 415 yards), plus TE Tucker Kraft (50 catches, 707 yards). In the off-season, they added another speedster in Mecole Hardman from the Chiefs. They also used a first-round pick on talented wideout Matthew Golden.

DEFENSE
Right before the deadline for this guide, the Packers released star cornerback Jaire Alexander and also lost Eric Stokes, but early reports have them happy to move forward with Nate Hobbs (from the Raiders), Keisean Nixon and Carrington Valentine.

Last season, first-year defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley got the job done as the Pack was No. 5 in total defense and No. 6 in points allowed despite having a top offense like the Lions. It also helped that Green Bay led the league in pressure percentage on blitzes, they were No. 4 in tackling (according to Pro Football Focus) and also were No. 4 in takeaways.

A bigger loss than the secondary (which at least has the division's top safety in Xavier McKinney) might be defensive tackle TJ Slaton, whose run-stuffing abilities helped Green Bay improve from No. 28 in 2023 to No. 13 last season.

OUTLOOK
The Over/Under Season Win Total is pretty solid at 9.5 (Over -115/Under -105 at Circa). The losses on defense are a concern, but the offense should be able to win enough shootouts to get them to double-digit wins again and a return to the playoffs.

prediction
OVER 9.5 WINS

MINNESOTA
VIKINGS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 14-4 SU & 11-6-1 ATS / 7-11-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Kevin O'Connell (4th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/8	at Chicago	+1	MINNESOTA is on 4-0-1 ATS run at Chicago
9/14	ATLANTA	-4.3	OVER the total has converted in L3 of ATL-MIN h2h series
9/21	CINCINNATI	-0.7	HOME TEAMS are 7-0-1 ATS in L8 of CIN-MIN h2h series
9/28	vs. Pittsburgh	+0	FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in MIN-PIT h2h series
10/5	vs. Cleveland	-5	FAVORITES are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of MIN-CLE h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
10/19	PHILADELPHIA	+4	HOME TEAMS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of PHI-MIN h2h series
10/23	at LA Chargers	+3	MINNESOTA is 3-0 ATS in L3 road games vs. Chargers
11/2	at Detroit	+6.2	DETROIT is on 9-game ATS winning streak vs. Minnesota
11/9	BALTIMORE	+3.5	The L5 games of BAL-MIN h2h series went OVER the total
11/16	CHICAGO	-2.8	L2 games of CHI-MIN series in Minnesota went UNDER the total
11/23	at Green Bay	+4.9	OVER the total is 12-6 in MIN-GB series at Green Bay since '08
11/30	at Seattle	+0.4	HOME TEAMS are 7-3 ATS in MIN-SEA h2h series since '09
12/7	WASHINGTON	+0.8	L2 of WAS-MIN series went UNDER the total after 6 straight OVER's
12/14	at Dallas	+1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0 ATS streak in MIN-DAL h2h series
12/21	at NY Giants	-1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0 ATS surge in MIN-NYG h2h series
12/25	DETROIT	+2.7	DETROIT has won L4 ATS at Minnesota
1/4	GREEN BAY	+1.8	OVER the total is 4-1 in L5 of GB-MIN series at Minnesota after 0-6 skid

SOS
24.91
(#5 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2 / 0.2
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
30-1

NFC
14-1

NFC NORTH
+400

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.4	9	19.5	5
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	8	17.2	3
PLAYS PER GAME	62	18		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:15	15		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.0%	12	35.6%	4
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	346.9	12	335.4	16
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	12	5.3	10
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.9	14		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	109.1	19	93.4	2
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	26	4.1	4
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	18		
COMPLETION %	66.4%	12	65.2%	15
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	237.8	6	242	28
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8	5	6.5	10
TURNOVERS	1.2	17	1.9	1

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
24.0
(#17 of 32)

Kevin O'Connell won AP Coach of the Year after leading the Vikings to a 14-3 record as his team exceeded expectations more than the Lions. The key to Minnesota's surprising success was former first-round bust Sam Darnold taking over at QB; however, he's gone after only one season after signing a three-year, $100 million deal with Seattle, so the Vikings are turning to second-year QB JJ McCarthy, who won the national championship at Michigan before the Vikings made him their QB of the future with the 10th pick in the 2024 draft. The Vikings are +400 to win the NFC North, falling behind the Packers (+275).

OFFENSE
The Vikings' offense was explosive in 2024 behind Darnold (4,319 passing yards, whopping 35 TDs) and a stellar receiving corps led by superstar Justin Jefferson (103 catches, 1,533 yards). WR Jordan Addison (63 catches, 875 yards) and TE TJ Hockenson (41 catches, 455 yards) also give hope that the transition won't be too tough for McCarthy.

Overall, the offense ranked No. 9 in points per game (25.4) and No. 12 in total yards per game (346.9), but that was mostly due to the passing game as the Vikes were No. 19 in rushing yards per game.

Aaron Jones did come over from the Packers to lead Minnesota with 1,138 rushing yards, but 1,000 yards in a season ain't what it used to be with 17 games. They did add Jordan Mason from the 49ers, but most of all, the Vikings need McCarthy to do what Love has done in Green Bay after sitting behind Rodgers.

DEFENSE
The Vikings' defense did its share in helping the team to a 14-3 record, similar to what the Lions' defense did despite having a high-powered offense that was put back on the field after quick scores and facing teams in come-from-behind situations filling the air with passes. The Vikings still allowed just 19.5 points per game (ranking No. 5) and were No. 2 in rushing D at 93.4 yards per contest, while the pass defense was No. 28 at 242 yards per game due to opponents abandoning the run for the most part.

The defense did lose safety Camryn Bynum to the Colts, but kept CB Byron Murphy and added nice pieces in CB Isaiah Rodgers, DT Jonathan Allen and DT Javon Hargrave.

OUTLOOK
The Vikings still certainly have a playoff-caliber roster, but starting basically a rookie QB certainly has us looking at them regressing from that 14-3 season. Despite the national title, I wasn't too high on McCarthy's pro prospects in last year's draft class and wouldn't be surprised if he's a bust. Regardless, even with the Over/Under Season Win Total down to 8.5, I have to look to the Under (especially at plus-money).

prediction
UNDER 8.5 WINS

NFC SOUTH
preview

Coverage by Adam Burke

You have to go back to 2020 to find the last season in which the Tampa Bay Buccaneers fell short of winning the division. You have to go back to 2016 to find the last time that either the Atlanta Falcons or Carolina Panthers took down the NFC South title, as the New Orleans Saints ripped off four in a row from 2017-20. Ironically, the Falcons (2016) and Panthers (2015) both went to the Super Bowl the last time they won the division. Neither the Bucs nor Saints have made it past the Divisional Round.

The Buccaneers enter the season as the favorite in search of a five-peat, but they feel vulnerable this season…just like they did last season. Tampa Bay won the division at 13-4 back in 2021, but they've won the division at 8-9, 9-8, and 10-7 over the last three seasons. In other words, it shouldn't take much for another NFC South team to not only close the gap, but jump over it and put the Bucs in the rearview mirror.

All of these teams are flawed. The Bucs were third in yards per play on offense, but 19th on defense. The Falcons were a top-10 offense in yards per play as well, but changed quarterbacks during the season. They also had the fifth-highest percentage of drives against ending in points. The Panthers played musical chairs at QB before Bryce Young seemed to settle in late in the season, but opponents scored on 51.4% of their possessions. The next worst team was Jacksonville at 45.6%. The Saints were bad on offense, bad on defense, and have to pick from the three-headed monster of rookie Tyler Shough, second-year player Spencer Rattler, or third-year player Jake Haener.

In theory, divisions like this should carry a fair amount of betting value. Even though the Bucs are going to win most often, and are priced that way in the markets, the Falcons, who beat Tampa Bay in both head-to-head meetings, and even the Panthers, who tied for last with the Saints at 5-12, don't really need to improve all that much to make this division more competitive.

And many believe that they have done that and Tampa Bay's reign of NFC South terror is in jeopardy.

VSiN staff division selections
BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

16	8	2	0

2025 projected standings
(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
TAMPA BAY	26.0	2.1	0.1	23.44 (24)	9.7	7.3	9.5
ATLANTA	22.5	1.5	-0.4	23.66 (21)	8.0	9.0	7.5
CAROLINA	21.0	1.2	-0.9	24.44 (9)	6.8	10.2	6.5
NEW ORLEANS	18.5	1.6	0.3	23.25 (28)	6.2	10.8	6.5

ATLANTA
FALCONS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 6-11 ATS / 7-10-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Raheem Morris (2nd)

With the awkwardness of the 2024 season in the past, the Falcons can focus on the present and the future. Signing Kirk Cousins to a four-year, $180 million deal about a month and a half before drafting Michael Penix Jr. in the first round created a very uncomfortable situation for all involved.

The Falcons are still saddled with Cousins, but it is undeniably Penix's team to start the season. With the wily vet as a safety net, maybe everything falls into place. There were some major salary cap constraints over the spring and summer to work around, so the Falcons don't have a lot of new faces, but the ones they do have are probably walking around with a different expression going into 2025.

OFFENSE
You can tell that Zac Robinson feels very comfortable with his offense. The Falcons spent both first-round picks on defenders and their meager free agent funds on that side of the ball as well. So this group, which finished eighth in yards per play and 13th in EPA/play, looks very similar. The one obvious difference is Penix, as Cousins started 14 games. Cousins was 16th in EPA + CPOE (Comp% Over Expected) Composite among 30 QBs with at least 320 plays, so he was decidedly average, even with the 16 interceptions.

The data is messy given how some star QBs didn't play and some did, with other players resting, but Penix was 19th in EPA+CPOE Composite among 33 QB with at least 50 plays in Weeks 16-18. He missed some throws to be sure and needs more reps with the No. 1s, but there were flashes. With a dynamic RB in Bijan Robinson, who was 44 yards short of 1,500, and WRs in Drake London and Darnell Mooney that combined for nearly 2,300 yards, Penix has the pieces to be successful.

DEFENSE
Morris is a defensive coordinator by trade and the unit's regression had to keep him up at night. The Falcons were a top-10 defense by YPP in 2023, but simply didn't force enough takeaways with only 16. This past season's defense was 19th in YPP and only had 18 takeaways. So, the Falcons drafted LB Jalon Walker, pass rusher James Pearce Jr., and two safeties in Xavier Watts and Billy Bowman Jr. with their top-four picks. The Falcons also brought in Jordan Fuller and Leonard Floyd.

This is a team that didn't blitz a lot and didn't generate much pressure, leading to a league-worst 69.9% completion rate against. While they only gave up 9.9 yards per catch, they didn't generate enough negative plays, allowing opponents to have a high Success Rate and get ahead of schedule. As a result, the Falcons were 31st in third-down defense. Those are the areas of focus based on the offseason transactions.

OUTLOOK
The NFC South drew the AFC East and NFC West and the Falcons added the Vikings, Colts, and Commanders thanks to their second-place finish. The schedule is not easy and the bye comes in Week 5, well before a trip to Berlin in Week 9. But, the division is wide-open and Year 2 of this coaching staff may elevate a talented roster.

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	TAMPA BAY	+2.5	OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of TB-ATL series at Atlanta
9/14	at Minnesota	+4.3	OVER the total has converted in L3 of ATL-MIN h2h series
9/21	at Carolina	-0.3	UNDERDOGS are on 8-2 ATS run in ATL-CAR series
9/28	WASHINGTON	+2.8	WASHINGTON is on 4-0 ATS run at Atlanta
- BYE WEEK -			
10/13	BUFFALO	+5.2	ROAD TEAMS/DOGS are on 4-1 ATS run in BUF-ATL series
10/19	at San Francisco	+6.1	HOME TEAMS are 4-1 ATS in L5 of ATL-SF h2h series
10/26	MIAMI	-0.8	FAVORITES are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of MIA-ATL h2h series
11/2	at New England	+1.9	NEW ENGLAND has won L7 ATS vs. Atlanta
11/9	vs. Indianapolis	-1	FAVORITES are on 6-1 ATS run in ATL-IND h2h series
11/16	CAROLINA	-3.5	CAROLINA is 4-1 ATS in L5 at Atlanta
11/23	at New Orleans	-2.4	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of ATL-NO series at New Orleans
11/30	at NY Jets	-0.1	UNDER the total is 3-1 in L4 of ATL-NYJ set in New York
12/7	SEATTLE	-1.4	UNDERDOGS are on 12-4-1 ATS run in SEA-ATL h2h series
12/11	at Tampa Bay	+5.6	ATLANTA has won L3 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/21	at Arizona	+3.7	ARIZONA has won L4 SU & ATS hosting Atlanta
12/29	LA RAMS	+2	ROAD TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS surge in LAR-ATL h2h series
1/4	NEW ORLEANS	-4.8	NEW ORLEANS is 7-3 ATS in L10 at Atlanta

SOS
23.66
(#21 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.5 / 0.4
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
80-1

NFC
35-1

NFC SOUTH
+250

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.9	13	24.9	23
YARDS PER POINT	16.2	25	13.9	24
PLAYS PER GAME	63.9	8		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:54	20		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.2%	17	45.3%	31
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	369.8	6	345.2	23
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	8	5.5	20
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.1	8		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	130.5	10	120.6	15
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	12	4.5	18
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.9	14		
COMPLETION %	65.1%	16	69.9%	32
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	239.3	5	224.5	22
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.7	8	6.6	16
TURNOVERS	1.4	24	1.1	16

prediction

OVER 7.5 WINS

CAROLINA
PANTHERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 8-9 ATS / 13-4-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Dave Canales (2nd)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Jacksonville	+3.6	FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in CAR-JAC h2h series
9/14	at Arizona	+5.7	UNDERDOGS have won L5 ATS in ARI-CAR h2h series
9/21	ATLANTA	+0.3	UNDERDOGS are on 8-2 ATS run in ATL-CAR series
9/28	at New England	+3.9	CAROLINA is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. New England
10/5	MIAMI	+1	MIAMI is 6-1-1 ATS in L8 vs. Carolina
10/12	DALLAS	+1	FAVORITES are on 6-1 SU & ATS streak in DAL-CAR h2h series
10/19	at NY Jets	+1.9	FAVORITES are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 of CAR-NYJ h2h series
10/26	BUFFALO	+7	BUFFALO is on 3-0-1 ATS run vs. Carolina
11/2	at Green Bay	+9.8	HOME TEAMS are 6-1 ATS in L7 of CAR-GB h2h series
11/9	NEW ORLEANS	-3	HOME TEAMS are on 6-1-1 ATS run in NO-CAR rivalry
11/16	at Atlanta	+3.5	CAROLINA is 4-1 ATS in L5 at Atlanta
11/24	at San Francisco	+8.1	FAVORITES are on 5-0 ATS streak in CAR-SF h2h series
11/30	LA RAMS	+3.8	FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in L7 of LAR-CAR series
	- BYE WEEK -		
12/14	at New Orleans	-0.4	OVER the total is 11-4 in CAR-NO series at New Orleans since '12
12/21	TAMPA BAY	+4.3	UNDER the total is 8-4 in L12 of TB-CAR rivalry in Carolina
12/28	SEATTLE	+0.4	The L8 games of SEA-CAR h2h series went OVER the total
1/4	at Tampa Bay	+7.6	TAMPA BAY is on 6-0 SU & 5-1 ATS surge hosting Carolina

SOS
24.44
(#9 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.2 / 0.9
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
120-1

NFC
50-1

NFC SOUTH
+400

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.1	23	31.4	32
YARDS PER POINT	14.9	15	12.9	30
PLAYS PER GAME	58.4	31		
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:13	31		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.0%	26	50.2%	32
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	298	29	404.5	32
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	24	6	32
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.1	27		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	110.5	18	179.8	32
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	10	5.2	32
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	19		
COMPLETION %	62.3%	28	67.9%	26
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	187.5	30	224.7	23
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	30	7.2	29
TURNOVERS	1.3	19	1	20

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS **21.0** (#27 of 32)

Dating back to the 2002 division realignment, the only years in which a team hasn't gone worst to first have been 2014, 2019, and 2024. Semantics might come into play with the Panthers, who you could argue tied for last place and technically finished in third because of tiebreakers. Nevertheless, the overarching point here is that teams can and often do turn it around from one year to the next.

In a division that does feel ripe for the taking, the question is whether or not Bryce Young can be consistently good and if the league's worst scoring defense can improve enough for the team to be in contention. After the bye week, the signs were there, as the Panthers nearly beat the Chiefs and probably should have beaten the Buccaneers and Eagles. But "should" and "did" are two very different things in the NFL.

OFFENSE
There were three stages of offense for the Panthers last season. There was the Bryce Young era, the Andy Dalton era, and then Bryce Young Part Deux. Because I'm such a naturally optimistic guy, I'll look at the A.D. weeks (After Dalton). Young took back over as the starter in Week 8. In those 10 games, the Panthers were 4-6 and Young had a 15/6 TD/INT ratio with a 61.8% completion rate and 223 rushing yards on 37 carries. He only had 6.69 adjusted net yards per attempt, but looked to have a better grasp of the Dave Canales offense.

For 3WR sets now, Young has 2024 first-round pick Xavier Legette, productive vet Adam Thielen, and 2025 first-round pick Tetairoa McMillan. So his primary targets are 6'3", 6'2", and 6'5". Catch radius should matter a lot with a somewhat inaccurate, short-statured QB. The backfield is also bolstered with Chuba Hubbard and a homecoming of sorts for South Carolina product Rico Dowdle, who ran for over 1,000 yards and still was content to sign into a timeshare at best. With an OL that was top-10 in yards per carry and 12th in Sack%, you can see why this offense is highly-regarded in the minds of some.

DEFENSE
The focus will always be on a QB taken No. 1 overall, but this defense was extremely poor last season. Opponents converted over 50% of their third-down attempts and this was a bottom-five red zone unit. Carolina's 64 QB hits were the lowest in the league and they were last in Pressure%. They got gashed to the tune of 5.2 yards per carry. It's a make-or-break year for third-year DC Ejiro Evero in all likelihood.

Carolina added 13 sacks in free agency from Patrick Jones II and Tershawn Wharton, plus a huge-bodied run-stopper in Bobby Brown III. Tre'von Moehring had 97 tackles and 10 pass breakups. This unit needs more than a few free agents, but there really is nowhere to go but up.

OUTLOOK
The season hinges on Young being better than he was and significantly, if the Panthers want to contend for a playoff spot. The schedule isn't too bad, though a Week 14 bye is concerning if Young gets off to a slow start. I think this team will look better on the stat sheet, but not necessarily in the standings. Both sides of the ball have a long way to go.

prediction

UNDER 6.5 WINS

NEW ORLEANS
SAINTS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 7-10 ATS / 8-9-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Kellen Moore (1st)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	ARIZONA	+4	NEW ORLEANS has won L5 SU & ATS hosting Arizona
9/14	SAN FRANCISCO	+5.5	SAN FRANCISCO is on 7-3 ATS run versus New Orleans
9/21	at Seattle	+5.8	UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS run in L6 of NO-SEA series in Seattle
9/28	at Buffalo	+13.3	FAVORITES are on 7-0 ATS win streak in NO-BUF series
10/5	NY GIANTS	-0.3	OVER the total is 7-1 in L8 of NYG-NO series in New Orleans
10/12	NEW ENGLAND	+1.8	ROAD TEAMS are on 3-0 SU & ATS streak in NE-NO series
10/19	at Chicago	+7.2	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of NO-CHI series in Chicago
10/26	TAMPA BAY	+6.4	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-0 ATS run in TB-NO h2h series
11/2	at LA Rams	+8	FAVORITES have won L4 ATS in NO-LAR h2h series
11/9	at Carolina	+3	HOME TEAMS are on 6-1-1 ATS run in NO-CAR rivalry
- BYE WEEK -			
11/23	ATLANTA	+2.4	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of ATL-NO series at New Orleans
11/30	at Miami	+8.1	FAVORITES are on 4-0 ATS streak in NO-MIA h2h series
12/7	at Tampa Bay	+8.9	NEW ORLEANS has won L7 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/14	CAROLINA	+0.4	OVER the total is 11-4 in CAR-NO series at New Orleans since '12
12/21	NY JETS	-1.2	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2 ATS in L8 of NYJ-NO h2h series
12/28	at Tennessee	+2.6	ROAD TEAMS have won L6 ATS in NO-TEN h2h series
1/4	at Atlanta	+4.8	NEW ORLEANS is 7-3 ATS in L10 at Atlanta

SOS
23.25
(#28 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.6 / 0.3
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
300-1

NFC
120-1

NFC SOUTH
12-1

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.9	24	23.4	19
YARDS PER POINT	16.1	24	16.2	7
PLAYS PER GAME	60.7	22		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:08	29		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.2%	28	41.1%	21
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	320.1	21	379.9	30
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	17	5.8	28
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.1	21		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	114.9	14	141.4	31
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	14	4.9	31
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.4	16		
COMPLETION %	61.7%	30	61.9%	5
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	205.2	23	238.5	27
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	22	6.9	24
TURNOVERS	1.1	11	1	20

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
18.5
(#32 of 32)

The safety blanket of a franchise quarterback saves a lot of jobs and wins a lot of games. But, the smartest organizations find a way to plan for the inevitable end. Drew Brees gave the Saints 15 outstanding years and played until his age-41 season. Since Brees retired at the end of 2020, the Saints have gotten starts from Ian Book, Taysom Hill, Trevor Siemian, Jameis Winston, Andy Dalton, Derek Carr, Jake Haener, and Spencer Rattler. Carr posted a 14-13 record as the starter with a respectable 40/13 TD/INT ratio over 2023-24. Others were 0-7.

Five years after Brees, the Saints are still looking for a consistent QB and head into this season with rookie second-rounder Tyler Shough, second-year fifth-round pick Rattler, and third-year fourth-rounder Haener. Have I mentioned yet that the Saints are the second favorite for the fewest wins this season?

OFFENSE
Collectively, Saints QBs not named Carr didn't win a game and also had more interceptions (6) than touchdown passes (5) last season. First-time head coach Kellen Moore has been brought in to inject some life into this offense, but that task seems rather difficult with the QB options. Ironically, Alvin Kamara had more yards per carry last season than he's had in the last three seasons and came just seven yards shy of 1,500 from scrimmage.

The Saints let Lucas Patrick walk and signed Dillon Radunz to a one-year deal, so all five linemen are under 30 and both tackles, Taliese Fuaga and Trevor Penning, started all 17 games last year. Offensive lines are always important, but even more so with inexperienced quarterbacks. New Orleans had a higher Success Rate with the run (41.4%) than with the pass (40.1%), so the OL will have to open holes for Kamara for this offense to have hope.

DEFENSE
The player personnel needs to improve, but this coaching staff has a lot of potential upside, including DC Brandon Staley. Staley was not successful as a head coach, but the 42-year-old rapid riser in the coaching world gets his second crack at the DC role. New Orleans actually had a top-10 defense by Dropback Success Rate and were second in the league in pass breakups. They also struggled to generate pressure, illustrating just how well the corners played.

Kool-Aid McKinstry will have to take on a bigger role with Paulson Adebo, who was second in pass breakups, in New York. Alontae Taylor (16 PBU) is back, though he somehow failed to secure an interception. If Staley can get more from Chase Young and Bryan Bresee develops, this might be an underrated defense entering the season.

OUTLOOK
"If". "Might". Those are the words you get when looking at a team in what I'll generously call a "transitional" year. The season does not start favorably with three NFC West opponents and a trip to Buffalo. More wins are available in the back portion of the schedule, depending on how fast the team comes together and if a QB, likely Shough, emerges. I'd keep an eye on an in-season Over with the Panthers, Jets, and Titans in December.

prediction

UNDER 5.5 WINS

TAMPA BAY
BUCCANEERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 10-8 SU & 10-8 ATS / 12-6-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Todd Bowles (4th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Atlanta	-2.5	OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of TB-ATL series at Atlanta
9/15	at Houston	+0.7	HOUSTON is 3-0 SU & ATS all-time hosting Tampa Bay
9/21	NY JETS	-9.2	NY JETS are 6-1 ATS in L7 versus Tampa Bay
9/28	PHILADELPHIA	+1.9	HOME TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS surge in PHI-TB h2h series
10/5	at Seattle	-1.5	TAMPA BAY is on 5-1 ATS surge vs. Seattle
10/12	SAN FRANCISCO	-2.5	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of SF-TB series in Tampa
10/20	at Detroit	+5.1	ROAD TEAMS are 9-2 ATS in L11 of TB-DET h2h series
10/26	at New Orleans	-6.4	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-0 ATS run in TB-NO h2h series
- BYE WEEK -			
11/9	NEW ENGLAND	-6.2	NEW ENGLAND has won L5 ATS vs. Tampa Bay
11/16	at Buffalo	+6	TAMPA BAY is 5-1-1 ATS in L7 at Buffalo
11/23	at LA Rams	+0.7	LA RAMS are on 9-1-1 ATS surge versus Tampa Bay
11/30	ARIZONA	-4	ARIZONA has won L5 ATS vs. Tampa Bay
12/7	NEW ORLEANS	-8.9	NEW ORLEANS has won L7 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/11	ATLANTA	-5.6	ATLANTA has won L3 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/21	at Carolina	-4.3	UNDER the total is 8-4 in L12 of TB-CAR rivalry in Carolina
12/28	at Miami	+0.8	TAMPA BAY is 6-1 SU & 7-0 ATS vs. Miami since '97
1/4	CAROLINA	-7.6	TAMPA BAY is on 6-0 SU & 5-1 ATS surge hosting Carolina

2025 schedule

SOS
23.44
(#24 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.1 / 0.1
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
28-1

NFC
13-1

NFC SOUTH
-110

odds

2024 stats

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.5	4	22.6	16
YARDS PER POINT	13.5	7	15.1	17
PLAYS PER GAME	64.4	6		
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:07	2		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	50.9%	1	38.1%	14
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	399.6	3	341.8	18
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	4	5.5	18
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.4	10		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	149.2	4	97.8	4
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.3	3	4.3	10
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.6	10		
COMPLETION %	71.5%	2	66.4%	22
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	250.4	3	243.9	29
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	6	6.6	15
TURNOVERS	1.4	21	1.1	16

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
26.0
(#9 of 32)

Some things in sports make a lot of sense. Some things in sports make no sense. The last time the Buccaneers failed to win the NFC South was when they won the Super Bowl during the 2020 season. Even in a post-Tom Brady world, the Bucs have run their NFC South reign of terror out to four straight division titles after not having won one since 2007. Baker Mayfield has been at the helm for the last two and his team is favored to make it five in a row.

Mayfield will be working with his eighth different offensive coordinator in eight seasons, as Josh Grizzard is his new OC. It will be his third in three seasons with the Bucs. And yet, with Mike Evans, Chris Godwin, and Jalen McMillan back, plus Emeka Egbuka and a strong offensive line, he's set up for success again.

OFFENSEE
The Bucs may have only gone 10-7 during the regular season and had an early exit in the playoffs, but this was a tremendous offense last year. Tampa Bay was fourth in points, third in yards, and wound up being sixth in point differential and fifth in yardage differential. The 23 turnovers, including 16 interceptions, didn't help, but this was the league's top third-down offense and a top-five unit in the red zone.

As all eight OCs have found out, Baker will throw his picks, but he'll produce as well. He threw for 4,500 yards last season as the Bucs trailed only the Bengals and Lions in net passing yards. Grizzard is only 35 years old and had a full-time NFL job by the age of 27. He was Tampa Bay's pass game coordinator last season, so this should be another potent and prolific passing attack, coupled with an 1,100-yard back in Bucky Irving.

DEFENSE
Todd Bowles and the staff are putting trust in the youngsters this season. Calijah Kancey led the team in sacks with 7.5 and he'll be one of the premier pass rushers for the team. He only played 12 games, so he's a guy who has a chance to have more of an impact. The most notable loss is Jordan Whitehead, but another recent draft pick in Tykee Smith, who was 15th in the Defensive Rookie of the Year voting, will pick up some of that slack.

The other pass rusher to keep a close eye on is Haason Reddick, who should be plenty fresh after not really being a factor for the Jets last season. The Bucs were only 17th in EPA/play on defense and were actually rather bad against the pass. Turnovers are a huge factor in EPA metrics and the Bucs had just seven interceptions and need to improve in that department to better complement a top-10 run defense.

OUTLOOK
Expectations are high, but deservedly so. The Bucs only leave Florida once over the final six weeks of the season, a trade-off to playing two of their first-place games (Texans, Lions) on the road. The offense looks spectacular again and the defense has room for improvement with more of a pass rush and some more athleticism in the secondary.

prediction

OVER 9.5 WINS

NFC WEST

preview

Coverage by Wes Reynolds

This time last year, the San Francisco 49ers were odds-on favorites (-200) to win the NFC West coming off a defeat in Super Bowl LVIII. Injuries got the season off track before it began, as Christian McCaffrey did not debut until Week 10 when the 49ers got off to a sluggish 5-4 start. McCaffrey only played four games and finished the season on Injured Reserve along with 18 others, including several starters. The 49ers finished at the bottom of the division with a 6-11 record.

While the 49ers are the division favorites again (+150), last year's winner, the Los Angeles Rams (+195), are also out for some redemption as they nearly knocked off the eventual Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles in the divisional round. Matthew Stafford, who had brief flirtations with the Las Vegas Raiders and New York Giants before agreeing to a restructured deal, will have a new primary target to start alongside Puka Nacua as Davante Adams enters the fold.

Adams replaces Cooper Kupp, who was released by the Rams and has signed with the Seattle Seahawks (+475). Kupp will be catching passes from Sam Darnold, who is off his career-best season (14-3 record, 4,319 yards, 35 TD) in Minnesota. The performance earned him his first trip to the Pro Bowl and a $100 million contract in Seattle. Darnold is now on his fifth team in eight seasons, but he reunites with offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak, who was on the 49ers staff when Darnold was the backup in San Francisco back in 2023.

Jonathan Gannon doubled the Arizona Cardinals' (+475) win total from four to eight victories last season, and they improved on both sides of the ball. Kyler Murray started all 17 games and posted his best marks for yards and touchdown passes since 2021, the last time Arizona made the playoffs.

San Francisco is the favorite, potentially benefiting from the last-place schedule and the easiest overall by 2024 win percentage (.415). The 49ers committed to Brock Purdy as well with a five-year, $265 million contract. Stafford is still the best quarterback in the division, but the Rams have the first-place schedule, and the 49ers have been in the NFC Championship in three of the past four seasons. The window has not closed yet.

VSiN staff division selections

BY VSIN HOSTS & EXPERTS

12	11	2	1
SF	LA	Cardinals	Seahawks

2025 projected standings

(BASED ON STEVE MAKINEN RATINGS)

TEAM	2024 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
SAN FRANCISCO	25.5	2.3	0.5	21.94 (32)	10.2	6.8	10.5
LA RAMS	26.5	-0.1	-0.1	24.97 (4)	9.3	7.7	9.5
ARIZONA	24.0	1.4	0.5	23.42 (25)	8.8	8.2	8.5
SEATTLE	22.5	1.7	0.5	23.46 (23)	8.0	9.0	8.5

ARIZONA
CARDINALS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 11-6 ATS / 8-8-1 O-U-T
Head Coach: Jonathan Gannon (3rd)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at New Orleans	-4	NEW ORLEANS has won L5 SU & ATS hosting Arizona
9/14	CAROLINA	-5.7	UNDERDOGS have won L5 ATS in ARI-CAR h2h series
9/21	at San Francisco	+2.9	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ARI-SF h2h series
9/25	SEATTLE	-2	UNDERDOGS are 8-1-1 ATS in L10 of SEA-ARI series at Arizona
10/5	TENNESSEE	-7.3	ARIZONA is on 3-0-2 ATS run vs. Tennessee
10/12	at Indianapolis	-0.9	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ARI-IND h2h series
10/19	GREEN BAY	+1.6	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of GB-ARI series in Arizona
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/3	at Dallas	+1.5	ARIZONA is on 7-1 ATS run vs. Dallas, all as underdog
11/9	at Seattle	-0.7	The L6 games of ARI-SEA series in Seattle went UNDER the total
11/16	SAN FRANCISCO	+1	FAVORITES have won the L3 ATS in SF-ARI series at Arizona
11/23	JACKSONVILLE	-4.7	ARIZONA has won four straight ATS vs. Jacksonville
11/30	at Tampa Bay	+4	ARIZONA has won L5 ATS vs. Tampa Bay
12/7	LA RAMS	+1.4	LA RAMS are 9-1 ATS in L10 at Arizona but lost LY
12/14	at Houston	+2.3	HOME TEAMS are 4-2 ATS all-time in ARI-HOU series
12/21	ATLANTA	-3.7	ARIZONA has won L4 SU & ATS hosting Atlanta
12/28	at Cincinnati	+3	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in ARI-CIN h2h series
1/4	at LA Rams	+1.5	UNDER the total is 11-6 in ARI-LAR set at Los Angeles since '08

SOS
23.42
(#25 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.4 / 0.5
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
60-1

NFC
28-1

NFC WEST
+475

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.5	12	22.3	15
YARDS PER POINT	15.2	18	15.4	14
PLAYS PER GAME	60.9	21		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:32	22		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.0%	8	43.8%	28
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	358.2	11	342.5	21
YARDS PER PLAY	5.9	7	5.6	23
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.2	11		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	144.2	7	126.4	20
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.3	2	4.6	25
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.9	21		
COMPLETION %	68.9%	7	68.7%	29
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	214.1	18	216.1	14
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	16	6.8	23
TURNOVERS	1.2	16	1	20

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
24.0
(#16 of 32)

Year two of Jonathan Gannon's tenure went much better than his first as the Cardinals doubled their wins from four to eight. However, it is fair to say that Arizona should have fared even better. They were 6-4 heading into Thanksgiving weekend but began what would eventually be a 2-5 finish that included being swept by Seattle and losing in overtime at Carolina.

Kyler Murray stayed healthy for all 17 games, and the organization seems to have confidence in both him and his offense. The Cardinals spent most of their free agent money on the defensive line and used six of their seven draft picks on defense. Nevertheless, while Murray rebounded last year for his best statistical season since 2020, he was also largely responsible for the 2-5 late-season swoon.

OFFENSE
Kyler Murray had a 12-3 touchdown-to-interception ratio in his first 10 games last year, but he then posted an 8-9 ratio after Thanksgiving. While he is still a running threat, he does not have to do it alone like he had to early in his career because James Conner is off consecutive 1,000-yard rushing seasons and, like Murray, also was able to stay healthy in 2024.

Marvin Harrison Jr. had a good rookie season, but the No. 4 overall pick failed to make the All-Rookie team at receiver. He should take a big leap in his second season. Michael Wilson returns as WR2. Zay Jones was re-signed for another year and provided a second chance after being suspended for five games for violating the league's personal conduct policy. Greg Dortch proved to be a weapon in the slot. Then, there's Trey McBride, who was extended in April to be the highest-paid tight end in NFL history at the time of the signing. The right side of the offensive line is a question mark with second-year man Isaiah Adams and Jonah Williams, who missed nine games last year.

DEFENSE
The biggest change on the entire roster is on the defensive line with the additions of Dalvin Tomlinson, and Calais Campbell, who returns to the team that drafted him in 2008 — and where he played his first nine seasons. Tomlinson and Campbell join first-rounder Walter Nolen to help last year's first-rounder Darius Robinson. Josh Sweat reunites with Gannon and defensive coordinator Nick Rallis from their time in Philadelphia to bolster the pass rush along with Baron Browning, who had 21 QB pressures in eight games after a midseason trade.

Budda Baker might be the best safety in the league, and the seven-time Pro Bowler had 168 tackles last season.

OUTLOOK
The Cardinals have an opportunity to get off to a good start with three home games against non-playoff teams and a road opener at New Orleans in their first five games. The Weeks 9-11 stretch starts with an MNF game at Dallas. Murray has his homecoming where he was 42-0 as a starting QB at nearby Allen HS.

This season looks like a similar story to last year's Arizona team. They will start off well, but then sputter at the end.

prediction

UNDER 8.5 WINS

LOS ANGELES
RAMS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 11-8 SU & 11-8 ATS / 9-10-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Sean McVay (9th)

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	HOUSTON	-2.4	LA RAMS are on 4-1 SU & ATS run all-time vs. Texans
9/14	at Tennessee	-5	TENNESSEE is 6-0-1 ATS vs. LA Rams since '99
9/21	at Philadelphia	+6.3	ROAD TEAMS are on 6-0 ATS win streak in LAR-PHI series
9/28	INDIANAPOLIS	-5.4	The L7 games of IND-LAR series went OVER the total
10/2	SAN FRANCISCO	+0	LA RAMS have won L4 ATS vs. San Francisco
10/12	at Baltimore	+6	BALTIMORE is 4-1-1 ATS in L6 vs. LA Rams
10/19	vs. Jacksonville	-5	LA RAMS are 5-1 SU & 6-0 ATS all-time vs. Jacksonville
- BYE WEEK -			
11/2	NEW ORLEANS	-8	FAVORITES have won L4 ATS in NO-LAR h2h series
11/9	at San Francisco	+1	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of LAR-SF series in San Francisco
11/16	SEATTLE	-3	LA RAMS are on 10-3 ATS run hosting Seattle
11/23	TAMPA BAY	-0.7	LA RAMS are on 9-1-1 ATS surge versus Tampa Bay
11/30	at Carolina	-3.8	FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in L7 of LAR-CAR series
12/7	at Arizona	-1.4	LA RAMS are 9-1 ATS in L10 at Arizona but lost LY
12/14	DETROIT	+1.5	The L4 games of DET-LAR h2h series went UNDER the total
12/18	at Seattle	-2.6	LA RAMS have won L5 ATS at Seattle
12/29	at Atlanta	-2	ROAD TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS surge in LAR-ATL h2h series
1/4	ARIZONA	-1.5	UNDER the total is 11-6 in ARI-LAR set at Los Angeles since '08

SOS
24.97
(#4 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
0.1 / 0.1
HOME/ROAD

SUPER BOWL
22-1

NFC
11-1

NFC WEST
+195

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.6	20	22.7	17
YARDS PER POINT	15.3	19	15.5	12
PLAYS PER GAME	61.2	20		
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:25	23		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.8%	24	40.7%	20
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	331.4	15	352.8	26
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	16	5.7	26
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.5	16		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	103.8	24	130	22
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	31	4.6	26
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.9	14		
COMPLETION %	65.7%	14	65.3%	17
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	227.5	10	222.8	20
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.3	14	7	25
TURNOVERS	0.8	4	1.2	14

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
26.5
(#8 of 32)

The Rams had a shot to reach the NFC Championship Game. They were at the Eagles' 13-yard line with 1:14 left before a sack and an incompletion on third and fourth downs ended their season. Matthew Stafford is back on a restructured deal and got some help on offense with the addition of Davante Adams to go opposite Puka Nacua.

It is impossible to replace one of the best defensive players to ever play in Aaron Donald, but the Rams found two likely perennial Pro Bowlers up front – Jared Verse and Braden Fiske – with their first two draft picks last year. However, the Rams must fix a secondary that gave up 29 passing touchdowns (T-28th in the league) if they want to take the next step in being a legitimate NFC contender. Nevertheless, Sean McVay is going for his fifth NFC West title in nine seasons.

OFFENSE
Matthew Stafford proved he still has a lot left in the tank, throwing for nearly 3,800 yards and 20 touchdown passes. Plus, he gets an upgrade at receiver as Davante Adams replaces an aging Cooper Kupp. Adams can bring explosiveness to complement Nacua's consistency and reception volume. Speedy Tutu Atwell was also re-signed to play in the slot.

In 2023, the Rams finally found a running back to replace Todd Gurley after five years of trying, as Kyren Williams posted a 1,000-yard season for the first time since Gurley in 2018. Then, Williams did it again last year with career highs in yards (1,299) and rushing touchdowns (14). Left tackle Alaric Jackson is the offensive line's anchor for the future for a group that allowed the sixth-fewest sacks last season.

DEFENSE
It is way premature to compare the current Rams defensive line to the "Fearsome Foursome" of the '60s and '70s, but even with Aaron Donald in retirement, this group is already one of the best in the league. Not only are second-year players Defensive Rookie of the Year Verse and Fiske potential stars, Kobie Turner and Byron Young have 17 and 15.5 sacks in their first two seasons, respectively. Poona Ford comes in from the Chargers to play nose tackle as the Rams' struggles against the run showed most in the playoffs, trying to stop Saquon Barkley.

Behind this elite defensive line some questions arise as the Rams must replace leading tackler Christian Rozeboom at linebacker and both starting corners – Ahkello Witherspoon and Darius Williams – are in their 30s. This group had trouble limiting big plays.

OUTLOOK
The Rams are still a young roster, and they had 16 rookies on their active roster last season, so there is room for optimism that McVay and a quality coaching staff can get them to keep playing beyond their years, as happened last season.

As far as the schedule goes, the Rams will travel 34,832 miles this upcoming season, second only to the Chargers, and will cross 44 time zones. They also play four of their last six games on the road. Nevertheless, this young talent, especially on defense, should continue to progress.

prediction
OVER 9.5 WINS

SAN FRANCISCO
49ERS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 6-11 SU & 5-12 ATS / 10-7-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Kyle Shanahan (9th)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	at Seattle	-2.2	FAVORITES are 12-2 ATS in L14 of SF-SEA series in Seattle
9/14	at New Orleans	-5.5	SAN FRANCISCO is on 7-3 ATS run versus New Orleans
9/21	ARIZONA	-2.9	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ARI-SF h2h series
9/28	JACKSONVILLE	-7.1	SAN FRANCISCO has won L6 ATS vs. Jacksonville
10/2	at LA Rams	+0	LA RAMS have won L4 ATS vs. San Francisco
10/12	at Tampa Bay	+2.5	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of SF-TB series in Tampa
10/19	ATLANTA	-6.1	HOME TEAMS are 4-1 ATS in L5 of ATL-SF h2h series
10/26	at Houston	+0.8	SAN FRANCISCO is 4-0-1 ATS all-time versus Texans
11/2	at NY Giants	-3.6	SAN FRANCISCO is on 5-1 ATS run vs NY Giants
11/9	LA RAMS	-1	UNDER the total is 9-3 in L12 of LAR-SF series in San Francisco
11/16	at Arizona	-1	FAVORITES have won the L3 ATS in SF-ARI series at Arizona
11/24	CAROLINA	-8.1	FAVORITES are on 5-0 ATS streak in CAR-SF h2h series
11/30	at Cleveland	-4.5	CLEVELAND is on 4-0 ATS run hosting San Francisco
- BYE WEEK -			
12/14	TENNESSEE	-9.7	The L3 games of TEN-SF series in San Francisco went OVER
12/22	at Indianapolis	-2.4	INDIANAPOLIS has swept L3 ATS vs. San Francisco
12/28	CHICAGO	-5.4	SAN FRANCISCO is 6-2 ATS hosting Chicago since '95
1/4	SEATTLE	-4.4	UNDER the total is 9-4 in SEA-SF series at SF since 2012

SOS
21.94
(#32 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
2.3 / 0.5
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
20-1

NFC
10-1

NFC WEST
+150

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	RANK	DEFENSE STAT	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.9	13	25.6	29
YARDS PER POINT	16.4	27	12.4	31
PLAYS PER GAME	60.4	27		
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:29	13		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.6%	9	43.1%	24
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	376.3	4	317.4	8
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	2	5.2	7
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.9	14		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	127.2	12	124.6	18
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	7	4.4	17
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	31.4	22		
COMPLETION %	65.5%	15	65.5%	18
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	249.1	4	192.8	5
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.3	3	6.4	8
TURNOVERS	1.6	27	1	20

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS
25.5
(#11 of 32)

The 2024 49ers season was an uphill battle as star running back Christian McCaffrey was injured in camp and did not see the field until Week 10. Fourteen of 22 regular starters missed at least some significant time last season. The Niners finished a disappointing 6-11 in defense of their NFC Championship.

While this year's roster received a mini-purge, San Francisco still returns a core that was in the Super Bowl just two years ago. McCaffrey, Brock Purdy, Trent Williams, George Kittle, Nick Bosa, and Fred Warner lead a group that rated fourth in total offense and eighth in total defense last year despite all the adversity. Robert Saleh reunites with Kyle Shanahan as he returns for his second stint as defensive coordinator, a role he previously held from 2017 to 2020.

Adding to the optimism around the 49ers is that they play not only the last-place schedule in the NFC West, but a schedule that is rated the easiest (.415 opponent winning percentage in 2024) in the league. The talent and coaching are here, but can this team stay healthy?

OFFENSE
The biggest story in the offseason surrounded Purdy's contract and whether the 49ers front office would commit to him long term. Well, they did to the tune of a five-year, $265 million deal. Purdy has been very good, but the 49ers are paying him to be great. McCaffrey was unable to defend his NFL rushing title due to Achilles and PCL injuries. He is the lynchpin to this offense, but he may have a slightly lessened workload due to the emergence of Issac Guerendo and Patrick Taylor. They will run behind an offensive line returning four starters, including left tackle Williams, who missed the final seven games.

Aside from McCaffrey, Brandon Aiyuk's health is a question mark as he was lost for the season after Week 7 with torn ACL/MCL injuries. Trading Deebo Samuel to Washington creates a leadership void, but the Niners do not lack weapons in the passing game with Kittle, Jauan Jennings, and second-year man Ricky Pearsall.

DEFENSE
Saleh inherits a group with high-end talent like 2022 Defensive Player of the Year Bosa and four-time All-Pro Warner, but some rookies including DE Mykel Williams (first round, Georgia), DT Alfred Collins (second round, Texas), and DT CJ West (fourth round, Indiana) will need to get up to speed quickly for a defensive line group that is receiving a major makeover.

Warner will need a new running mate at linebacker, and rookie Nick Martin (third round, Oklahoma State) likely gets the first opportunity. Deommodore Lenoir leads a younger secondary where Renardo Green and Ji'Ayir Brown step into starting roles.

OUTLOOK
The 2024 season was a hard-luck year for the 49ers in a multitude of ways, yet they still have the fourth-best odds (20/1) in the NFC to win the upcoming Super Bowl. They have a great chance to open 4-0 (at Seattle, at New Orleans, vs. Arizona, vs. Jacksonville) and to close strongly in December with a bye week to start the month, then Tennessee, at Indianapolis, vs Chicago, and vs. Seattle.

Shanahan has been here before and has won 12 or more games in four of his last five seasons and has made the NFC Championship Game (including his time in Atlanta) in five of the last nine seasons.

prediction
OVER 10.5 WINS

SEATTLE
SEAHAWKS

2024 Record (incl playoffs): 10-7 SU & 6-10-1 ATS / 9-8-0 O-U-T
Head Coach: Mike Macdonald (2nd)

2025 schedule

DATE	OPPONENT	LINE*	SERIES TREND
9/7	SAN FRANCISCO	+2.2	FAVORITES are 12-2 ATS in L14 of SF-SEA series in Seattle
9/14	at Pittsburgh	+3.7	ROAD UNDERDOGS are 2-1 SU & 3-0 ATS in L3 of SEA-PIT series
9/21	NEW ORLEANS	-5.8	UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS run in L6 of NO-SEA series in Seattle
9/25	at Arizona	+2	UNDERDOGS are 8-1-1 ATS in L10 of SEA-ARI series at Arizona
10/5	TAMPA BAY	+1.5	TAMPA BAY is on 5-1 ATS surge vs. Seattle
10/12	at Jacksonville	+0.7	HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in SEA-JAC h2h series
10/20	HOUSTON	-0.2	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 ATS in HOU-SEA h2h series
	- BYE WEEK -		
11/2	at Washington	+5.7	WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS vs. Seattle
11/9	ARIZONA	+0.7	The L6 games of ARI-SEA series in Seattle went UNDER the total
11/16	at LA Rams	+3	LA RAMS are on 10-3 ATS run hosting Seattle
11/23	at Tennessee	-1.6	TENNESSEE is on 6-1-1 ATS run vs. Seattle
11/30	MINNESOTA	-0.4	HOME TEAMS are 7-3 ATS in MIN-SEA h2h series since '09
12/7	at Atlanta	+1.4	UNDERDOGS are on 12-4-1 ATS run in SEA-ATL h2h series
12/14	INDIANAPOLIS	-3.2	FAVORITES are 5-1 ATS in L6 of IND-SEA h2h series
12/18	LA RAMS	+2.6	LA RAMS have won L5 ATS at Seattle
12/28	at Carolina	-0.4	The L8 games of SEA-CAR h2h series went OVER the total
1/4	at San Francisco	+4.4	UNDER the total is 9-4 in SEA-SF series at SF since 2012

SOS
23.46
(#23 toughest of 32)

FIELD RATINGS
1.7 / 0.5
HOME/ROAD

odds

SUPER BOWL
60-1

NFC
28-1

NFC WEST
+475

2024 stats

	OFFENSE STAT	OFFENSE RANK	DEFENSE STAT	DEFENSE RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.1	18	21.6	11
YARDS PER POINT	15.1	16	15.4	13
PLAYS PER GAME	60.6	24		
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:49	28		
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.6%	21	37.1%	10
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	332.2	14	332.7	14
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	13	5.3	11
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.5	29		
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	95.7	28	120.8	16
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	17	4.6	23
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.9	7		
COMPLETION %	69.7%	5	65.2%	16
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	236.5	8	211.9	11
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.4	13	6.3	7
TURNOVERS	1.4	24	1.1	16

preview

STEVE MAKINEN POWER RATINGS **22.5** (#21 of 32)

Year one of the post-Pete Carroll era resulted in a 10-7 season with the Seahawks winning six of their last eight games under first-year head coach Mike Macdonald, but Seattle fell short of a playoff bid.

In year two, the era of Geno Smith, DK Metcalf, and Tyler Lockett now ends. Macdonald upgraded the defense last year — as was expected — but now he must transform the offense with Sam Darnold, who is off his career season last year in Minnesota, but he's also on his fifth team in eight seasons. GM John Schneider brought a Super Bowl (XLVIII) victory to Seattle, but the Seahawks have only one playoff win since 2016, and he is certainly on the hot seat in the Emerald City.

OFFENSE
Geno Smith was dealt to Las Vegas. Darnold enters the fold this season, reuniting with new offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak from their time in San Francisco. Kubiak will certainly want to run the ball more than his predecessor, Ryan Grubb. The Seahawks ranked 28th in rushing offense and hope that heavier volume, plus Kenneth Walker III's health and increased production from Zach Charbonnet will be enough for improvement, but the offensive line has been a revolving door for the past several seasons and remains the biggest question mark on the roster.

Jaxon Smith-Njigba (100 catches, 1130 yards) is now clearly the man in the passing game for Seattle, but the Seahawks are hoping that new signee Cooper Kupp still has something left in the tank at age 32.

DEFENSE
The defensive line is the best unit on the team, with tackles Jarran Reed, Byron Murphy II, and Johnathan Hankins, to go along with ends Leonard Williams and DeMarcus Lawrence.

Derick Hall made a huge improvement at linebacker and had eight sacks (Seattle had 45 as a team; T-8), but could use Uchenna Nwosu on the other side to stay healthy, as he only played 12 games the last two seasons. Ernest Jones mans the inside and was a midseason trade acquisition last year that solidified this group. Devon Witherspoon and Riq Woolen are one of the best corner duos in the game, and Coby Bryant cemented himself at free safety last year. This is the best back four Seattle has had since the "Legion of Boom" days.

OUTLOOK
Seattle was always a solid road team under Carroll, as they went 20-9 in 10 a.m. PT road games, and Macdonald continued that success with a 3-0 mark last year. This year, they have four of them, and the Seahawks make six cross-country trips in total.

The Seahawks could get off to a slow start, as it will take time for a new offense to gel with potentially seven new starters. Darnold showed the ability to play at a high level last year, but was he a one-hit wonder?

The defense will keep them in most games, but the Seahawks may take a step back this year in the first year of this new offense, especially behind an offensive line that has not been upgraded nearly enough.

prediction

UNDER 8.5 WINS