

NFL BETTING GUIDE

VSIN **PRO**



FLUKE OR FOR REAL?

TIPS AND STRATEGIES FOR BETTING THE NFL

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR ALL 32 TEAMS
- EARLY BEST BETS ON PROPS AND FUTURES
- PREDICTIONS FOR 2026 PLAYOFF TEAMS

VSIN

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**ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

photos by USA Today Sports Images

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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 Game • 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
YPTT - Yards per Point • YPR - Yards per Rush

Greetings, all!

The 2026 VSiN NFL Betting Guide is out earlier than ever thanks to the hard work and dedication of everybody here at THE Sports Betting Network. It's never too soon to talk about the upcoming NFL season and we've put that into practice by putting out previews for all 32 teams, several feature articles, and dozens of best bets on futures, props, and awards markets.

Much like football, this project is a complete team effort and I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my Senior Editor Zachary Cohen, Editor Michael Dolan, and Guide Designer Extraordinaire Matt Devine for what they did on this Guide. Our VSiN hosts and contributors deserve thanks as well for putting their thoughts and opinions into this year's Guide, including their picks for division winners and the Super Bowl LXI matchup.

This year, we switched up the format for the team previews, as our analysts asked and answered Three Burning Questions for the 2026 season for all 32 teams. Along with that, we have deep dives into a variety of topics, including:

- Steve Makinen's Key Stats for Predicting Improvement/Decline and his Win Total Projections
- Matt Brown's Analysis of the Offensive Rookie Class
- Josh Appelbaum on How to Use NFL Betting Splits
- Zachary Cohen on Who Will Be This Year's Bears/Patriots
- Adam Burke on Betting Alternate Win Totals and an Update on the NFL's Kickoff Rules

We also have a feature from Fantasy Points football guru John Hansen, host of Prop Points during the football season, with 15 of his favorite season-long player props.

Expect all kinds of football content as we go forward, including our College Football Betting Guide on Monday, August 3 and our NFL "2.0" Betting Guide following the preseason on Monday, August 31.

You can find VSiN on SiriusXM Channel 158, on the [VSiN Watch App](#), on YouTube TV as part of the Sports+ package, on our YouTube page, on radio affiliates and regional sports networks across the country, wherever you get your podcast content, through [VSiN.com](#), and with Best Bets TV on OrkaTV.

Tell your friends, tell your family, tell your colleagues and coworkers, tell anybody who will listen why now is the time to come along for the ride at VSiN!

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2026 SEASON PREDICTIONS

	FEMI ABEBEFE	GILL ALEXANDER	MATT BROWN	STORMY BUONANTONY	ADAM BURKE	KELLEY BYDLON	ZACHARY COHEN	WILL HILL	PAUL HOWARD	JENSEN LEWIS	STEVE MAKINEN	PATRICK MEAGHER	MITCH MOSS	TIM MURRAY	WES REYNOLDS	DAVE ROSS	SCOTT SEIDENBERG	TYLER SHOEMAKER	DUSTIN SWEDELSON	DAVE TULEY	JONATHAN VON TOBEL	NICK WHALEN	MATT YOUMANS
AFC EAST	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Patriots	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Patriots	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Patriots	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills
AFC NORTH	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Bengals	Bengals	Bengals	Bengals
AFC SOUTH	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Jaguars	Jaguars	Texans	Titans	Texans	Texans	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans	Titans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans	Texans	Jaguars	Texans	Texans
AFC WEST	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chargers	Chargers	Broncos	Chargers	Chargers	Broncos	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Broncos	Chiefs	Chiefs	Broncos	Chiefs	Chargers	Chiefs
AFC WILD CARD	Chargers	Patriots	Ravens	Ravens	Broncos	Ravens	Chiefs	Broncos	Broncos	Bills	Ravens	Ravens	Ravens	Chargers	Broncos	Ravens	Chiefs	Bills	Ravens	Chargers	Chargers	Chiefs	Chargers
AFC WILD CARD	Jaguars	Jaguars	Chargers	Broncos	Bills	Patriots	Patriots	Chiefs	Colts	Chiefs	Colts	Jaguars	Texans	Bengals	Chargers	Chiefs	Texans	Bengals	Broncos	Chiefs	Texans	Ravens	Ravens
AFC WILD CARD	Patriots	Broncos	Texans	Chiefs	Bengals	Chiefs	Chargers	Texans	Chiefs	Chargers	Patriots	Chiefs	Chargers	Patriots	Patriots	Broncos	Patriots	Chargers	Chargers	Patriots	Ravens	Patriots	Patriots

NFC EAST	Eagles	Commanders	Eagles	Cowboys	Eagles	Eagles	Cowboys	Cowboys	Eagles	Eagles	Cowboys	Commanders	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Cowboys	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Eagles	Cowboys	Eagles	Cowboys	
NFC NORTH	Vikings	Lions	Bears	Lions	Lions	Lions	Vikings	Lions	Packers	Lions	Lions	Packers	Lions	Packers	Lions	Lions	Bears	Lions	Lions	Lions	Lions	Lions	Lions	
NFC SOUTH	Falcons	Panthers	Bucs	Panthers	Falcons	Saints	Saints	Saints	Bucs	Bucs	Saints	Panthers	Saints	Saints	Panthers	Falcons	Falcons	Bucs	Bucs	Bucs	Falcons	Saints	Falcons	
NFC WEST	Rams	Rams	Rams	49ers	Seahawks	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Seahawks	Rams	Rams	Rams
NFC WILD CARD	49ers	Packers	Seahawks	Rams	Rams	Seahawks	49ers	Vikings	Vikings	Seahawks	Seahawks	Seahawks	Seahawks	Lions	49ers	Seahawks	Vikings	Seahawks	49ers	Rams	Seahawks	Seahawks	Seahawks	
NFC WILD CARD	Seahawks	Seahawks	Cowboys	Seahawks	Bears	Bears	Bears	Eagles	Lions	49ers	Packers	Bears	49ers	49ers	Seahawks	49ers	Seahawks	Packers	Seahawks	Bears	Eagles	49ers	49ers	
NFC WILD CARD	Cowboys	49ers	Lions	Vikings	Commanders	Packers	Eagles	Packers	Cowboys	Packers	Eagles	Cowboys	Vikings	Seahawks	Packers	Packers	49ers	Cowboys	Giants	Cowboys	Packers	Vikings	Eagles	

AFC CHAMPION	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Ravens	Bills	Bills	Chargers	Broncos	Ravens	Bills	Ravens	Chiefs	Chiefs	Texans	Bills	Bills	Ravens	Bengals	Bills	Bengals	Bills	Chiefs
NFC CHAMPION	Eagles	Rams	Rams	Lions	Rams	Rams	Rams	Rams	Eagles	Rams	Lions	Rams	Lions	Packers	49ers	Cowboys	Rams	Rams	Rams	Lions	Rams	Rams	Rams

SUPER BOWL LXI	Eagles	Rams	Rams	Bills	Ravens	Rams	Bills	Rams	Eagles	Rams	Bills	Rams	Lions	Chiefs	49ers	Bills	Rams	Rams	Rams	Lions	Bengals	Rams	Rams
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VSIN TEAM AND PROP

BEST BETS

STEVE MAKINEN

CINCINNATI OVER 9.5 WINS -150

There is a lot of love right now with the Baltimore Ravens, who are somewhat of a heavy favorite to win the AFC North. Plus, they have the highest win total prop of any team in the league. I don't see how they have such upside after missing the playoffs last season however, particularly with a new rookie head coach. Instead, I think it is the Bengals that have the most room for growth, especially if they can get a full season out of QB Joe Burrow. The offense is set and should be for the foreseeable future with Burrow, WR's Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins, and RB Chase Brown forming a talented nucleus at the skill positions. In the draft this year, they gave up their top pick to secure nose tackle Dexter Lawrence from the Giants, so that addition alone should have immediate impact. The rest of the draft was heavily defensive oriented, and for obvious reasons. This is a franchise that I believe has rightfully stayed the course with most of its personnel. Plus, they fit into some very good improvement systems I like: 1) 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 32 teams were worse the next season, and the average win improvement was about 2.6 per season. 2) There is a strong improvement potential for teams that won fewer OR EQUAL games than the prior season in three straight seasons. Since '97, there have been 68 such teams and only 16 got worse. The average improvement for the other 52 was 3.6 wins per season! I like OVER the win total and also wouldn't mind any AFC North title wagers either.

CHICAGO UNDER 9.5 WINS -120

The Bears made a huge jump last season under first year head coach Ben Johnson, much of which can be attributed to the growth of QB Caleb Williams. However, in my experience with anything NFL betting from season to season, what goes up fast, typically can fall just as fast. In fact, only five of the L54 teams since '98 that won 6+ more games than the prior season improved in the follow up campaign, with an average season win DROP of 3.4 from the other 49 teams. If Chicago were to be an average team on this system, they would drop to 7.6 wins. Now you can argue that the system and many of the key players are young and should only get better, but much of what this team accomplished in 2025 can also be attributed to good old-fashioned luck, with a lot of close wins in comeback fashion and benefitting from turnovers. The defense, which was wildly inconsistent last year despite a division title, has many concerns, mostly about the defensive line, as that group ranked in the bottom third of the league in sacks and hasn't improved noticeably in the offseason. This has the looks of a team that could find itself in a lot of shootouts, again. Looking at recent history, 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 L27 seasons, only five of the 35 teams were better the next season, and the average win drop off was 3.1 per season, including Washington's 7-win drop a year ago. Also, 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 104 teams since 2009, 70 of them had won-lost-records that DECLINED, by an average of 13% outright AND against the spread. Furthermore, of the 94 that reached the playoffs, 40 failed to do so the follow-up season, including five teams last year. Luck tends to turn quickly in the NFL, Chicago could find that out the hard way.

NEW ORLEANS OVER 7.5 WINS -120

I believe the Saints are being judged by a full body of work rather than a specific part of the '25 season that would figure to represent them more for the future. In 2025 under first year head coach Kellen Moore, they were 1-8 in the first nine games and 5-3 in the last eight. What they got from rookie QB Tyler Shough late in the season should have fans optimistic for this season and beyond. Plus, after the spring NFL draft, Moore's offense is

probably in even better shape. No. 8 pick WR Jordyn Tyson was looked at as perhaps the premiere playmaker in the draft when healthy. He'll join free agent addition RB Travis Etienne in what should provide for a sizable upgrade for the unit. The main transition system I am looking at for New Orleans for '26 reads as follows: Since '00, there have been 78 teams that somehow won less than 42% of their games despite allowing 23 or less points per game in a season. In the follow up season, 51 of these teams, or 65.4% of them, improved in the win column, and the average improvement of that group was 3.65 wins per year! Chicago was the only qualifier last year and improved by six wins! In other words, the Saints defense was pretty good last season already. The offense has the looks of one that could be much better. Perhaps the talent and coaching are finally in place to take a big step forward this season.

MATT YOUMANS

CHIEFS TO WIN AFC WEST (+180) AND SUPER BOWL (15-1)

It's not easy to do, which is why most bettors don't do it, but one of the best ways to handicap the NFL is to bet the opposite of what we've seen most recently. In other words, look to bet on teams that were bad last week or last year and look to bet against teams that were great last week or last year. The last memories we have of the Chiefs are of Patrick Mahomes going down with a serious injury and the season ending in a 6-11 disaster. Mahomes is ahead of schedule with his knee rehab and the quarterback will be ready to lead a bounce-back season. Kansas City executed an excellent offseason through the draft and free agency. Super Bowl MVP Kenneth Walker will improve what was the 25th-ranked rushing offense. The defense should be just as strong as last year when coordinator Steve Spagnuolo's unit ranked sixth in scoring (19.3 PPG). In his first 12 years as Chiefs coach, Andy Reid made the playoffs 11 times. When a heavyweight champ gets knocked down, he doesn't stay down. I faded Kansas City with preseason bets a year ago and picked Denver to win the division. This is a buy-low opportunity. The Chiefs were -120 to win the AFC West last summer and are getting +180 now. KC had its streak of division titles stopped at nine. This team is highly motivated and not stopping until it gets to a Super Bowl matchup against the Rams.

BILLS TO WIN AFC EAST (-125)

The Patriots were my pick to win the division last year and they took advantage of a soft schedule to go 14-3 and finish two games up on the Bills. It's a two-horse race again. Not only is New England drawing a tougher schedule, the Super Bowl loser hangover has already started to kick in with coach Mike Vrabel's off-field scandal. Bills quarterback Josh Allen turned 30 in May and is not yet in the now-or-never phase of his career, but he's getting close and senses the urgency. The coaching switch from Sean McDermott to Joe Brady should be a boost. Buffalo's defense is a concern, yet Allen can overcome that and get revenge on the Patriots.

BENGALS TO WIN AFC NORTH (+200)

An injury to quarterback Joe Burrow, who was limited to eight games, wrecked Cincinnati last season. In 2024, Burrow led the league in passing yards (4,918) and touchdowns (43) while the Bengals ranked sixth in scoring (27.8 PPG). The other side of the ball has been a big problem, but Cincinnati made an attempt to get better by trading for Pro Bowl defensive tackle Dexter Lawrence. "You go back and watch what I said before the 2019 season at LSU," Burrow recently said in reference to his record-setting college season and the Tigers' national title team. "I feel very similarly about this team. I feel like there's so much greatness we'll be able to achieve." I rarely buy the hype, but do believe Burrow in this case, and I'm selling the Steelers as contenders. This division is another two-horse race with the Ravens as the favorites.

LIONS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+180)

The top candidate for a team to go from worst to first in a division is Detroit, which finished 9-8 and 2-4 in the NFC North. The Bears are due for some regression, the Packers are a mystery team that became a mess at the end of last season, and the Vikings' quarterback forecast is cloudy. Start with the Lions' last-place schedule, which ranks 27th by the average projected DVOA of opponents and includes the Cardinals, Giants, Jets, Saints and Titans. The Lions' luck seemingly has to improve after Detroit suffered the most injuries of any defense in the NFL. Jared Goff was still good last season, completing 68% of his passes for 4,564 yards and 34 touchdowns with eight interceptions. Not that long ago (January 28,

2024 to be exact), Goff and coach Dan Campbell had the Lions sniffing a Super Bowl trip before blowing a 17-point halftime lead in the NFC championship at San Francisco.

CARDINALS UNDER 4.5 WINS (-145)

New coach Mike LaFleur landed what is arguably the least desired top job in the NFL. Arizona went 0-6 in the league's toughest division last year and seems likely to repeat that feat. The Cardinals concluded last season on a nine-game losing streak to finish 3-14, and during the streak the defense allowed 35.2 points per game to rank last in the league. While the Cardinals and Browns have the worst quarterback depth charts in the league, Arizona does have at least one player worth watching — former Notre Dame running back Jeremiyah Love, the No. 3 overall pick. Aside from home games against the Jets and Raiders in late December, the Cardinals can't circle any other games on the schedule as likely wins. The first 13 games are brutal. The price to bet Under 4.5 is -145 at Circa Sports and much higher (-190) at DraftKings.

CHARGERS OVER 9.5 WINS (-130)

Jim Harbaugh posted 11-6 records in each of his first two years as coach and this could be his best team if the Chargers can avoid getting cursed with more bad injury luck. Harbaugh's hiring of Mike McDaniel as offensive coordinator is an upgrade, and the offensive line looks strong in front of quarterback Justin Herbert. This is the most challenging schedule Harbaugh has faced in three years, and I favor the Chiefs to win the AFC West, but the Chargers' offense should be explosive and the result should be double-digit wins again.

DAVE TULEY

LIONS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (18-1)

Last year, my Super Bowl value play was on the Detroit Lions at around 11-1, among the betting favorites, but I felt they were still a value bet as they had built a championship-caliber team and looked ready to take the next step. I couldn't have been more wrong as they ended up going 9-8 and didn't even make the playoffs. The losses of offensive coordinator Ben Johnson and defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn to head coach jobs was too much to overcome for head coach Dan Campbell. However, oftentimes in horse racing, I'll be following a promising young colt or filly and bet them to pull a big upset in a major race. Even if they lose, I usually stick with them in subsequent races because I just figure I was on them too early but I've hit enough of these to trust the process. The Lions look like that to me. They still have talent on both sides of the ball, and hopefully Campbell learned from last year and gets the team back on track. And last year's setback gets us a better price at 18-1 (Circa Sports).

LIONS OVER 10.5 WINS (-140) AND WIN NFC NORTH (+165)

Since I'm picking the Lions to win the Super Bowl, I also have to like the Over 10.5 for their season win total and odds to win the NFC North as I'm counting on them contending for the NFC's No. 1 seed and first-round bye as the easiest path. It's still a tough division, but the Lions won 12 games three years ago, and 15 two years ago, and should certainly improve on last year's nine wins to get back to 11 to win the NFC North (and our bet).

CHICAGO BEARS OVER 9.5 WINS (+115)

Even though the Bears are in the same division as the Lions, I also like their Over 9.5 season win total, especially at plus-money odds. The Bears won 11 games last year, but the oddsmakers went ahead and put their O/U at 9.5 and the market has made the Under the favorite between -130 and -135 at Vegas sportsbooks. The offense proved it can come from behind and should be able to do better early in games, especially against weaker teams.

NFL WEEK 1: BROWNS +7.5 AT JAGUARS, BUCCANEERS +3.5 AT BENGALS, CARDINALS +10.5 AT CHARGERS, DOLPHINS +3.5 AT RAIDERS

After the Week 1 schedule came out in May, I did a "Tuley's Takes" column with four bets to make even though the season was four months away. For my reasons on each pick, you can go back and read that column, but the common thread is these are lines that are all half a point above key numbers and I don't expect these to be around after Labor Day. As of deadline for this guide, all were still available. The Cardinals even went up to +11, and I plan to play them again there.

AARON MOORE

WILL ANDERSON JR. TO WIN DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (+750)



This is a wager based on the idea that Aaron Donald will come back to play in Los Angeles and take a heavy dose of showtime away from Myles Garrett. If Donald plays, the overall semblance of defensive talent for the Rams will ding Garrett's status as a one-man wrecking crew. That reputation benefitted him greatly with voters in Cleveland.

MIKE EVANS UNDER 924.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-110)

The algorithm kicked out a total for the books that is more representative of a wide receiver serving as the foundation of an offense, not his current status of running routes in a Kyle Shanahan system that values numerous downfield options. Evans will reach his 33rd birthday early in the season and that age has proven to be a "cliff year" for elite WRs who commonly face a steep dive in their production.

KENYON SADIQ OVER 450.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-110)

Last season, bookmakers posted a similar total for then rookie TE Tyler Warren. That proved to be way too low and I think the scenario will play out again this year for Sadiq with the Jets. The former Oregon stud will do a lot of work out of the slot and that should provide a number of underneath targets from Geno Smith, who will likely throw plenty of fourth quarter dump-offs.

The Jets have notable downfield targets in Garrett Wilson and AD Mitchell, but keep in mind that their new offensive coordinator Frank Reich tends to favor multiple TE sets.

Reports are that Sadiq should be ready for training camp after dealing with offseason hernia surgery.

JEREMIAH LOVE UNDER 900.5 RUSH YARDS (-110)

An immediate reaction for a number of public NFL bettors will be to take the Over on a high-profile draft pick (especially one coming from a college with a large fan base such as Notre Dame). But eliminate his status as the third overall pick and conceptualize a total contingent on a first time head coach steering a team expected to win just four games.

Yes, Ashton Jeanty exceeded this total last season, but he was playing for Pete Carroll on a team that was supposed to make a playoff push. Mike LaFleur is in a much different situation, leading a franchise looking to acquire even more high picks next year for Arizona's rebuild. This all leads to Love not being overworked during his rookie campaign.

TYLER SHOUGH UNDER 3649.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

This total is basically derived from the 17-game average he had as a rookie last year playing in 11 contests. Shough's 2,384 passing yards last year was boosted considerably by the final three games against non-playoff teams (Jets, Titans and Falcons). Last season, Kellen Moore had the luxury of giving his new QB a tryout for a team far from postseason consideration. Things will be very different with the Saints having the second-easiest strength of schedule in the league and plans to be one of the "teams in the hunt."

With the Saints trending towards winning more games, there should be a reduction in fourth quarter yards for Shough.

Along the same lines of expecting a big jump from the Saints, I also played Kellen Moore (12-1) as Coach of the Year.

PAULY HOWARD

BROWNS UNDER 5.5 WINS

How long will Watson play? In what should be his final season in Cleveland, he doesn't have enough weapons — or skills — to make this offense look good. Maybe we'll see Sanders more, but that wouldn't be a good thing either. After trading the DPOY, this team needs to hit big in the draft next year.

GIANTS UNDER 7.5 WINS

Every year this team seems to start 1-6 with no chance of doing anything. I loved the draft, and the Harbaugh hire, but the division is stacked and the schedule is brutal again. A big question is, can Dart stay healthy all year? I say no.





DAVE ROSS

ATLANTA OVER 6.5 WINS (-130) & ALT OVER 7.5 WINS (+120)

I can't stress how much of a coaching upgrade has been made here. Stefanski knows how to run an offense. It's even more remarkable he was a two-time Coach of the Year in *checks notes* CLEVELAND.

Tua will have a chip on his shoulder and I love when I see teams where the win total is QB independent. I don't even care if it's Tua or Penix Jr. As long as they don't have to see a third stringer, this team will soar Over 6.5/7.5.

I also think they are very live at +400 to win the division. The other three teams are very, very average, making this a pretty price point to grab pre-season.

This defense is also young and talented. Just keep them out of trouble with the law and available on Sundays. They have some real difference-makers.

With a new sheriff in town, this team should be ready to grow up — on and off the field.

DOLPHINS OVER 4.5 WINS (+105)

I know, I know. How?

I'm not sold that the Jets will be much better, and I think the Pats come back to the pack. Plus, even when the Fins are terrible, they traditionally give the Bills fits. Well, if they can sneak two wins in the division, this bet gets home.

Green Bay South, from the new GM to HC, should see a drastic improvement. Malik Willis really shined every time he got playing time in GB, and at one point people were wondering out loud if he was an upgrade over Jordan Love. I wouldn't go that far, but you don't have to in order to hop Over that win total.

You'll see some fight out of The Fish this year.

TENNESSEE TITANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+800)

Here's your shocker: I LOVE what the Titans have done with the coaching staff, and I think you can deduce how much value I put on coaching changes with these picks.

Saleh may have failed the first time around, but that was with the Jets. He'll be much more confident and prepared for HC opportunity number 2. I also love the hiring of Brian Daboll for OC. This football team will be tough, and they'll weed out the softies. You have to be ready to strap up the chinstrap if you want to play for these guys, and that is exactly what Tennessee needs.

You know who loves all of that? Cam Ward. This is an old soul in a young man's body. He's tough as nails and itching to win.



Overall, this team has talent. Protect Ward and he's gonna take a massive leap in Year 2.

Give me failed coaches with something to prove. Give me toughness. Give me a QB that WANTS to be coached hard.

I'm very excited for their prospects, especially in an average — at best — division. This price point won't last long once the rest of the football world catches on.

KELLEY BYDLON

BILLS WIN AFC EAST (-125 AT DRAFTKINGS/BOYD)

I'm not sure a change at head coach will fix everything in Buffalo, but I don't think it can hurt either.

After another early exit from the playoffs, the Bills made the move to fire HC Sean McDermott and bump OC Joe Brady up. With Josh Allen and many of the familiar faces back, the offense should once again be a top-five unit in the NFL (No. 3 offense at ProFootballFocus.com in 2025). Allen is the single most valuable player in the NFL, not only because of his elite talent, but also because of his availability. He has started 139 consecutive games at this point. That always gives this team a very high floor.

On the defensive side of the ball, there will be big changes. Jim Leonhard comes in to run the defense and he will be making big scheme changes switching up the unit to a 3-4. This was a bottom-third defense in the NFL last season, so it's hard to argue with switching it up.

As we look at the rest of the division, I do expect the Patriots to be good, but they will play a much tougher schedule than a season ago. Both the Pats and Bills look like they will face average schedules based off win totals. Then there's the Jets and Dolphins, who are expected to have two of the worst records in the league. So to me, this is basically a matchbet against the Pats. With the high floor the Allen-led Bills have, the -125 division price is an easy look for me.

BROWNS UNDER 6.5 WINS (-160 AT DRAFTKINGS)

A new head coach in Todd Monken, Myles Garrett gone, a whole new offensive line, a quarterback competition between Deshaun Watson, who hasn't played in nearly two years, and Shedeur Sanders...oh, and it's a division with Lamar Jackson, Joe Burrow, and I guess Aaron Rodgers....

Yeah, sorry, Cleveland, but I'm going Under on the win total.



MITCH MOSS

LIONS OVER 10.5 WINS (-110) & WIN NFC NORTH (+180)

Detroit still has one of the best rosters in the league. They also have the easiest schedule in the NFL. I LOVE the Ben Johnson/Caleb Williams combo in Chicago, BUT they're the number one negative regression candidate in football entering 2026. I'm also a big fan of the talent in Minnesota, but they are not as good as Detroit — especially at QB. The Packers are a wild card entering the season. I have too many questions about the team to trust them.

ZACHARY COHEN

I wrote up the NFC East for this guide, so you'll see some predictions from me there. However, the only win totals I actually took in that division were Cowboys Over 9.5 Wins (+110) and Commanders Over 7.5 Wins (-115). I also took all four of the candidates I mentioned in my MVP column: Dak Prescott (14-1), Jayden Daniels (25-1 - 0.5 units), Brock Purdy (22-1 - 0.5 units), and Kyler Murray (70-1 - 0.25 units). Then, with the teams I mentioned in my other feature, I went Over 7.5 Wins (-125 - 1.5 units) with the Saints, while also playing them to win the NFC South (+280 - 0.5 units). I also went Over 6.5 Wins (-105) with the Titans.

The rest of my futures are as follows:



VIKINGS OVER 8.5 WINS (-110 - 3 UNITS), VIKINGS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+525) AND VIKINGS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (50-1 - 0.25 UNITS)

I was all over the Vikings in last year's guide, expecting JJ McCarthy to play well enough in Kevin O'Connell's offense. Clearly, that didn't end up happening. However, poor health along the offensive line didn't help. This year, Minnesota is expected to be in better shape up front. That should lead to better play at the quarterback position, where it seems Kyler Murray is ready to inject his dual-threat skill set into the equation.

As long as Murray can avoid costly interceptions, this Minnesota offense should be great. Not only will the line be better but Murray's legs take some pressure off the group. Murray also happens to have an elite group of weapons in Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison, Jauan Jennings, and T.J. Hockenson. There's simply a lot suggesting the Vikings offense is set to take a major step forward. Well, given how good Minnesota's defense has been under Brian Flores, that should be enough for this team to roll.

I just strongly believe that last year was a fluke. I'm expecting Murray to play well for the Vikings, and I think he can take the team to new heights.

49ERS OVER 9.5 WINS (-146 - 1.5 UNITS) & 49ERS TO WIN SUPER BOWL (19-1 - 0.5 UNITS)

San Francisco arguably plays in the toughest division in football. However, when the 49ers are healthy, they're as good as anyone. And heading into this season, it sure seems like they're healthy.

San Francisco does have to prove that it can return to top-10 status defensively, and maybe doing so without Saleh won't be easy. But Raheem Morris has been a great defensive coordinator throughout his career, and the 49ers reloaded on defense in the offseason — with the acquisition of Osa Odighizuwa being massive.

This team could also have the best offense in football. San Francisco still has one of the game's brightest minds calling the shots, with Kyle Shanahan back on the sidelines. Brock Purdy, Christian McCaffrey, Ricky Pearsall, and George Kittle are also back from last year's team, and the 49ers weren't complacent after the season. They signed star wideout Mike Evans, while also using the 33rd overall pick in the 2026 NFL Draft on De'Zhaun Stribling — and a third-round pick on running back Kaelon Black. The acquisition of Christian Kirk could also prove to be sneaky-important.

There's a chance this San Francisco team is unstoppable, so better luck in the health department could bring the 49ers back to the Super Bowl. I genuinely think the Vikings and 49ers will be right there with the Rams when all is said and done.

JOSH APPELBAUM

TEXANS OVER 9.5 WINS (-125 AT DRAFTKINGS)

Houston's win total has remained stagnant at 9.5 this offseason but a closer look at the juice shows liability on the Over, as the price has increased from Over 9.5 (-115) to Over 9.5 (-125). This signals smart money leaning toward 10 wins or more as DraftKings is forcing bettors to pay a more expensive price than what it opened at.

The Texans have won at least 10 games in all three seasons under head coach DeMeco Ryans, going 10-7 in 2023, 10-7 in 2024 and 12-5 last season.

Houston plays in a weak division and enjoys the seventh easiest strength of schedule based on their opponent's win percentage from last season (0.474).

The Texans continue to boast a ferocious defense (2nd in the NFL allowing only 17.3 PPG last season) that returns nearly every starter from last year while also adding safety Reed Blankenship in free agency to shore up the defensive backfield. Houston's offense should also improve with the return of injured WR Tank Dell and addition of RB David Montgomery.

As bad as C.J. Stroud looked in the playoffs (throwing four interceptions in the Divisional Round loss to the Patriots), he is an experienced starter entering his fourth season and will surely be motivated to produce in a contract year.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

WEEK 1 - NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS +4.5 VS SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

The Seahawks are the defending champs, so unsurprisingly this line is currently shaded a bit towards them. The initial T Shoe Index ratings make this game closer to Seahawks -3, so I'll happily take a key number (4) plus the hook here. From a trends standpoint, since 2019, Week 1 underdogs are 56.8% ATS, compared to 51.1% ATS for underdogs in all other regular season weeks. Road underdogs have been even better in that sample at 36-25 ATS (59.0%).

GILL ALEXANDER

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS OVER 10.5 WINS

Last season, the San Francisco 49ers finished the regular season with a 12-5 record before beating the Eagles in the Wild Card Round. They then got hammered by the eventual Super Bowl champion Seahawks in the Division Round after essentially spotting Seattle a 17-0 lead by giving up an opening kickoff return for a TD, calling a poorly conceived fourth and short fullback sweep in their own territory, and coughing the ball up on their side of the field, as well.

Consensus opinion is that they're on a tier below their division rival Rams and Seahawks. And maybe they are. But the 49ers put together that season while their six highest-paid players, all either All-Pro or Pro Bowlers, if not future Hall of Famers — Brock Purdy, Nick Bosa, Brandon Aiyuk, Trent Williams, Fred Warner, and George Kittle — combined to miss 64 games, paving the way for the Niners to have the most missed games due to injury by any playoff team. Electromagnetic force substations aside, this is unlikely to repeat.

With everyone above coming back, with the exception presumably of Aiyuk, a great core of young defensive players, including Mykel Williams, Upton Stout and a solid acquisition in Osa Odighizuwa, and on

offense, nice pickups of Christian Kirk and Mike Evans to replace exiting wideouts, I think the Niners are actually poised to contend for the NFC West crown. But this bet doesn't require them to do so for it to cash.

The Niners go from the 11th hardest schedule in football based on preflap season win totals last year to the eighth easiest in 2026-27.

And for the Purdy naysayers, an NFL-record 58% of his passes on third and fourth down converted first downs last year. And on those downs, he averaged an NFL-low 2.5 YAC per completion. That kind of accuracy is sustainable.

NICK WHALEN

SAINTS OVER 7.5 WINS

The NFC South may be the most unpredictable division in the NFL, and while I still view Tampa Bay as the safest of the four teams, I can't help but be impressed by the growth we saw from the Saints over the second half of last season. Working with a rookie quarterback and limited pieces, Kellen Moore piloted this team to six wins after a 1-8 start. With a year of growth for Tyler Shough — plus the additions of Jordyn Tyson and Travis Etienne — New Orleans should have a more-potent offense this season, while the defense quietly finished 2025 in the top-10 in EPA. On top of that, the Saints project to have one of the league's most-favorable schedules, drawing winnable out-of-division matchups against the Raiders, Giants, Steelers, Browns and Cardinals.

LIONS TO WIN THE NFC NORTH

After back-to-back double-digit-win seasons, the Lions took a major step back in 2025, finishing 9-8 and sliding all the way to the bottom of one of the NFL's most competitive divisions. The NFC North could be even better this season, but I see Detroit as an obvious bounceback team — partially because it projects to have arguably the easiest schedule in the NFL. While six matchups against Minnesota, Chicago and Green Bay will be difficult, the Lions get the Cardinals, Titans and Giants as their non-rotation games. Meanwhile, the Packers get the Rams, Texans and Cowboys, while the Bears get the Seahawks, Jaguars and Eagles.

VIKINGS TO MAKE THE PLAYOFFS

While I can't quite get there on Minnesota to win the NFC North, I do think +510 is a juicy enough price that it could be worth a sprinkle. Instead, though, we'll settle on another plus-money payout for Minnesota to find its way into a loaded NFC field via a wild card spot. For the most part, last season felt like a disaster for the Vikings, who had some of the worst QB play in the NFL between Carson Wentz and JJ McCarthy. And yet, Minnesota found its way to nine wins, despite a bottom-five offense in EPA and yards per play. It's very possible that I'm too high on Kyler Murray, but I loved the decision to buy low on a quarterback whose baseline — and ceiling — is significantly higher than what the Vikings dealt with last season.

EMEKA EGBUKA OVER 874.5 RECEIVING YARDS

Egbuka's production fell off over the second half of last season, as did the entire Bucs' offense, but I'm willing to buy in on what we saw over the first nine games, when the rookie racked up 677 receiving yards on 40 catches (16.9 YPC) and six touchdowns. It's worth noting that a hamstring injury sapped some of his explosiveness down the stretch, while the return of Mike Evans from his own injury took away some opportunities over the final month. Obviously, Evans is out of the picture, and while the Bucs still have viable secondary pass-catchers, Egbuka is now the clear No. 1 option for Baker Mayfield. As long as he stays relatively healthy, I love Egbuka's chances to go well over this number. Even if he were to miss, say, three games, he'd still only need to average about 62 yards per game to hit 875 yards. That's less than what Wan'Dale Robinson averaged (63.4) a year ago.



JENSEN LEWIS

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS TO WIN AFC EAST (+120)

After reaching the Super Bowl in 2025, the Patriots made arguably the biggest offseason move on offense by acquiring true No. 1 wide receiver A.J. Brown. It instantaneously gives quarterback Drake Maye the go-to downfield threat he sorely lacked last season and upgrades the weakest position on the roster. The returning core talent and coaching staff give them a great chance to repeat as AFC East champs, even with the Bills garnering lots of the offseason hype. The schedule is tougher this time around, but Mike Vrabel's defensive identity remains a strength that's undeniable. There's true value at a plus-money price in taking the Patriots to return to the top of this division, especially with it being such a contrarian play.

DENVER BRONCOS TO WIN AFC WEST (+225)

Perhaps one of the best value plays in the division winner market, Denver is my choice to repeat as AFC West champions. I'm here for the critics saying last year's run can't be duplicated too. The Broncos are flying under the radar, even after adding wide receiver Jaylen Waddle. If they can remain healthy in the backfield with the dynamic duo of J.K. Dobbins and RJ Harvey, a healthy Bo Nix will have weapons galore to attack with. The questions surrounding this division are important to factor in: Can the Chiefs really bounce back? Will the Chargers finally stay healthy on the offensive line? I'd rather invest in Denver's roster continuity, elite defense and Sean Payton's coaching edge to ride the Broncos back to the best in the West.

LOS ANGELES RAMS TO WIN NFC WEST (+100) & WIN NFC (+305)

Los Angeles went "all-in" this offseason with the blockbuster additions of Myles Garrett, Trent McDuffie and Jaylen Watson, making an already lethal defense into elite, Super Bowl-favorite status. Future Hall of Famer Matthew Stafford remains exceptionally effective in Sean McVay's offense and will operate as high-octane an offense there is in the NFL. The defending champion Seahawks will certainly provide resistance, as will the 49ers if they can remain healthy, but neither squad feels like they can attain the Rams' lofty ceiling. Even money or better to win the NFC West and anything over +300 to win the conference feels as solid a preseason investment that can be made anywhere in the sport.

MYLES GARRETT TO WIN DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (+450)

How ideal is this situation for the best defensive player in the league? The Rams already are a juggernaut defensive unit and he's now the anchor of it. Garrett is arguably the most disruptive edge rusher in the sport. Going from Cleveland to Los Angeles parabolically increases his skillset, due to a defensive scheme that maximizes his strengths of disciplined front-seven play, excellent pressure looks and an avalanche of one-on-one chances. Historically, the DPOY winner generates a high amount of sacks and negative plays. That's basically Garrett this year in a nutshell: a chaos creator on every snap, leading one of the best defenses in the NFL.

WILL HILL

BILLS TO WIN AFC EAST (-125)

This was a popular bet last year despite being over twice the price at nearly -300. Those bets didn't get home, of course, as the upstart Patriots went 14-3 and won the division. However, the Patriots go from having a historically easy schedule last year to now a gauntlet of a slate to deal with this year. The Patriots Under their win total or to miss the playoffs are tempting bets as well, but in a two-horse race, I will trust Josh Allen and the Bills to beat out a Patriots' team dealing with plenty of obstacles. The Super Bowl hangover is real, and the off-field issues of Mike Vrabel can't be viewed as a positive either. These -125 odds are cheap for the Bills to re-capture the AFC East.

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

NICK BONITTO TO WIN DEFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (14-1)

DPOY is a sack-volume award, and no defense in football has a better runway to manufacture sacks than Denver. My NFL Trench Report ranks the Broncos the #1 sack environment in the league: a pass-rush unit that graded top 3 in 2025, now pointed at the weakest slate of opposing pass protection any team

will face. Bonitto has been consistent the last two seasons, with 13.5 and 14 sacks respectively, and it's probably going to take 15+ to win this award. But as the explosive element of the Denver rush, being fed below-average offensive lines week after week, the counting stats spike — exactly the profile that turns 14-1 into value rather than a dart throw.

SAQUON BARKLEY RUSHING YARDS LEADER (10-1)

You already know the talent, you already know the team. But the schedule adds the tailwind: Philadelphia draws the fourth-easiest run-defense slate in my 2026 Trench Report, and Barkley runs behind a line that grades above average in run blocking. Proven workhorse, plus soft fronts, plus a team built to run when it's winning is the cleanest path to a yardage crown. At 10-1, you're getting a double-digit price on a back whose floor is "league leader" in the right matchups. Kyler Murray To Win Comeback Player of the Year (+600) The case is all about the landing spot. Minnesota hands Murray the easiest schedule against the pass rush in the entire league (according to my Trench Report) — the cleanest pocket any QB will operate in this season — plus the #2-softest run-defense slate to keep the offense balanced and on schedule. For a quarterback engineering a bounce-back, facing the league's weakest pass rushes every week, inside a QB-friendly scheme with a QB guru coach and elite WR around him, is about as soft a runway as you can draw. The +600 on a healthy Murray in that environment is a live number.

DUSTIN SWEDELSON

NEW YORK GIANTS OVER 7.5 WINS (-130)

Since Tom Coughlin was forced to step down after the 2016 season, the Giants have been an unserious, stubborn and poorly run organization. Seemingly, for the first time since that golden era, New York has a leader in the locker room with credibility and hardware to get this organization back on track in John Harbaugh.

Harbaugh's track record is so impressive that it would be embarrassing to even compare him to this recent run of Giants coaches of Ben McAdoo, Pat Shurmur, Joe Judge and Brian Daboll. Plain and simply, he's a winner. He won Year 1 in Baltimore, going 11-5 and losing in the AFC title game. And in 18 seasons, he averaged 10 wins with the Ravens, made the postseason 12 times, and won one Super Bowl ring. The floor has been raised in New York.

The roster has also been vastly improved. Jaxson Dart returns after a promising rookie season where he didn't have much help due to injuries down the stretch. The keys will be stud WR Malik Nabers and battering ram RB Cam Skattebo returning from injuries and giving Dart some dynamic playmakers. The addition of Isaiah Likely from Baltimore should give Dart a clear #2 weapon and a difficult mismatch in the middle of the field. And if Calvin Austin or Darnell Mooney can add another speed element to this offense, they could be a really solid unit with upside.

While people will cry that trading Dexter Lawrence is a big issue for their run defense, I think it's worth noting that they had the second worst run defense in the league with him on the roster last year. They also replaced him with a couple consummate professionals in DJ Reader and Shelby Harris. The pass rush got stronger with the drafting of Arvell Reese to go with Brian Burnes, Abdul Carter and Kayvon Thibodeaux. And the signing of Greg Newsome at CB filled a major need for this team.

Combine all of that with the Giants going from the hardest schedule in 2025 to the 16th schedule and this team should be able to double last year's win output of four wins. They'll just need to take care of business in the gimme games against Tennessee, Arizona and Cleveland, and they should benefit from hosting the Saints and Jaguars (in late November).

In some ways this reminds of last year in New England:

- Veteran head coach comes in
- Second year QB
- Coming off a four-win season

I see no reason why they can't win 9-10 games and possibly make the playoffs.

WES REYNOLDS

HOUSTON TEXANS TO WIN AFC SOUTH (+140 AT FANATICS)

Houston's two-year run as division champs ended last year, but they still went 12-5 and won a road playoff game despite CJ Stroud having a disappointing season. This year, Stroud gets more help as WR Tank Dell returns from a knee injury and RB David Montgomery comes in from Detroit to give the Texans an every-down back who can also be a threat in the passing game. Wyatt Teller and Braden Smith were also added via free agency to bolster the offensive line. Not much needs to be said about the defense considering they were No. 2 in the league last year and could be even better with the addition of Reed Blankenship at safety from Philadelphia and Kayden McDonald, who was arguably the best run-stopper in the 2026 draft.

Meanwhile, Jacksonville has to play a first-place schedule and goes eight weeks (Weeks 4-11) with only one true home game. Indianapolis should have Daniel Jones back from an Achilles injury, but he started to show regression against better competition even before the injury. Tennessee should be better with an improved coaching staff and the continued development of Cam Ward, but it is a big ask to go worst to first for this group that is still a bit short on overall talent.

MATTHEW STAFFORD UNDER 30.5 PASSING TDS (-115 AT DRAFTKINGS)

It is rare to have a career-high in anything during your 17th season in the NFL, but that is what Stafford did last year throwing for 46 touchdown passes and having the highest Passer Rating of his career. At 38 years old, he signed a one-year extension back in May, so this could be his last season and the Rams are clearly all in on getting back to another Super Bowl in its home SoFi Stadium.

While Stafford still has the dynamic duo of Puka Nakua and Davante Adams at receiver, the rest of the depth chart is very young and inexperienced. Kyren Williams is also just 25 and in his prime at running back and may be asked to shoulder more of the load offensively especially when they have leads due to the improved defense.

Aside from the acquisition of Defensive Player of the Year Myles Garrett, the Rams also traded for Trent McDuffie and then made him the highest-paid defensive back (four years, \$124M) in NFL history. McDuffie was not the only corner acquired from Kansas City as his running mate Jaylen Watson also signed.

The Rams will still have a high-octane offense, but might not find themselves in as many shootouts as last season due to a better defense and perhaps some more cautious playcalling to keep Stafford healthy for another Super Bowl run.

STORMY BUONANTONY

LIONS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+180) & OVER 10.5 WINS (-110)

Every year we see at least one team go from worst in the division to first and Detroit is the most obvious such candidate. Last year was a season of change with both coordinators Ben Johnson and Aaron Glenn moving on to head coaching opportunities, and after having the most injured defense in the league the last two years, water should start to find its level. They had 31 combined games missed from WK1 starters last year in the secondary alone. If they can stay healthy on that side of the ball, 2-4 in the NFC North isn't happening again. Even still, it's not like Detroit was bad last season overall. Their 9-8 record was better than last year's NFC South winner, but because of where they finished in the division they now benefit from a last place schedule. It's the easiest schedule in the league in terms of opponent win total and the sixth easiest based on opponent win percentage from 2025-26. Jared Goff has led the NFL in pass yards and pass TDs over the last four seasons. Offensively they can hurt you through the air with stud WRs Amon Ra St. Brown and Jameson Williams, or one of the best TEs in the league, Sam LaPorta. They can also run the ball with a tough OL and Jahmyr Gibbs, who passed Barry Sanders for the most TDs of any player in NFL history his first three seasons. I'm very high on the Lions this year — go look at our spreadsheet picks to see just how much. That, paired with my belief the Bears take a step back and my lack of overall enthusiasm for Green Bay, got me on both the season win total and division bets.





BENGALS TO WIN AFC NORTH (+200) & OVER 10.5 WINS (+120)

This is the year for Cincinnati, right? It feels like every season one of two things (if not both) happens that holds them back: Joe Burrow gets hurt and/or the defense is trash. Who am I kidding? Every year the defense has been trash, so let's start there. When your QB is putting up numbers, you should win games. In 2024, when Burrow played the full season, they lost six games in which they scored 25+ points, four of which they scored 33+. That shouldn't happen in 2026. Cincinnati has made it clear they're all in on winning now with how they revamped this defense. They added big time talent up front in Dexter Lawrence and Jonathan Allen. They also signed Boye Mafe in free agency to help off the edge, drafted NFL-ready Cashius Howell, and I've seen a number of reports Shemar Stewart, who had a tough rookie season, should take a big step forward. Now to Burrow's health. If he's not healthy, none of that matters. And while it's not the most scientific approach, so far in his career he has been an "every other year" injury guy so in theory this should be a healthy year! Plus, while admittedly it's a low bar, he'll be protected by what's certainly the best OL unit he's had in his pro career. Schedule-wise, they've got the third easiest SOS based on opponent win total and last year's opponent win/loss percentage. As for the division, as good as the Ravens could be, they're also going through a lot of change with a new offense and new head coach. The Steelers won't be anything to write home about, and I already played the Browns win total Under. Let's go Bengals.

BROWNS UNDER 6.5 WINS (-160)

I don't make a habit of laying -160 on a futures bet I'll have to stare at in my betting app for seven months, but this just seemed like something silly not to play based on my feelings about Cleveland. While I like a lot of the things they've done this offseason to build to the future — they traded for 2025 DROY Jared Verse (who can be a foundation piece of your future and is still on his rookie deal), they got a 2027 first-round pick and more from LA, they crushed the draft this year and overhauled the OL, plus brought in a new voice in Todd Monken, etc. I like the trajectory of the Browns A LOT... but that impact won't be truly felt for a couple years. For now, I see this as another year of struggle in a tough division. While they may have received great compensation from the Rams for Myles Garrett, they still lost the best defensive player in the league right now in a division that has Joe Burrow and Lamar Jackson in it. Meanwhile, their own QB position is in shambles. Monken appears most apt to make Deshaun Watson QB1 despite the fact he hasn't played at a high level in roughly six years (outside of one half of football against the Ravens in 2024 in which he was injured and shut down the remainder of the season). Over his four years in Cleveland, he's 9-10 in 19 starts and hasn't played more than seven games in any season due to either suspension or

various injuries. If he's the one getting the nod, that tells me all I need to know about the guys behind him on the depth chart as well. Get a high caliber QB next year in the draft, then we'll talk.

JONATHAN VON TOBEL

CINCINNATI BENGALS OVER 10.5 WINS (+115)

It might be foolish, but call me a believer when it comes to Joe Burrow and the Bengals this season. I am going to assume that I am getting one of the best offenses in the NFL. Burrow — when healthy — is one of the best signal-callers in the league. He was 11th in EPA per play among quarterbacks with at least 250 snaps played, and the wide receiver room is among the best in the league.

On the other end, the front office invested heavily in its biggest weakness: defense. Defensive tackle Dexter Lawrence was brought in via trade. Defensive end Boye Mafe and safety Bryan Cook were signed in free agency. With such strong investments at key positions, this group should be much improved. In a division that has no real juggernaut, this team should be able to thrive.

ATLANTA FALCONS OVER 6.5 WINS (-115)

Kevin Stefanski is a legitimate head coach, and he now has some of the best talent he's ever had under his watch in Atlanta. There are questions at the most important position, but I believe he can make it work, especially if Tua Tagovailoa wins the job. Say what you want about the former Dolphins signal-caller, but he was on the fringes of multiple MVP races at his peak in Miami. He also gets to play indoors and in a division that will avoid playing in freezing cold temperatures late in the season. If it is Penix, I trust Stefanski will develop him properly.

Defensively, this team is no Steel Curtain, but it is good enough that it could be serviceable with much better offensive support. The Falcons finished 15th in opponent EPA per play and 17th in success rate. If they can replicate those numbers — and perhaps improve them slightly — this team should be able to get to seven wins or more this season.

ATLANTA FALCONS TO WIN NFC SOUTH (+425)

If there is value in the Falcons' win total then there is value in this number for Atlanta to win the division. The NFC South is a weak division. Carolina added to its defense, but its offense is still a massive question. New Orleans is showing signs of improvement and Tampa Bay should be just as competent, but none are exponentially better than Atlanta. If the quarterback position improves in this offense like I believe it can, this is a team that has the potential to win the division.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

BEST BETS

by Zach Cohen

With the NFL's Most Valuable Player award, the last decade has really been a showcase for elite signal-callers, and the 2025 season was no different. Matthew Stafford took home the honors, leading the league with 4,707 passing yards and 46 touchdown passes while throwing just eight interceptions for a 12-win Rams team.

That's the blueprint that keeps winning this award: elite production, a palatable number in the interceptions column, and a team that's winning games. Patrick Mahomes, Lamar Jackson, and Josh Allen — the three winners before Stafford — each checked those boxes.

Mahomes built his case on prolific passing and AFC dominance. Jackson and Allen added a little flair, bringing a rushing dimension that made them nearly impossible to stop. Stafford won by being the most efficient passer in the league, in the best passing offense in football. There's no one way to do it, but winners generally play the quarterback position for good teams, posting stupid numbers in the process.

Saquon Barkley basically wrote the definitive case against non-QBs winning MVP in 2024. Philadelphia's star back ran for 2,005 yards, punched in 13 touchdowns, chipped in 33 catches for another 278 yards, and helped Philadelphia hoist the Lombardi Trophy. That's an all-time season by any measure, and the award still went to a quarterback.

Non-quarterbacks don't get shut out of MVP voting because they're underperforming; they get shut out because voters have essentially pre-determined who's eligible. Wide receivers are also absent in this conversation, and defensive players are a complete afterthought. Until that changes, betting MVP means betting a quarterback.

Given all of that, let's look at some quarterbacks worth targeting in the 2026 NFL MVP market (with odds from DraftKings Sportsbook).

DAK PRESCOTT (13-1)

It's always a little concerning backing a trendy MVP candidate, which surely describes Prescott as the leader of the biggest brand in football. However, Prescott has already shown us that he has MVP-level upside, throwing for 37 touchdowns in 2021. The signal-caller is also fresh off a year in which he posted the fourth-highest PFF passing grade (85.4) amongst qualified quarterbacks. On top of that, he has been near the top of the league in passing yards on several occasions, and it isn't out of the question that he'll be the league leader in 2026.

Prescott is very comfortable in the Brian Schottenheimer offense, his offensive line should be a little better in 2026, and he has one of the best groups of weapons in the NFL. CeeDee Lamb, George Pickens, and Jake Ferguson make up a trio that's probably only matched by the one Stafford has in Los Angeles. And unlike Stafford, Prescott doesn't have to deal with voter fatigue.

The Dallas defense is also expected to be much better in 2026. With the team having brought in a new defensive coordinator, while also adding some game-changing talent, there's a good chance the Cowboys perform like a top-15 defense. That gives Prescott a shot at leading Dallas to 11 or 12 wins, which should be good enough for him to get himself into the mix.

Out of all of the chalkier options, it's hard not to like Prescott the most. The only other one worth considering is Justin Herbert, who should thrive in Mike McDaniel's offense. However, that is a run-heavy scheme, so the numbers might not be on par with Prescott's. We know Prescott will get to air it out as much as he wants.

JAYDEN DANIELS (20-1)

Daniels looked like he was going to be a serious MVP candidate heading into 2025, but he was only able to play seven games because of injuries. Well, Daniels is now healthy heading into the 2026 season, the new David Blough-led offense is designed to keep him upright, and the all-world dual-threat upside is still there. That means Daniels should be one of the top quarterbacks in football again.

Realistically, we're only two years removed from Daniels finishing as PFF's fifth-best quarterback (90.6), throwing for 3,568 yards with 25 touchdowns and only nine picks. He also rushed for 891 yards and six scores that year. If he can post similar numbers in Year 3, while cutting down on his turnovers a touch, there's no reason the Commanders superstar can't re-establish himself as an MVP candidate.

Not only is Daniels healthy right now, Terry McLaurin also happens to be heading into camp at 100%. That means Daniels has his No. 1 wideout ready to rock.

Let's just sit back and see what Blough's offense can do for the third-year signal-caller. Would it really shock you if Daniels throws for 4,000 yards with 30 touchdowns, with Washington returning to double-digit wins?

BROCK PURDY (20-1)

Purdy missed a good chunk of the 2025 season, with Mac Jones filling in admirably for San Francisco's franchise QB. However, when Purdy was on the field, he delivered. Last season, Purdy was PFF's sixth-ranked quarterback (85.4), doing his usual work as an efficient thrower and under-the-radar runner. All of that should be amplified in 2026.

There's a good case to be made that Purdy has the most electric group of weapons that he has had since being drafted by San Francisco. The 49ers have had some good pass-catchers since then, so that might be a bold statement. But San Francisco was able to sign Mike Evans, a walking 1,000-yard receiving threat and massive red-zone target, during the offseason. The 49ers also happen to have Ricky Pearsall and Christian Kirk ready to flank him at wide receiver, and George Kittle remains one of the league's top pass-catching tight ends.

The presence of Christian McCaffrey also happens to make Purdy better. Purdy gets to work off an incredible running game, plus McCaffrey is an elite receiver out of the backfield.

It just feels like the stars are aligning for Purdy to turn in a career year, and that should put him in the running for MVP. He was pretty close to winning this award in 2023, when he threw for 4,280 yards with 31 touchdowns and 11 picks, while also rushing for 144 yards and two scores. He might be able to top those numbers in 2026. Playing in the Kyle Shanahan offense, with this group of skill-position players, should bring the best out of Purdy.

KYLER MURRAY (40-1)

Finding a deep cut to win the MVP award isn't something that tends to be profitable. The winner of this award usually ends up being someone we expect greatness from. However, Murray's situation is a unique one. This is a former No. 1 overall pick, capable of making all the throws while also being a serious threat with his legs. Murray just hasn't found himself in favorable situations...until now.

Murray is now playing for one of the best play-callers in football, with Kevin O'Connell having pressed the right buttons for several different quarterbacks early in his career. O'Connell is the one directly responsible for getting Sam Darnold's career back on track, and Murray is the newest car he's looking to restore in the garage.

Murray has an elite group of weapons in Minnesota, as he'll be throwing to Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison, and T.J. Hockenson. The Vikings also made a nice move in bringing in Jauan Jennings over from the 49ers. If the Minnesota offensive line can just stay healthy, Murray should post career numbers. And while many have those numbers being enough for him to win Comeback Player of the Year, why not take it a step further?

The Vikings were a popular pick to win the NFC North a year ago, but the team's 4-8 start proved to be too much to overcome. The Vikings ended up winning their last five games of the year, but it was too little, too late. Well, perhaps everyone was a year early in expecting greatness from this group. And if Minnesota can find a way to win 11 or 12 games, it'll likely mean that Murray balled out.

Let's look at some opinions from our VSIN hosts on the 2026 NFL MVP market.

AARON MOORE

JUSTIN HERBERT (11-1)

In full transparency, I am one of the few people in this world to be referred to as a "die hard Chargers fan." However, this depressing personality flaw is not leading me to bet with my heart, rather the motivation comes from what I have seen during OTAs. The pounding Herbert took last season got plenty of media coverage, so the potential is there for a new story to be written as in his resurrection.

That requires tackles Rashawn Slater and Joe Alt to return healthy, but the presence of new center Tyler Biadasz will be a massive upgrade in protection.

The budding bromance between the stoic Herbert and an odd-ball like new offensive coordinator Mike McDaniel provides a unique narrative for the media to latch onto during the course of the season. The former Miami head coach has already changed Herbert's footwork while altering the team's blocking scheme to enable the franchise QB to throw more quick passes and direct option runs.

JENSEN LEWIS

LAMAR JACKSON (+650)

When 100% healthy, Jackson is the most intimidating, duel-threat, dominant force to take the field. The Ravens franchise is built around No. 8 and his supporting cast in 2026 got a sizable upgrade on the offensive line. Baltimore added first-round guard Olaivavega Ioane out of Penn State, as well as signing former Colts center Danny Pinter and Jets right guard John Simpson. Those upgrades will also help Jackson's "running mate" Derrick Henry, continuing to force defenses to respect both the run and RPO threat. The receiving weapons aren't anything to write home about, but remain satisfactory in receivers Zay Flowers, Rashod Bateman and tight end Mark Andrews.

The biggest risk with Jackson being at the top of the list for Most Valuable Player: durability. He's missed games in multiple seasons and it's a crowded quarterback list for the award with Josh Allen slightly ahead of him on the odds board and fellow AFC stalwarts Patrick Mahomes, Justin Herbert, Joe Burrow and Drake Maye all in the mix.

This wager is risk vs. reward: If Jackson stays healthy for the entire season and the Ravens challenge for both the AFC North title and No. 1 seed in the conference, the combination of elite production and piling up victories will be difficult for voters to bypass.



DUSTIN SWEDELSON

BROCK PURDY (22-1)

I know, you're probably shaking your head. I get it. I did the same when Purdy's name was tossed around to win MVP in the past. But that number, north of 20-1 doesn't match his potential to be in the mix for this award.

The last 10 NFL MVP's have this in common:

On average on a 13 win team, none with less than 11

On average they throw for 38 TDs and 7.5 interceptions

7 of 10 threw for at least 36

8 of 10 had 8 or less Interceptions

8 of 10 were on top 10 offenses, five were on the #1 offense

The average pass yards is 4,353

Purdy's 17 game projected average: 69.5%, 4,054 yards, 29 Passing TDs, 13 Interceptions

Are those MVP numbers? Not quite. But that's why the number is 22-1. I'm betting this because I believe there is meat on the bone with what Purdy can be, especially this year.

For starters, he's 26 years old and still improving. Limited to nine games due to injury in 2025, his 17 game projection was: 4,095 yards, 37.8 TDs, 18.9 interceptions. The turnovers need to be cut down but the other numbers are what we are looking for. His QBR since entering the league is 69.7, second only behind Josh Allen during the last four seasons. Plus, we are reaching a point where he is becoming a master of this Kyle Shanahan system.

But why am I so bullish on Purdy? The answer in part is Mike Evans, who is a King Maker.

Johnny Manziel won a Heisman tossing 50/50 balls up to Evans. In limited time throwing to Evans, Mike Glennon did enough for the Chicago Bears to believe he could be a starting QB and sign him to a \$45 million deal.

In 2020, Tom Brady was coming off:

his worst completion percentage (60.8) since 2013

lowest passing yards per game (253.6) since 2010

fewest TD passes since 2006 (24)

At 43 years old, in his first season with Evans, Brady's completion percentage rose to 65.7%, his yards went back up to 289.6 and he threw for 40 TDs.

How about Baker Mayfield? He was looking like a backup QB, splitting a season with Carolina and the Rams before getting a shot with Tampa Bay. In his first season, he had a career high completion percentage (64.3), TDs (28) and passing yards 4,044.

Is that all Evans? No, but he seems to be around when QBs look their best. They have someone to move the chains, an elite red zone target and a 50/50 ball master.

The 49ers schedule also features opportunities for Purdy to air it out this year with the Cardinals (2x), Raiders, Dolphins, Commanders and Cowboys.

Add all of that to the addition of Christian Kirk in the slot, drafting Ole Miss WR De'Zhaun Stribling, a healthier Ricky Pearsall and George Kittle and it is very possible Brock Purdy has a monster season. Hopefully MVP caliber.

ADAM BURKE

JALEN HURTS (28-1)

Hurts has yet another new play-caller with the Eagles, who have had seven different ones in seven years. This time around, it's Sean Mannion, who was the QB coach for Matt LaFleur last season in Green Bay and has some roots in the Sean McVay/Kyle Shanahan offensive style, plus he was a very productive QB in his own right at Oregon State.

Early reports from mini-camp noted that Hurts was lined up under center more, an area where he has excelled in his NFL career. It remains to be seen how much he'll run in this scheme, or whether or not the Tush Push will continue to be a focal point of the offense. But, Hurts, who finished second in MVP voting back in 2022, may have to use his legs more often without A.J. Brown, his top target from last season. Even if not, this offense has more play-action and should lead to a bounceback season in the completion percentage department.

He had nearly 4,500 total yards and 35 total touchdowns in that 2022 runner-up season. Something similar is not out of the question here.

TUA TAGOVAILOA (300-1)

Yes, I know what you're thinking. I'm thinking it, too. And betting any awards market is a major gamble on a player's health and Tua might be one concussion away from never playing in the NFL again. But, his career has a new lease on life with a sharp offensive mind in Kevin Stefanski and a strong complement of skill players in Atlanta.

It isn't a given that he'll win the job and the organization did pump a lot of time and resources into Michael Penix Jr., but Tua is only 28 years old, just one season removed from leading the league in completion percentage, and two seasons removed from leading the league in passing yards. Quick throws into space and heavy tight end usage are hallmarks of Stefanski's offense and, by proxy, what OC Tommy Rees wants to do. Plus, Tua's likely to pick up some easy yardage thanks to Bijan Robinson out of the backfield.

At 300-1, with a very winnable division, a team that improved from a personnel and sideline standpoint, and past success, Tua going to a coach like Stefanski, who has coaxed some very good play out of mediocre or worse QBs in his career, is far from the worst dart throw on the board.

OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

BEST BETS

by Adam Burke

It is fascinating how different the draft classes are from year to year. Back in 2024, there were 14 offensive players taken before the first defensive player, including six quarterbacks and seven wide receivers. In 2025, there were 17 offensive players and 15 defensive players, but only three QBs and two WRs. Not surprisingly, one of those five players won the Offensive Rookie of the Year award.

Those who like to bet some long shots in awards markets have been sorely disappointed in this one. With Tetairoa McMillan's win in 2025, eight of the last 10 OROY winners have been top-10 picks. McMillan's only real competition in that respect was Cam Ward and Ashton Jeanty after Travis Hunter suffered a season-ending injury. Two of the first 10 offensive picks were tight ends and four were offensive linemen - two positions that have never won this award. That includes five such players in the top 10.

Is the 2026 Offensive Rookie of the Year market set up differently and in a way that could buck some trends? For the current top-10 trend to continue, the options are Fernando Mendoza, Jeremiyah Love, and Jordyn Tyson. Given how much of a long shot Ty Simpson of the Rams will be because he's not even going to start barring injury, the next eligible player based on the recent history of the award is Makai Lemon, who was picked 20th.

Alvin Kamara was the last non-top-10 pick to win OROY and also the last non-first-round pick back in 2017. Love (or fellow Notre Dame RB Jadarian Price, 32nd overall) is hoping to become the first RB since Saquon Barkley in 2018 to win.

Wide receivers now have three wins in the last five seasons after going from 2014 (Odell Beckham Jr.) to 2021 (Ja'Marr Chase) without winning. Prior to Beckham, you have to go back to Percy Harvin in 2009.

Mendoza is a reasonable choice, given that the Raiders have an offensive-minded head coach, a solid skill group, and the last four QBs to win have all been top-six picks, with Kyler Murray as the first overall pick in 2019 as the award winner. Plus, opportunity is a huge deal here, as Mendoza and the Raiders are likely to trail a lot, giving him the chance to rack up numbers, as long as he starts over Kirk Cousins.

Outliers are definitely a possibility, albeit a small one. 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: Tetairoa McMillan, Jayden Daniels, C.J. Stroud, Garrett Wilson, Ja'Marr Chase, Justin Herbert, Kyler Murray, Saquon Barkley, Alvin Kamara, Dak Prescott
- By Position: 5 QB, 2 RB, 3 WR
- By Draft Position (Round.Pick): 1.8; 1.2; 1.2; 1.10; 1.5; 1.6; 1.1; 1.2; 3.67 (Kamara); 4.135 (Prescott)
- 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. Keep in mind, if we get another first-round pick this year as Prescott drops off, that will be nine of 10 and maybe all nine as top-10 picks. That should define your wagering strategy.
- First-place votes (L5 years): 41 (McMillan); 48 (Daniels); 48 (Stroud); 18 (Wilson, runner-up Kenneth Walker III had 19); 42 (Chase)
- Nobody has been unanimous since Ben Roethlisberger in 2004 with all 48 votes.
- Also, team success isn't exactly a prerequisite. The Panthers, Texans, Bengals, Saints, and Cowboys were all division winners within the last 10 years, but the Commanders, Jets, Chargers, Cardinals, and Giants were not. Of those five non-division winners, the Commanders are the only team to make the playoffs. Carolina won the NFC South at 8-9 last season.

STATS OF THE WINNERS

TETAIROA MCMILLAN (2025)

McMillan was targeted 122 times and caught 70 balls for 1,014 yards and seven touchdowns. He was one of 18 WRs with 1,000+ yards and the only rookie of the group, as Emeka Egbuka was next with 938 yards. Tyler Shough (5), TreVeyon Henderson (1), Jaxson Dart (1), and OG Grey Zabel (2) were the other first-place vote-getters. Note that McMillan joined Wilson and Chase as WRs to win this award and the common thread is that all of them had at least 1,000 receiving yards, likely a simple benchmark for any WR hoping to be in contention this year.

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.

MY OROY BET: MAKAI LEMON (+950)

Piggybacking off of my thoughts on Hurts to win NFL MVP, Lemon should be walking into a great situation. A ton of targets opened up in Philly with the trade of A.J. Brown and some red-zone targets as well. While he does have to contend with DeVonta Smith, Dallas Goedert, Dontayvion Wicks, and Saquon Barkley for touches, Sean Mannion's offensive scheme should be fruitful for a guy of his stature who may find himself in the slot a fair amount.

Brown had 121 targets and 78 catches while just going over 1,000 yards. Even with a back like Barkley, the Eagles had more pass attempts than rush attempts and a Mannion-led offense should be the same.



DEFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

BEST BETS

by Adam Burke

While the Offensive Rookie of the Year market remained very predictable, we got an outlier in the Defensive Rookie of the Year market in 2025. Browns LB Carson Schwesinger became the first pick outside of the first round to win since Darius "Shaquille" Leonard back in 2018. Inner-runner-up Nick Emmanwori went 35th overall, two spots behind Schwesinger.

Schwesinger also became the first true linebacker to win the award since Leonard, as pass rushers have had an inside track to winning DROY. That depends on your definition of "true" linebacker, as guys like Jared Verse and Will Anderson could be considered LBs, but they'd more likely be grouped as pass rushers.

A confluence of factors came together to make Schwesinger, who was lined around 30/1 as training camp was beginning, the winner. Top-five pick Abdul Carter struggled badly as a rookie and six defensive tackles were taken in the first round, limiting the types of players who usually wind up in contention. It was a weak draft on edge rushers and there were only three defensive backs selected, none higher than 20th, at least until the Jaguars converted No. 2 pick Travis Hunter to a full-time DB during the season.

Should we expect a 2026 surprise? The short answer is no. David Bailey, Arvell Reese, and Sonny Styles all have edge rusher profiles among top-10 picks and Mansoor Delane and Caleb Downs are with highly visible teams, with Downs just outside the top 10 at No. 11. That doesn't even include first-round edge-type guys in Rueben Bain Jr., Akheem Mesidor, Malachi Lawrence, and Keldrick Faulk. With 13 first-round defenders and only two interior defensive linemen, this year's rookie class looks similar to what we'd expect in today's NFL and one that will follow recent DROY trends instead of bucking them.

An outlier is 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: Carson Schwesinger, Jared Verse, Will Anderson, Sauce Gardner, Micah Parsons, Chase Young, Nick Bosa, Shaquille Leonard, Marshon Lattimore, Joey Bosa
- By Draft Position (Round.Pick): 2.33; 1.19; 1.3; 1.4; 1.12; 1.2; 1.2; 2.36 (Leonard); 1.11; 1.3
- Eight of the last 10 winners have been top-20 picks in the draft. Despite nine such players in last year's draft class, Schwesinger

defied the odds. This season, there are seven top-20 picks and most of them play positions conducive to being in the running.

- First-place votes (L5 years): 40 (Schwesinger); 36 (Verse); 16 (Anderson, runner-up Jalen Carter and third-place finisher Kobie Turner had 14); 46 (Gardner); 50 (Parsons)
- We had another runaway in 2025, as Schwesinger racked up 40 of the 51 votes. 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 seven of the 10 teams made the playoffs. Four of the last six 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

CARSON SCHWESINGER (2025)

Schwesinger had 156 combined tackles, with 67 solo stops and 89 assists. He only had 2.5 sacks, but did have a couple of interceptions. When Leonard won in 2018, he had 111 solo tackles and 52 assists, leading the league with 163 combined tackles. Schwesinger was sixth in that department, as the top three tacklers were all former first-round picks.

JARED VERSE (2024)

Verse had 66 combined tackles, 11 tackles for loss, 18 QB Hits, and 4.5 sacks. He added a couple of 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 had 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 finished in the top three for Defensive Player of the Year four times in five seasons.

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 DROY/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 BOSHA (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.

What does this mean for 2026? Pass rushers and defensive backs are absolutely the places to look, despite Schwesinger's surprising season. 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

AKHEEM MESIDOR (13-1)

The Chargers will look a little different on defense, as Jesse Minter is now the head coach of the Ravens. While Chris O'Leary is not really a prominent name, he may become one. The 34-year-old was the safeties coach under Jim Harbaugh before going to Western Michigan to be the defensive coordinator. WMU is not the University of Michigan, where Mike MacDonald went to coach for a season before Jim's brother John called him back to Baltimore, but it is interesting to see a similar career path.

Western Michigan was tied for fourth in the nation in sacks with 43. One of the teams ahead of them was Miami, which is where Mesidor had 12.5 sacks and 17.5 tackles for loss. Reps should be there pretty immediately for Mesidor in this defense and this award does get slanted towards edge rushers, so he looks like a worthwhile gamble.



ZACHARY COHEN

CALEB DOWNS (+850)

Whether he was playing at Alabama or Ohio State, Downs was one of the best players in college football. PFF gave him great marks as a coverage safety, and he was just as good playing the run. PFF also had him as the most valuable safety in the nation when looking at their Wins Above Average metric.

Downs is just an absolute freak, having been a three-time All-American in two high-pressure situations. Many viewed him as the best player in the 2026 NFL Draft, but he slipped to Dallas because safety isn't considered one of the more valuable positions along the defense.

The good news is that the draft slot won't matter in determining DROY. If Downs' all-world production translates to the pros, he'll be in consideration here. And there's really no reason to believe he can't be a star right away.

COACH OF THE YEAR **BEST BETS**

by Adam Burke

I'll start this year's analysis exactly how I started last year's - 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 Patriots did the "worst to first" thing, something that also happened with the Bears, but Ben Johnson only got one first-place vote, while Mike Vrabel got 19. He edged out Liam Coen, another first-year head coach, as the Jaguars HC got 16 first-place votes. It was a very competitive season for the award, even if Vrabel and Coen combined for 35 of the 50 first-place votes. Eventual Super Bowl champion Mike Macdonald got the last laugh after getting eight first-place votes.

The huge turnaround factor was on display last season for sure, as Vrabel led a 10-win improvement for the Patriots and took them to the Super Bowl. Speaking of direct correlations, it certainly helps for the best player on the team to improve dramatically, especially if it comes as a little bit of a surprise. Drake Maye, in just his second season, more than doubled his TD output and was runner-up for the MVP award. Kevin O'Connell and Sam Darnold. Kevin Stefanski and Joe Flacco. Brian Daboll and Daniel Jones. The coach and the starting QB are often joined at the hip here.

There are 10 new head coaches this season and not all of them are joining teams that had bad records, as is often the case when there's a change in leadership. That should make for a lot of candidates and a lot of interesting betting options.

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.

MIKE VRABEL (2025)

10-win improvement (4-13, 14-3); first-year head coach with the Patriots, as they scored 490 points, the most since 2012.

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

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.

ADAM BURKE

KEVIN O'CONNELL (30-1)

O'Connell was the 2024 Coach of the Year and has the chance to be the third coach to be a multiple winner in the last few seasons. Kevin Stefanski won in 2020 and 2023, while Mike Vrabel won in 2021 and is the reigning COTY winner.

O'Connell won it in 2024 with reclamation project Sam Darnold, who had 35 passing touchdowns and used that season as a springboard to win the Super Bowl with the Seahawks this past season. That's not to say

that Kyler Murray will win Super Bowl 62 in 2028, but it is to say that the QB whisperer may be able to work his magic once again.

Murray is arguably the most athletic and talented QB that O'Connell has had to work with and he still has Justin Jefferson and Jordan Addison, among others. Having won this award before has given the recipients name recognition and being front of mind for the voters is important, especially if O'Connell can bounce back from last season's 9-8 record to get up into double digits. With 10 new head coaches, O'Connell's price has gotten even more attractive given the narrative (and examples) of a new head coach leading a turnaround, but turning Murray around should be enough to have him in the conversation if he is successful.

ZACHARY COHEN

KELLEN MOORE (12-1 - 0.5 UNITS) & ROBERT SALEH (14-1 - 0.5 UNITS)

These are the leaders of two of the teams I wrote up in my feature on teams with sleeper appeal after having finished near the bottom of their respective divisions last year. Naturally, that means that I view them as Coach of the Year candidates, as I did with Mike Vrabel last year. With Moore, a sizable leap from the Saints offense, combined with a jump to 9-10 wins, should put him in contention. For Saleh, just flirting with a spot in the postseason should be enough after last year.

WILL HILL

SEAN MCVAY (40-1)

The traditional criteria for Coach of the Year is the head coach of the team that overachieves modest expectations. But that's not the only path. In 2019, Ravens coach John Harbaugh won the award because of a 14-2 year, despite being a playoff team the prior season. In 2007, Bill Belichick led the Patriots to an undefeated season and won Coach of the Year honors. This award can be won with sheer dominance, and perhaps Sean McVay can get in the mix for this award through a 15-2 or 16-1 season. There's also a scenario where aging Rams' quarterback Matthew Stafford gets hurt, and if the Rams are able to win in his absence, McVay can garner some attention that way. At 40-1, with a potentially dominant team, I think this number is long enough to take a shot on one of the league's best and most respected coaches.



THE HIDDEN YARDAGE

One of the major questions heading into the 2024 NFL season centered on 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 were 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. There were 622 more points scored during the 2024 season than the 2023 season.

For the 2025 season, the "punishment" for a touchback was placement of the ball at the 35-yard line. There were also some changes to where the players on both the kicking and receiving teams lined up. While the 2024 changes were objectively more altering to the game, the additional five yards for a touchback really changed the philosophies around kickoffs and strategy.

There is no better example of this than the TB% from the 2025 season. We saw just shy of a 9% drop from 2023 to 2024 in touchback rate, but with the ball moving out from the 30 to the 35 after booting it into the end zone, only 20.7% of kickoffs were touchbacks. The Rams actually didn't seem to worry much about the field position element, leading the league with a 57.3% TB% (nearly 20% higher than any other team), whereas the Colts (5.9%) and Steelers (8.0%) took a dramatically different approach. The Colts had an 83% TB% in 2024 that ranked second in the league, so you can see where their analytics department came into play with the additional five yards in mind.

The average starting field position only went up from the 30.1-yard line to the 30.7-yard line, obviously a much smaller number than the five yards on a touchback, so teams actively worked on kicking the ball off to the point of a return and then covering the return more effectively. The league's yards per kick return fell from 27.6 to 25.9. Teams got a sample size of data and adjusted accordingly.

Points per drive did increase from 2.07 to 2.11, but the total number of points only increased by 55. After a 622-point increase with the new kickoff rules from 2023 to 2024, it was clear last season that everybody had settled in. Scoring did increase slightly on a per-possession basis with a 38.8% Sc% compared to last season's 38%, but there were only eight more touchdowns and actually six fewer field goals year over year.

The average Over/Under was 43.1 in 2023, 44.6 in 2024, and 44.8 in 2025.

For 2026, the kickoff-related rule changes are likely to have a very small impact, if any, on scoring and field position. Teams can try an onside kick at any time, but the element of surprise is still gone because they have to be announced ahead of time. There are also some minor changes to the way that teams line up. Lastly, and one that could be the most impactful, is that kickoffs from the 50-yard line (following an accepted 15-yard penalty on the receiving team) now go to the 40-yard line if the ball is intentionally kicked out of bounds. It used to be the 25-yard line and was viewed as a bit of a loophole to the new rules. That loophole is now closed.

Only 13 teams had a TB% over 20% during the 2025 season and only three teams were north of 30%. Eight teams had a TB% under 15%. It will be interesting to see how this philosophy continues to evolve, but after being able to get some betting value with the totals market in 2024, it looks like things have stabilized now.

HOW TO WIN WITH VSIN NFL BETTING SPLITS

by Josh Appelbaum

The NFL is by far the most heavily bet and most popular professional sport in America.

According to Nielsen, of the 100 most-watched programs in 2025, NFL games accounted for 89 of them. And, according to the American Gaming Association, roughly \$30 billion was legally wagered on the 2025 NFL regular season. Now, with roughly 40 legal betting states in the country, along with the recent meteoric rise of Prediction Markets, the 2026 regular season is poised to shatter records and become the most heavily bet season of all time.

With so many Americans watching and, more importantly, betting on the NFL, it begs the question: what can recreational and new bettors alike do to increase their chances of winning?

THE PUBLIC VS THE SHARPS

Generally speaking, there are three different philosophies employed by NFL bettors.

The most popular approach is the “public” method. This means largely ignoring betting data and line movement in favor of making picks based on gut instinct, favoritism and bias.

The public makes up the vast majority of bettors within the NFL market and most Average Joes bet for the sheer fun and entertainment value. Sure, they want to win, but they are largely betting like a fan. This means focusing on favorites, overs and parlays. They are intrinsically weighted toward always taking the “better” team, rooting for points because it’s more fun and betting small amounts in order to strike it rich with bigger payouts. The public method might be the most popular, but it’s also the least profitable.

The second method is the “professional” approach. Employed almost exclusively by sharps and veteran handicappers, the professional approach relies on setting your own power ratings and creating your own lines. Then, pros compare their numbers to what the sportsbooks are offering and only “get down” if they identify a notable discrepancy, which provides the pro bettor an advantage over the sportsbook, known popularly as an “edge.” So, if the pro’s numbers have the Rams projected as a 4.7-point favorite on Sunday and the Vegas line sits at Rams -3, the pro hammers Los Angeles because their numbers tell them it’s a smart bet.

So, for bettors who don’t want to bet like an Average Joe but also lack the wherewithal to set their own lines, what can they do?

Well, a good starting point would be to learn how to analyze Betting Splits.

WHAT ARE BETTING SPLITS?

Betting Splits are the percentage of bets and dollars on every game across the three major bet types: spread, moneyline and total.

The percentage of bets refers to the percentage of overall tickets placed on the game, while the percentage of dollars or “handle” refers to the percentage of actual money placed on the game.

At VSIN, our Pro Members have 24/7 access to the Betting Splits at two major sportsbooks: DraftKings and Circa.

By analyzing the bet splits and comparing and contrasting the numbers at both books, bettors can cut through the noise and gain an edge by identifying where the public is and where the smart money is leaning. The VSIN Bet Splits page is one of the most trafficked pages on VSIN.com and provides data for all the major US sports, not just the NFL.

GO CONTRARIAN

One of the simplest ways to differentiate yourself from the Average Joes and increase your chances of winning is to take a contrarian approach. This means betting against the public, who more often than not loses, and placing yourself on the side of the house, who always wins in the end.

In order to go contrarian, focus on the percentage of bets column specifically at DraftKings.

Because DraftKings is one of the most popular sportsbooks in the country and pools data from the lion’s share of Average Joe bettors, the percentage of bets column is a good barometer for what the public thinks and where they are leaning. And, because football is predominantly a spread sport, bettors should focus most of their attention on the spread percentage of bets column.

A good cutoff for contrarians is 65% vs 35%. If a team is getting 65% of spread bets or more, that indicates a very “public” play. So, instead of joining the herd and betting with the masses, contrarians would lean toward taking the team receiving 35% of spread bets or less.

IDENTIFY SHARP ACTION

Going contrarian isn’t the end all, be all. It’s a starting point that places you against the public and with the house. The next step is to ensure that you are not just against the drunk guys at the bars, but also with the sharps and

professional bettors who win at a high rate and have the respect of the sportsbooks.

In order to identify sharp action, bettors should laser focus on the Circa betting splits. Circa has gained a reputation as a “sharp” book because it sets high limits and accepts big money from respected bettors instead of turning them away.

As a result, it makes sense that data-driven bettors would want to place themselves on the same side as the sharps at Circa.

To do so, bettors can compare the percentage of bets to the percentage of dollars at Circa, looking for “discrepancy” plays where a team is garnering far more money than bets. A good line of demarcation is 10% or more.

So, if the Patriots are a 3-point favorite, receiving 57% of spread bets but 78% of spread dollars at Circa, that would indicate smart money in favor of New England because they are taking in far more money than tickets from the wiseguys in the desert.

Conversely, if the Bengals are a 7-point underdog and receiving 65% of spread bets but only 48% of spread dollars, that would be a red flag that Cincinnati is a public play worth avoiding.

The same philosophy can be used for totals.

If the under is taking in 40% of bets but 70% of dollars (and the line has fallen from 45 to 44.5), bettors can be confident that wiseguys have gotten down on a lower-scoring game.

DRAFTKINGS VS CIRCA

The ultimate goal for data-driven bettors is to use both sportsbooks in tandem in order to provide as much color and texture as possible.

If a team is contrarian at DraftKings, bettors can be confident that they are against the masses. If that same team is showing a “low bets, higher dollars” bet discrepancy at Circa, that gives bettors confidence that they are also a sharp bet for the Vegas pros.

Also, betting splits shouldn’t be taken in a vacuum. They should also be compared to how the line is moving. Ideally, you want the betting splits and line movement to all be on the same page. In other words, the sharp contrarian team receiving “low bets” but “higher dollars” is also taking line movement in their favor.

It’s important to remember that not every contrarian play or sharp discrepancy is guaranteed to win. As always, there is no such thing as a lock. However, by consistently focusing on unpopular teams that are also sharp in Vegas, bettors can elevate their selection process and make more informed decisions using their head and not their heart.

Lastly, keep in mind that the VSIN Betting Splits are subject to change. They are updated every 5 minutes as more action pours in. As a result, bettors should take early bet splits with a grain of salt, as they can change drastically as we get closer to kickoff. For this reason, it’s always recommended to focus more on the betting splits within the last 24 hours leading up to kickoff.

WORST TO FIRST THE 2026 TURNAROUND TEAMS

by Zach Cohen



The 2025 NFL season validated our exercise of searching for turnaround candidates. In last year's guide, we identified the Bears, Jaguars, Panthers, and Patriots as teams with sleeper appeal.

Chicago, in Year 1 with Ben Johnson on the sidelines, arguably had the toughest job to do, with the NFC North being one of the most competitive divisions in football. The Bears were 100% up to the task, going 11-6 and finishing with two more victories than the rival Packers. The Jaguars had a clearer path to first, as the AFC South is a gettable division year in, year out. Jacksonville ended up edging Houston out, finishing 13-4 in Liam Coen's first year at the helm. The Panthers were the weakest of the four entering the season, but they still finished atop the NFC South after going 8-9 in the regular season. Lastly, Mike Vrabel's Patriots, who ended up losing in the Super Bowl, were one of the biggest stories of the year, going from 4-13 in 2024 to 13-4 in 2025. New England also had to hold off an elite Buffalo team to win the AFC East.

It feels like an annual occurrence now. Teams make some changes in the offseason, bring in a new coach, or just build on late-season momentum from the year prior. Then they go out and show out. Well, identifying these teams isn't as hard as you think. So, we're running it back in 2026.

We'll apply the same criteria: teams that finished at or near the bottom of their division in 2025, with a coaching upgrade, a new-look roster, a favorable schedule, or better roster-wide circumstances that suggest a real turnaround. We might not hit on them all, but identifying a few teams can give us exactly the kind of edge this guide is built around.

Here are the best candidates for 2026 — excluding the Lions, who feel too obvious. Do with them what you will. Division prices, win total Overs, alt Overs, and loftier futures are all in play.

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

Last season, Carolina won the NFC South with an 8-9 record. That speaks to how weak this division is, meaning it's wide open for anyone to finish atop the standings in 2026. That includes the Saints.

New Orleans actually enters this season with some legitimate buzz. Not many people were paying attention to the Saints last year, but they were second in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (-0.178) from Week 10 until the end of the 2025 regular season. Defensive coordinator Brandon Staley did a remarkable job turning that unit around, and he'll have more toys to work with this season. New Orleans drafted Christen Miller in the second round of the 2026 NFL Draft, adding some nice size and talent along the defensive line. Staley will also try to get something out of Tyree Wilson, who was the seventh pick in the 2023 NFL Draft. Wilson was disappointing with the Raiders, but a change of scenery should help.

The offense is what needs to take a major step forward, but there were signs last year. After making the change from Spencer Rattler to Tyler Shough, New Orleans' offense looked much better. Rattler probably wasn't as bad as the public thinks, and Shough wasn't quite as good, but the overall unit clearly improved. The Saints went 5-4 in Shough's final nine games under center in 2025, plus his combination of size and speed gave him more upside than Rattler flashed. All in all, Shough threw for 2,384 yards with 10 touchdowns and six picks on the season, and he also added three scores on the ground. In Year 2 in Kellen Moore's system, the expectation is that Shough will look even sharper.

New Orleans also did great work providing Shough with help. The team signed Travis Etienne Jr. as a versatile weapon out of the backfield. They also used the No. 8 pick in the 2026 NFL Draft on Jordyn Tyson, who has the potential to be a true No. 1 wideout. The tight end room was also upgraded, as the Saints signed Noah Fant and added Oscar Delp in the third round of the draft. Even the offensive line was addressed, as New Orleans signed guard David Edwards away from Buffalo.

The Saints just enter 2026 with some serious momentum, and they have Warren Sharp's second-easiest strength of schedule for 2026. We could see a major turnaround here.

TENNESSEE TITANS

On the surface, hiring Robert Saleh may not seem like the most inspiring move. His stint with the Jets was extremely disappointing, and it's not yet clear he can handle the responsibility of being in charge of a whole team. However, Saleh sure knows how to coach a defense, and he was able to bring Brian Daboll in as his offensive coordinator, giving Tennessee a clear offensive identity. That makes this coaching staff way more appealing for a roster that is looking to make a jump in 2026.

Daboll made his mistakes with the Giants, but he also got decent production out of some mediocre offensive units. At times, he had Daniel Jones and Jaxson Dart looking sharp, and it's pretty easy to envision him getting Cam Ward, the No. 1 pick in the 2025 draft, right. Ward had a rough rookie season, but he's clearly a highly-talented passer. Things should look much better in 2026.

Tennessee actually scored at least 24 points in the final six games of the 2025 season, and Ward's strides as a passer played a big role in that. Well, Ward now has a much better group of weapons to work with. The Titans used the fourth pick in the 2026 NFL Draft on Carnell Tate, who looks like a future stud at wideout. They also signed Wan'Dale Robinson, one of Daboll's favorites, to be their receiver out of the slot. With a solid offensive line, a great group of pass-catchers, and some good rushers out of the backfield, the Titans could flirt with being a league-average offense.

The Titans also completely overhauled their defense. Not only did they hire Saleh, but big moves were made to address the talent up front. It started with Tennessee swapping T'Vondre Sweat for Jermaine Johnson, giving Saleh a strong pass-rushing threat on the edge. The Titans also signed another Saleh favorite, bringing John Franklin-Myers in on a big three-year deal. Tennessee also happened to address the secondary, signing Alontae Taylor and Cordale Flott to give the team a new set of starters at corner.

If things click faster than expected, there's no reason Tennessee can't turn heads. The Titans have a reasonable schedule, and they play in the weakest division in the AFC. They're exactly the type of team bettors should look to target.

WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

Many people like the Giants to go from worst to first in the NFC East, but the Commanders feel more like the team poised to make a big turnaround from 2025 to 2026.

In many ways, including Washington doesn't feel right here, as this team was 12-5 and won the division just two seasons ago. The Commanders also went all the way to the NFC Championship Game that year. However, Washington isn't getting much love from the national media, and the betting odds suggest this could be another disappointing season. Not so fast, my friend!

The Commanders do have a difficult schedule, plus they haven't done much to address an uninspiring group of pass-catching weapons. But this team should be in much better shape when looking at the coaching situation, as Dan Quinn now has David Blough running his offense and Daronte Jones running his defense. Both coaches are expected to do some good things this season. Blough is viewed as an up-and-coming offensive mastermind, while Jones was just helping Brian Flores run some of the league's best defenses in Minnesota.

The Commanders should also get a much better season out of Jayden Daniels. After finishing fifth in the NFL in PFF's QB rankings in 2024, Daniels was 18th among qualified signal-callers in his sophomore season. Injuries really played a role in that, with Daniels dealing with knee, hamstring, and elbow issues in 2025. With some better luck in the health department, he should get back to torching defenses as both a passer and a runner, helping to significantly raise the floor and ceiling of his team.

If Sonny Styles, Washington's 2026 first-round pick (No. 7 overall), lives up to expectations, there isn't much preventing the Commanders from riding the same 2024 formula to success. Elite offense, average defense. That's all it will take.



FINDING NFL TOTAL MISPRICES

by Adam Burke

Projecting out an entire season is an extremely difficult thing to do in any sport, even the NFL, despite how scrutinized and sharp that market tends to be. The 2025 season was no different, as 13 of the 32 teams were 3.5 wins above or below their season win total line. Since the current division format was installed back in 2002, a team has gone from worst to first in at least one division in every season except for three.

Interestingly enough, the 2024 season was one, but the 2025 season was not, as the Patriots and Bears went from worst to first in their respective divisions. As an honorable mention, the Jaguars finished third at 4-13 in the AFC South and won the division this past season.

With 10 new head coaches this season, the league seems higher-variance in nature than normal and that could be a really good sign for those who are willing to add a little more risk in search of a little more reward by playing alternate season win total lines. A changing of the guard seems to happen pretty frequently, but the possibility for that this season is definitely increased.

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 look at alternate NFL season 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, which is now part of the Covers website, I looked at season win total results from the last four 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 BetMGM, since that's what SOH had in their database. The results are pretty interesting.

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 cover it.

Second, even excluding +/- 1.5 Wins, we're still talking about 62 teams that were +/-2.5 or more Wins over the four-year sample, including 25 teams over the last two seasons that were +/-3.5 Wins. That would be 62 teams out of 128 team seasons in this sample, so just below 50%. Like I said, projecting out an entire season is very difficult given the inherent variance of sport and the other factors that cause a team to overperform or underperform.

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 a good opportunity for bettors.

2025 (23/32) (12 Overs, 11 Unders)

+/- 1.5 WINS (8)	+/- 2.5 WINS (3)	+/- 3.5 WINS (12)
49ERS (OV)	BEARS (OV)	BENGALS (UN)
BUCS (UN)	RAMS (OV)	BRONCOS (OV)
CHARGERS (OV)	TEXANS (OV)	CARDINALS (UN)
LIONS (UN)		CHIEFS (UN)
PACKERS (UN)		COMMANDERS (UN)
PANTHERS (OV)		JAGUARS (OV)
SAINTS (OV)		JETS (UN)
STEELERS (OV)		PATRIOTS (OV)
		RAIDERS (UN)
		RAVENS (UN)
		SEAHAWKS (OV)
		TITANS (UN)

2024 (26/32) (13 Overs, 13 Unders)

+/- 1.5 WINS (7)	+/- 2.5 WINS (6)	+/- 3.5 WINS (13)
BENGALS (UN)	BILLS (OV)	49ERS (UN)
CHARGERS (OV)	BUCCANEERS (OV)	BEARS (UN)
DOLPHINS (UN)	COWBOYS (UN)	BROWNS (UN)
FALCONS (UN)	RAIDERS (UN)	BRONCOS (OV)
RAMS (OV)	SAINTS (UN)	CHIEFS (OV)
RAVENS (OV)	SEAHAWKS (OV)	COMMANDERS (OV)
STEELERS (OV)		EAGLES (OV)
		GIANTS (UN)
		JAGUARS (UN)
		JETS (UN)
		LIONS (OV)
		TITANS (UN)
		VIKINGS (OV)

2023 (21/32) (11 Overs, 10 Unders)

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

2022 (24/32) (13 Overs, 11 Unders)

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

FANTASY FOOTBALL PROPS EARLY NFL PLAYER BETS FOR 2026

by John Hansen

As much as I've enjoyed analyzing the NFL for fake football for the last 30+ years, there's a different kind of joy when you handicap a player well for fantasy and also win a prop bet on the player. It's basically doubling the pleasure, and I'm here for it.

Take Jaxon Smith-Njigba last year, for example. I was very high on JSN as a fantasy pick, so he was an easy selection in this article 12 months ago (Over 950.5 receiving yards at -110). After opening the season with six 100+ yard performances in his first eight games, JSN crushed the Over before Thanksgiving in his ninth game of the season.

On the flip side, my top player fade and Under for the season was Saquon Barkley, who I was down on for fantasy, and that one was probably a dub by Turkey Day as well.

My starting point for 2026's list of early bets was to check the award-winning projections over at Fantasy Points, and I looked for players on my player target/avoid list for fantasy drafts who also have discrepancies in the site projections. Some of the deviations are minor, but most of the players have considerable discrepancies between the O/U total and our stat projections for the upcoming season.

We'll start with the positive with 10 players who are good fantasy picks and worth betting Overs on, and I've also added five players who I think will fail to meet expectations and make for good Under plays. I don't know if I can duplicate my 11-4 record on these picks last year, but barring injury devastation, I'm certainly envisioning some serious profitability.

THE OVERACHIEVERS

JUSTIN HERBERT REGULAR SEASON PASSING YARDS OVER 3574.5 (-110, DK)

We're projecting 3,783, which is only 5.8% more, but I'm incredibly high on Herbert and the Chargers and believe the planets have aligned for a career year. He has his star OTs back, along with a fully-stocked receiving corps with 6-7 strong options for new OC Mike McDaniel, who has been elite at scheming up big plays.

Herbert was seventh in catchable throw percentage last year despite their decimated OL, so with better health around him this year, he should consistently slice and dice NFL defenses and garner serious MVP consideration. As only the ninth or 10th QB off the board in fantasy drafts, he's an excellent value pick.

DAVID MONTGOMERY REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS OVER 774 (-110, DK)

Fantasy Points is projecting 1,115 rushing yards in 15 games on 263.2 carries (ninth-most), which is a whopping 44% higher than this line.

I won a Montgomery rushing yards Under in this article last year, but it was very close, and he still got to 719 yards (92.4% of this 774 number) while playing behind a stud talent in Detroit. Rookie Woody Marks was solid in 2025, but it looks like the books are overrating his presence this year.

Houston was a 12-win playoff team last season with a struggling QB and has arguably the best defense in the league, so the durable Montgomery should easily clear 200 totes. He's also hit this number in five-for-five seasons with 200+ carries.

He's not a sexy fantasy pick, but as about the 23rd back off the board, he's a strong pick as an RB3 or even a viable RB2 for teams that load up on the other skill positions.

JOSH DOWNS REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS OVER 649.5 (-110, DK)

Downs ran only 18.5% of his routes from the outside last season, but Michael Pittman and his 345 outside routes are gone, as is A.D. Mitchell, who was traded after playing eight games with the Colts last year.

Indy signed veteran Nick Westbrook-Ikhine, but he's more of a downfield specialist, and Downs is the more skilled receiver, so he's expected to soak up some of the reps outside in 12 personnel, which is a big development for the usually slot-centric Downs.

“ BREECE HALL REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS OVER 899.5 (-110, DK)

I hit a play of Over 925.5 rushing yards (-110) with Breece last year, and he beat it by a solid 15%. This year, we're looking at an improved Jets offense simply because it can't get any worse.

We're projecting a healthy 1,071.6 rushing yards from Hall at Fantasy Points, or 19% higher than this total. He's another year removed from the ACL with no contract concerns, and the Jets last year were quietly ninth in YBC/ATT, 11th in rushing YPG, and had the fifth-lowest stuff rate in the league.

Led by a veteran OC and QB behind a young and solid OL with a strong collection of talent at receiver, a healthy Hall should dominate the backfield touches despite talk of a 2-3 man backfield. I see Hall easily hitting 900+ rushing yards and delivering for fantasy players—even if the Jets keep jetting.

”

It also helps explain how we're projecting 768.3 receiving yards at Fantasy Points, which is a healthy 18.2% higher than this total.

SAQUON BARKLEY REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS OVER 1099.5 (-110, DK)

I was all-in on the Under last year (Under 1500.5 rushing yards), and that was an easy win. This year, with the total down 36.4%, I'm going Over with confidence.

With Philly's solid OL in relatively good shape, Fantasy Points is projecting 1,323.5 rushing yards, or 20.3% more. The 29-year-old has been very durable the last four seasons, and the offense can only improve after last season's horrendous showing.

D'ANDRE SWIFT REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS OVER 799.5 (-110, DK)

Swift has exceeded expectations three years in a row, logging 223 or more carries in each of the last three seasons.

His rushing data was strong last year, ranking top 15 among 49 RBs with 100 or more carries in rushing yards per game, YPC, explosive run percentage, and success rate. He's not tremendous in terms of yards gained after contact, and he's mediocre on man/gap runs (4.16 YPC), but 65.5% of his runs last year were on zone concepts (sixth-most), and his 5.27 YPC on those runs was sixth-best.

The Bears have an issue at LT with starter Ozzy Trapilo expected to miss most of the season, but Chicago's running game and OL are strong overall, posting the sixth-best YBCO/Att (2.18) and ranking top five in attempts, rushing yards per game, YPC, and success rate, per Fantasy Points Data.

They did absolutely nothing in the offseason to upgrade their RB room, and backup Kyle Monangai is not a serious threat to Swift's role as the top back. Fantasy Points is projecting another 200+ carries from Swift and 956.4 rushing yards, or 19.2% more, so this looks like a win if he hits 200+ carries for the fourth season in a row.

SAQUON BARKLEY REGULAR SEASON RUSHING TDS OVER 7.5 (+100, DK)

What we've learned about Philly is that, as long as one of HC Nick Sirianni's flunkies isn't running the offense, like in 2024 when Barkley had 10 rushing TDs, Philly is in good shape on that side of the ball.

No one knows how prevalent the Tush Push will be under the new OC, but our projections maven at Fantasy Points is an Eagles fan and lives in the Philly area, and he's projecting 10.1 rushing TDs, or 34.6% more than this total.

That's a solid cushion with the offense in better hands under well-respected new OC Sean Mannion.

CHRISTIAN WATSON REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS OVER 799.5 (-110, DK)

We're projecting 894.8 receiving yards at Fantasy Points, which is a modest 11.9% more than this line.

But this play simply comes down to health, since Watson was insanely good last year, producing against man (an excellent 2.55 YPRR) and zone (a stellar 2.87 YPRR).



BIJAN ROBINSON REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS: OVER 1174.5 (-110, DK)

Backup Tyler Allgeier is off the roster, and I don't see new No. 2 Brian Robinson handling the 143 carries Allgeier was fed last year. Bijan is a good candidate to hit 300+ carries (we're projecting the second-most carries this year at 293).

We're also projecting 1,370 rushing yards at Fantasy Points, or 16.6% more than this total. Bijan has never missed a game due to injury, and the Falcons led the league in yards after contact last year, thanks largely to him.

Atlanta was also top 12 in attempts, rushing yards, and YPC last year. The strength of this weak offense is still the OL and running game, so this one's a lock if he can avoid a serious injury.

The Packers are now ready to make him a foundational player, which is why they signed him to a four-year extension in June worth up to \$110.5 million, with a \$31 million signing bonus.

He was only 51st in the NFL last season in targets per route run, so his volume is set to rise on a thinned-out Packers receiving corps with Romeo Doubs and Dontayvion Wicks off the roster. The only thing standing between cashing this bet is a serious injury.

BRIAN THOMAS JR. REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS: OVER 724.5 (-115, DK)

Backing BTJ was one of the worst things I did last year, but I can partially make up for it by taking advantage of his dreadful season, which has lowered his O/U line by 37% compared to 2025.

Fantasy Points is projecting 855.3 receiving yards, which is 18% higher than this total. We also have BTJ with the most projected yards on the Jaguars, although it's close with Parker Washington and Jakobi Meyers.

The pads have yet to go on, so it's early, but Thomas has consistently drawn praise this offseason, and his growth in year two of this offense has been very apparent. The coaches know him better and he knows the offense better, so I expect a solid bounceback.

THE UNDERACHIEVERS

TREY MCBRIDE REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS UNDER 999.5 (-110, DK)

He's a stud, but I just don't see McBride collecting as many targets this year in the new offense run by Mike LaFleur, who's a good bet to run a lot more 3-WR sets than last year with Marvin Harrison Jr., Michael Wilson, and new addition Kendrick Bourne.

The Cardinals last year used 12 personnel on 28.86% of their offensive snaps, higher than the league average of 21.79%, so there will be a lot more target competition for McBride this year.

McBride's volume is also going to take a hit with rookie Jeremiyah Love likely getting 275+ opportunities, including 50+ targets. Finally, McBride's production may be compromised if the team decides to evaluate rookie QB Carson Beck late in the season, which seems likely.

We're only projecting 775.8 receiving yards at Fantasy Points, which is 22% lower than this total.

DRAKE LONDON REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS UNDER 1149.5 (-110, DK)

We've seen the top wideout exceed 1,000 yards under Kevin Stefanski multiple times in recent seasons (Jerry Jeudy, Amari Cooper), but it didn't happen in Stefanski's first season in Cleveland in 2020.

It's a new system for everyone, including Tua Tagovailoa, who averaged only 190 passing yards per game in Miami last year. We'll probably also see Michael Penix, who was somehow only 62nd in the NFL last year in catchable throw percentage and dead last among 29 QBs with 300+ dropbacks.

We're projecting London to finish only 16th in receiving yards among wide receivers with 964.3 yards, which is 19.2% lower than this total.

MIKE EVANS REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS UNDER 899.5 (-115, DK)

The odds are better for the over (-110), so the books are leaning under for Evans, who we have projected for 863.3 receiving yards. That's only 4% lower than this number.

I usually back older receivers who are Canton-bound, and this is a player who has posted 1,000+ yards 11 seasons in a row. But Evans is well over 30 now (33 in August), and he's had lingering hamstring issues dating back to 2019.

Plus, San Francisco has been an injury wasteland for a number of years, so I'm fully preparing for some time missed for Evans.

JAYDEN DANIELS REGULAR SEASON PASSING TDS UNDER 21.5 (-115, DK)

I can't say I'm in love with this play, and I'm fine with Daniels as a fantasy pick at his ADP.

But we're projecting 18.8 TD passes, which is 14.3% lower than this total. New OC David Blough has never called plays or run an offense, and Washington is a little light on receiver talent.

It took 17 games for Daniels to get to 25 TD passes as a rookie in 2024, but we're also only projecting 14.5 games due to lingering concerns about his availability.

John Hansen is the founder and majority owner at FantasyPoints.com and Fantasy Points Data. He's also the host of "Prop Points" on VSIN Monday through Friday from 1-2 p.m. ET.

A.J. BROWN REGULAR SEASON RECEIVING YARDS UNDER 1124.5 (-110, DK)

I do believe the marriage between Drake Maye and Brown will go well, since Maye's accuracy is pinpoint and he excels on many of the same routes that Brown does.

But Brown has dealt with right knee issues since the 2020 season, so it's not a stretch to believe he could miss some time. Brown should be the unquestioned top target, but they do have up to five very capable wideouts along with a pair of receiving tight ends.

We're projecting 1,058 yards at Fantasy Points, which is only 6% lower than this total, but we also have Brown only 19th in targets this year with 106.8.

One of the best ways to gain an advantage over the house on season win totals and futures 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.

I have always believed that the NFL is unlike any other sporting league in that teams can make quick, definitive turnarounds from year-to-year, both positively and negatively. First-to-worst and worst-to-first are not unusual terms, and you can see seasons where more than half of the teams that qualify for the playoffs are different from the prior campaign. I personally believe this parity is one of the contributing factors to the league being so popular.

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, which can also be affected quickly by the addition or departure of certain personnel.

Of course, the basis for this article is that certain statistical indicators a team exhibits in one season can illustrate how close they are to changing the status of those three C’s and, eventually, their fortunes the next season.

NFL KEY STATS THAT PREDICT a team's improvement or decline in 2026

by Steve Makinen

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

Since 2009, there have been 51 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 almost 25%. All but 10 of these teams improved their outright winning percentage as well, by an average of about 20%, and 16 of them qualified for the playoffs. Note that last year saw an unusually high number of qualifiers for this angle, with eight, and all eight improved their ATS mark, each going 7-10 ATS or better. For 2026, there is just one qualifier. **TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2026: TAMPA BAY**

Since 2020, 20 teams have endured a turnover differential of -0.6 per game or worse and failed to make the playoffs. All but three of those teams improved the next season. The average improvement in regular-season wins was 3.8 per season for the other 17 teams. The Patriots and Jaguars qualified on this system last year, and improved by 10 and 9 regular-season wins, respectively, so there is huge potential with this

one. Do you see either of the teams on the list below capable of massive jumps in 2026? **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: WASHINGTON, NY JETS**

Since 2009, 21 teams have had a negative or even turnover differential, yet still managed to win double-digit games against the spread. Twelve of those teams reached the postseason the next year, including the Jaguars last year. For this season, we have all three teams that qualify that have even reached the postseason despite their lack of turnover luck. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: CAROLINA, SAN FRANCISCO, SEATTLE**

Of the 36 teams that improved their win-loss percentage by 34% or more from one season to the next since 2009, all but five had negative or even turnover differentials the prior season. Last year, the Jaguars, Patriots, and 49ers all met the criteria and joined the Bears as the only three teams to improve by that much, essentially 6+ wins. **TEAMS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED FOR 2026: ARIZONA, BALTIMORE, CAROLINA, CINCINNATI, CLEVELAND, DALLAS, DENVER, INDIANAPOLIS, KANSAS CITY, LAS VEGAS, MIAMI, MINNESOTA, NEW ORLEANS, NY GIANTS, NY JETS, SAN FRANCISCO, SEATTLE, TENNESSEE, WASHINGTON**

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 104 teams since 2009, 70 of them had win-loss records that declined, by an average of 13% outright and against the spread. Furthermore, of the 94 that reached the playoffs, 40 failed to do so the follow-up season, including five teams last year. You'll see the number of qualifiers for 2026 is just five, after 10 a year ago. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: CHICAGO, JACKSONVILLE, LA RAMS, NEW ENGLAND, PHILADELPHIA**

Only three of the last 29 teams since 2020 that had a turnover differential of better than +0.5 per game improved their record the next season. The average win-loss percentage decline of the other 26 teams was 16.1% (10% ATS), or about 2.7 wins per season. Detroit was one of eight teams that qualified on this angle going into 2025 and saw the biggest drop from 15-2 to 9-8. Only Houston improved last year among the eight qualifiers. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: CHICAGO, JACKSONVILLE, LA RAMS, NEW ENGLAND, PHILADELPHIA**

Since 2009, there have been 46 teams with a turnover differential of +5 or better in a season and failed to reach the postseason. Only 14 reached the postseason the next year, and only 17 improved their records. These are typically play-against teams, as failing to reach the playoffs does not provide for momentum the next season. However, the Bears defied the odds a year ago by making the playoffs after improving by six wins. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: NONE – ALL SEVEN TEAMS THAT MET THE TURNOVER MARGIN THRESHOLD REACHED THE PLAYOFFS.**

Only 14 of the last 49 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 20 improved. Two teams qualified on this system a year ago, and Kansas City was one of them. The Chiefs went from 15-2 to 6-11. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: BUFFALO, DETROIT, GREEN BAY, TAMPA BAY**

Of the 14 teams that declined their ATS win-loss percentage by 31% or more from one season to the next since 2009, all had positive turnover differentials of +4 or better the prior season. Denver is the only team that qualified this past season. **TEAMS POTENTIALLY AFFECTED FOR 2026: ATLANTA, CHICAGO, HOUSTON, JACKSONVILLE, LA CHARGERS, LA RAMS, NEW ENGLAND, PHILADELPHIA, PITTSBURGH**

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

Since 2001, there have been 57 teams that managed to win 10+ games despite scoring less than 23 points per game in a season. In the follow-up season, only 13 of these teams improved, while 39 dropped, by an average of 4.4 games in the win column. Kansas City was the worst of these teams last year, dropping by nine wins. For 2026, we have two teams qualifying. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: LA CHARGERS, PHILADELPHIA**

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 2000, only four of the 32 teams were worse the next season, and the average win improvement was about 2.6 per season. San Francisco qualified on this most recently in

2025 and improved by six games! Nobody qualified last season. **TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2026: CINCINNATI, NY GIANTS**

Since 2000, there have been 78 teams that somehow won less than 42% of their games despite allowing 23 or fewer points per game in a season. In the follow-up season, 51 of these teams, or 65.4% of them, improved in the win column, and the average improvement of that group was 3.65 wins per year! Chicago was the only qualifier last year and improved by six wins! **TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2026: CLEVELAND, KANSAS CITY, NEW ORLEANS**

There has been a consistent season-to-season decline in the group of teams that have won 10 or more games despite allowing 23+ PPG. Over the last 27 seasons, only five of the 35 teams were better the next season, and the average win drop off was 3.1 per season, including Washington's seven-win drop a year ago. **TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2026: CHICAGO**

There have been 14 teams that have scored 27+ PPG in the last 23 seasons and did not make the playoffs. The combined record of those teams in the follow-up regular season was 135-92, good for 59.5% and an average of 9.64 wins per season. Only four 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 2025 Bengals qualified on this last year, however, and dropped from 9-8 to 6-11, in large part due to injuries. In a rarity, we have a lofty three teams qualifying this season. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: DALLAS, DETROIT, INDIANAPOLIS**

If you examine a positive point differential with a losing record, only four of the last 20 teams that had this combination worsened their win total the next season. Two recent Super Bowl Champion teams met this criterion: 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, the last two teams that qualified bucked this trend, 2024 Las Vegas and 2025 Arizona, who dropped by five wins last year. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: BALTIMORE, KANSAS CITY, INDIANAPOLIS**

COMBINATION SYSTEMS USING STATISTICAL TRAITS ALREADY DETAILED

Ten of the last 17 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 Seattle in 2025. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: BALTIMORE, INDIANAPOLIS, KANSAS CITY, MINNESOTA**

Only 15 of the last 56 teams that had a positive turnover differential but negative (or even) score differential qualified for the playoffs in the next season, although against all odds, all three qualifiers did in 2025. This year, we have two teams qualifying, both from the NFC South Division. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: ATLANTA, TAMPA BAY**

All but two of the 28 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%, or 3.8 wins per team. Seven of those teams made the playoffs, and 14 of them improved by four or more wins. Carolina was the biggest winner on this system a year ago, winning three more games and taking the NFC South title. **TEAM AFFECTED FOR 2026: LAS VEGAS, NY JETS, TENNESSEE**

Only 10 of the 51 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 14.5% (13.8% ATS), or about 2.5 wins per season. This included the Ravens, Bills, Eagles, and Lions a year ago, all of whom dropped in record. **TEAMS AFFECTED FOR 2026: JACKSONVILLE, LA RAMS, NEW ENGLAND**

Hopefully, what you've read here helps you zoom in on a few winning NFL season win total wagers you've been contemplating.

BETTING THE ROLE

FINDING VALUE IN THE 2026 ROOKIE CLASS

by Matt Brown

What five seasons of rookie production tell us about this year's headliners, and the markets worth a first look.

Every offseason, the rookie hype machine runs hot. Bettors, though, get paid on roles and usage, not on draft buzz or highlight reels. Before you put a dollar on a single rookie number this fall, it pays to ground expectations in what rookies have actually produced over the last five seasons, then layer this year's class, their projected roles, and the current consensus projections on top. Do that, and a handful of markets start to separate from the noise.

WHAT THE LAST FIVE YEARS ACTUALLY TELL US

RECEIVERS ARE THE MOST RELIABLE ROOKIE BET ON THE BOARD

In each of the past five seasons, at least one rookie pass-catcher has cleared 1,000 receiving yards: Ja'Marr Chase (1,455) in 2021, Garrett Wilson (1,103) and Chris Olave (1,042) in 2022, Puka Nacua's record 1,486 in 2023, four different 1,000-yard rookies in 2024 (led by Brian Thomas Jr.'s 1,282, plus Malik Nabers' 109-catch and Brock Bowers' 112-catch single-season rookie records), and Tetairoa McMillan (1,014) in 2025. Pedigree sharpens the edge: per ESPN's research, of the 16 wide receivers drafted in the top 10 since 2012, 12 reached at least 865 yards, and the 13 who played 14 or more games commanded a 25% target share on average.

RUNNING BACKS PRODUCE, BUT 1,000 YARDS IS NOT A GIVEN

Rookie backs cleared 1,000 in 2021 (Najee Harris, 1,200), 2022 (Kenneth Walker III, 1,050, and Tyler Allgeier, 1,035) and 2024 (Bucky Irving, 1,122). Yet the class's best back fell short in 2023 (Bijan Robinson, 976) and 2025 (Ashton Jeanty, 975). The separator is draft capital and volume. The last five backs taken in the top seven all posted 260-plus carries and 950-plus rushing yards, and the 11 first-round backs since 2012 who reached 200 carries all cleared 930 yards, averaging roughly 1,156 yards and 8.7 touchdowns.

QUARTERBACKS ARE A VOLUME STORY, NOT A BOX-SCORE EXPLOSION

Only one rookie in the last five years has topped 4,000 passing yards (C.J. Stroud, 4,108 in 2023). Rookie QBs who appeared in at least 12 games since 2012 average about 3,051 passing yards and 16.7 touchdowns. For rookie passers, the edge lives in how early they get on the field and game script, not crazy efficiency.

TIGHT END IS QUIETLY BECOMING A ROOKIE POSITION

Only 12 tight ends in NFL history have produced 700 receiving yards as rookies, but half of those have come since 2021, including three last season (Tyler Warren, Harold Fannin Jr. and Colston Loveland). That recent trend reframes how aggressively we project a first-round rookie tight end.

THE 2026 CLASS: ROLES AND CONSENSUS PROJECTIONS

The tables below show a three-source projection consensus (FantasyPros, ESPN and FTN) for rookies expected to have the biggest roles in 2026.

QUARTERBACK

Player	Team	Draft	Cons. Pass Yds	Cons. Pass TD
Fernando Mendoza	LV	No. 1	3,088	15.8

Fernando Mendoza, Raiders (No. 1 overall): Mendoza may open behind veteran Kirk Cousins, but history is unkind to the idea of a No. 1 pick holding a clipboard for long; first-rounders have started within a month at a 73% clip over the last decade. His roughly 3,088-yard consensus sits almost exactly on the rookie-starter baseline, which is the point. This is a volume profile, and it carries the widest source spread in the class (2,842 to 3,370) because who is going to catch the ball?

RUNNING BACKS

Player	Team	Draft	Cons. Rush Yds	Cons. Rush TD
Jeremiyah Love	ARI	No. 3	1,075	6.9
Jadarian Price	SEA	No. 32	932	7.3
Mike Washington Jr.	LV	No. 122	420	2.4
Emmett Johnson	KC	No. 161	321	2.2

Jeremiyah Love, Cardinals (No. 3 overall): The cleanest profile on the board, at least on the surface. Love fits the elite-workload, top-of-draft profile that has historically meant 950-plus yards, and his roughly 1,075-yard, 6.9-TD consensus reflects it. That said, I'm not sure the projection systems are factoring in that they still have a few carries to give James Conner, and they signed Tyler Allgeier to a two-year, \$12M deal. I have a hunch this is more of a 60-65% workload than a true bell-cow situation.

Jadarian Price, Seahawks (No. 32 overall). Price has a real path to lead-back touches with Zach Charbonnet recovering from a January ACL tear, and Seattle's run-friendly scheme helps. His roughly 932-yard, 7.3-TD line shows more touchdown equity than bulk yardage, a useful distinction when you get to the markets.

The committee backs. Mike Washington Jr. (Raiders, about 420 yards) and Emmett Johnson (Chiefs, about 321 yards) project as rotational pieces and will likely only be a viable bet for any market only after an injury to the starter.

RECEIVERS AND TIGHT END

Player	Team	Draft	Cons. Rec Yds	Cons. Rec TD
Carnell Tate	TEN	No. 4	946	4.6
Jordyn Tyson	NO	No. 8	890	4.8
Makai Lemon	PHI	No. 20	843	4.9
KC Concepcion	CLE	No.24	725	3.1
Kenyon Sadiq (TE)	NYJ	No.16	610	4.3
Omar Cooper Jr.	NYJ	No. 30	606	3.3

Carnell Tate, Titans (No. 4 overall): The top receiver projection in the class, and exactly the top-10 pedigree the historical data rewards. He pairs with second-year passer Cam Ward in a Tennessee offense that needed a No. 1 target. His roughly 946-yard, 4.6-TD consensus reflects that featured-role outlook that could lead to 1,200+ yards with a little more efficiency from Ward.

Jordyn Tyson, Saints (No. 8 overall): The other top-10 wideout, and history says receivers taken that high see heavy volume right away. His roughly 890-yard, 4.8-TD consensus banks on it, though the New Orleans passing game adds variance: he's catching passes from second-year quarterback Tyler Shough in an offense still finding its footing.

Makai Lemon, Eagles (No. 20 overall): A strong number for a player with real opportunity with AJ Brown out of town. His roughly 843-yard, 4.9-TD consensus assumes early opportunity in what has been a run-leaning Jalen Hurts offense. I think the volume will be there.

KC Concepcion, Browns (No. 24 overall): There is a path to a real Year 1 workload, but temper it. His roughly 725-yard, 3.1-TD consensus already accounts for target competition from veteran Jerry Jeudy and fellow rookie Denzel Boston, plus an unsettled Cleveland quarterback room with Deshaun Watson, Dillon Gabriel and Shedeur Sanders all in the mix.

Omar Cooper Jr., Jets (No. 30 overall): The lowest projection of the group, and a profile that fits a complementary role. His roughly 606-yard, 3.3-TD consensus reflects a spot behind a set Jets target hierarchy, with New York also spending a first-round pick on tight end Kenyon Sadiq in a Geno Smith offense.

Kenyon Sadiq, Jets (No. 16 overall): A roughly 610-yard, 4.3-TD consensus paired with the recent rookie-tight-end trend makes this projection possibly seem a little light. Even with Geno Smith at the helm, this could be dump-off city when they're down 20+ points. The Over on Sadiq's 450.5-yard receiving line is my favorite bet for any rookie in this class.

MARKETS WORTH EXPLORING

ROOKIE RECEIVING YARDS (PROPS AND SEASON FUTURES)

This is where the history is strongest. With a rookie receiver over 1,000 yards in five straight seasons and two top-10 wideouts (Tate, Tyson) profiling for big target shares, a conservatively set receiving-yards total has Over written all over it.

OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

The award skews toward high-volume skill players and Week 1 QB starters. Love (locked workload, top-3 capital) and the top-10 receivers headline the pool, while Mendoza's case rises or falls on how quickly he replaces Cousins. While Love is the rightful favorite, at the current prices, give me Makai Lemon at 15/1 at FanDuel.

JEREMIAH LOVE RUSHING YARDS

His profile matches the 200-carry first-round backs who have all cleared 900 yards. However, competition for carries (Tyler Allgeier) and a negative game script can cap a rookie back and I think that happens here. I'm waiting for the number to creep up so I can hit the Under button.

MENDOZA PASSING YARDS

He's lined right in the 2,300-2,400 pass-yard range. This is a pretty simple answer to a difficult question. If you think he plays early, this number is too low (Tyler Shough went for nearly 2,400 yards in 11 games last season). If you think Kirk Cousins is under center for about half the season, this number is too high. I lean pretty heavy to the Under, thinking Cousins takes snaps into November.

KENYON SADIQ RECEIVING YARDS

The number is just too low for a supremely talented player on a team that will have a negative game script nearly 75% of the time.

BOTTOM LINE

The receivers, especially the two top-10 picks, carry the most reliable historical tailwind, but Lemon is on the best team with WR1 upside. The headliner back, Jeremiah Love, has the cleanest path to volume, but is on one of the worst teams in the league, capping his upside. And the rookie quarterback is a volume-capped profile to bet against, especially when you consider he won't be the starter on Day 1.

PROJECTING THE 2026 NFL STANDINGS BY POWER RATINGS

by Steve Makinen

As bettors, we're looking for every edge we can, and by analyzing every game, we can potentially find things that oddsmakers setting season win-total props may have missed or overvalued. This year's NFL schedule again features 17 games for each team. For this particular piece, we will compare my projections with the numbers set by the oddsmakers at DraftKings. By no means am I saying that the best numbers are available at DK, just that you have plenty of options to choose from, including alternate win totals. I also love that you are able to bet any of the season's 272 games at this point.

In this exercise, I have simulated the 2026 schedules for each team using their actual opponents and my latest power ratings. You can see those on the VSIN website currently under the NFL tab and MAKINEN POWER RATINGS. The simulations included the team-specific home and road field ratings. I should note that my current NFL home-field advantage ratings settled at about 2.0 points at the conclusion of last season, and I have kept them at this point heading into 2026. If you recall, I conducted a full home-and-road field performance study midway through the 2025 season to arrive at this number. You'll see the projected 2026 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 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 upon 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. Also, are there any key-player situations to account for, such as possible suspensions or injury concerns? Are players that teams are counting on really fully healthy? Quarterback Patrick Mahomes of the Chiefs, LB Micah Parsons of the Packers, and WR Malik Nabers of the Giants are a few examples of players that move point spreads whose health should be monitored closely. Also, are veteran quarterbacks Geno Smith, Kyler Murray, or Kirk Cousins ready to step in for teams just lacking consistent production from the sport's key position?

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

STEVE'S TOP 6 TEAMS EXPECTED TO WIN MORE GAMES THAN PROP

1. MIAMI - DraftKings: 4.5, Steve's Projection: 5.6, Diff: +1.1
2. INDIANAPOLIS - DraftKings: 7.5, Steve's Projection: 8.2, Diff: +0.7
2. LAS VEGAS - DraftKings: 5.5, Steve's Projection: 6.2, Diff: +0.7
4. SEATTLE - DraftKings: 10.5, Steve's Projection: 11.1, Diff: +0.6
4. NEW ORLEANS - DraftKings: 7.5, Steve's Projection: 8.1, Diff: +0.6
4. CLEVELAND - DraftKings: 6.5, Steve's Projection: 7.1, Diff: +0.6

STEVE'S TOP 6 TEAMS EXPECTED TO WIN FEWER GAMES THAN PROP

1. TAMPA BAY - DraftKings: 10.5, Steve's Projection: 8.1, Diff: -2.4
2. LA CHARGERS - DraftKings: 9.5, Steve's Projection: 8.1, Diff: -1.4
3. DALLAS - DraftKings: 9.5, Steve's Projection: 8.5, Diff: -1
4. KANSAS CITY - DraftKings: 10.5, Steve's Projection: 9.7, Diff: -0.8
5. NEW ENGLAND - DraftKings: 10.5, Steve's Projection: 9.8, Diff: -0.7
6. HOUSTON - DraftKings: 9.5, Steve's Projection: 8.9, Diff: -0.6

According to my figures, the Cardinals play the league's toughest schedule, at least as it stands now, based upon opponent/home/road breakdown. Arizona ranked just ahead of the Chargers and Panthers in that regard. Not only will they have to face the tough NFC West Division foes, they also face the Cowboys and Eagles, plus the NFC West Division, which sent two teams to the postseason last year, one of which was not the Chiefs. For what it's worth, the Giants faced the toughest schedule in this column last season and limped to a 4-13 finish.

The league's easiest schedule belongs to the Lions, a team looking to make a rebound in 2026 after dropping by 6 wins a year ago in finishing 9-8. A primary reason for the schedule softness is that Detroit finished in last place in the NFC North last year, despite its winning record. Some bad fortune things went against HC Dan Campbell's team last season, including several tight losses. Assumed to be healthy at the outset, my power ratings have the Lions as underdogs in just four of 17 games, and the biggest underdog line they face is +4.5 points at Buffalo in Week 2. This could be a nice bounce-back season for a team whose championship window may be closing quickly. For the record, Baltimore (2nd), Philadelphia (3rd), and Cincinnati (4th) also face relatively easier slates.

Baltimore (11.4) is projected to win the most games of any team in the NFL, followed by Seattle (11.1), Buffalo (10.8), and Philadelphia (10.6). There are four other teams among the double-digit win projections - Detroit (10.4), Green Bay (10.0), LA Rams (10.7), and San Francisco (10.2).

Last year, there were two teams projected to win six (6.0) games or less, and those were Cleveland (5.6) & the Giants (5.9). Both teams ACTUALLY failed to reach six wins. For 2026, there are three more projected for this level of futility: the NY Jets (5.7), Miami (5.6), and Arizona (4.7). Of course, those win totals would represent improvements for the Jets and Cardinals, each of whom was praised for their draft work this past April.

Assuming the projections play out accurately, the AFC's top-seeded team for the playoffs would be Baltimore. Buffalo, the #2, would be slotted to take on #7 Cincinnati in the wild card round. Also in the wild card playoff round, the #4 Texans would host #5 New England, and Denver

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

The largest point spread at the outset of the season is expected to be a November divisional game featuring the Cardinals at Seattle, with the Seahawks shown as 13.4-point favorites. There are 16 other games showing lines with double-digit favorites, six more than a year ago, with the 49ers showing up most on that list, three times. Notably, there were 36 games projected to have double-digit point spreads in 2022, and just 47 in the four years since, suggesting an enhanced era of parity for the league.

Of the 263 matchups played at host stadiums, 85 of them are showing point spreads designating road favorites, down from 77 in 2025. The Seahawks and Ravens claim the distinction of being projected as road favorites the most times for the 2026 season, appearing as such in seven road games each. On the opposite end of the spectrum are the most frequent home underdogs: the Cardinals, expected to be in that role eight times.

OTHER INTERESTING SCHEDULING TIDBITS

There are four teams that will face at least three opponents coming off a bye week, which, theoretically, might be considered a disadvantage. Those teams are Philadelphia (4x), LA Chargers (4x), Las Vegas (3x) and LA Rams (3x). The Eagles, in particular, face three teams coming out of byes in a four-week span from Weeks 6-9.

The Texans claim the distinction of facing the most teams heading into their bye weeks, FOUR. Las Vegas and the Giants face three each.

There are six situations in which teams have a three-game set against opponents with a power rating of 19.2 or lower. Theoretically, these are the "easiest three-game stretches" in the league this year:

1. Kansas City: Weeks 9-11, 17.6 average opponent PR
2. San Francisco: Weeks 2-4, 18.2
3. Detroit: Weeks 3-5, 18.5
4. Cleveland: Weeks 12-14, 18.9
5. NY Giants: Weeks 3-5, 19.0
6. Denver: Weeks 13-15, 19.1

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 29.0 or more:

1. LA Chargers: Weeks 3-5, 29.9 average opponent PR
2. Arizona: Weeks 9-11, 29.5
3. Dallas: Weeks 12-15, 29.3
4. Kansas City: Weeks 12-14, 29.2
5. Las Vegas: Week 9-11, 29

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. Arizona: Weeks 1-3, 28.6 average opponent PR
2. Washington: 28.2
3. New Orleans: 26.53
4. Indianapolis: 26.5

On the flip side of the toughest three-game stretches to start the season, these are the teams facing arguably the easiest trio of contests to start the 2026 season. Oftentimes, getting off to a fast start can be what catapults a team to a successful season:

1. San Francisco: Weeks 1-3, 20.2 average opponent PR
2. Green Bay: 20.6
3. Detroit: 21.2
4. Tampa Bay: 21.6

2026 PROJECTIONS

EAST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
BUFFALO	10.5	28.5	2.8	0.3	23.67	23	10.8	6.2
NEW ENGLAND	10.5	27	1.1	0.5	24.21	14	9.8	7.2
NY JETS	5.5	18.5	1.4	-0.6	24.61	9	5.7	11.3
MIAMI	4.5	18.5	2.6	-0.3	24.83	4	5.6	11.4

NORTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
BALTIMORE	11.5	28.5	2.3	0.9	22.48	31	11.4	5.6
CINCINNATI	9.5	24	2.2	0.1	22.92	29	9.0	8.0
PITTSBURGH	8.5	23	2.3	0.4	23.45	26	8.3	8.7
CLEVELAND	6.5	20.5	2.5	-1.2	23.47	25	7.1	9.9

SOUTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
HOUSTON	9.5	24.5	2.1	0.3	23.73	20	8.9	8.1
JACKSONVILLE	8.5	24	2.3	-0.1	24.32	13	8.3	8.7
INDIANAPOLIS	7.5	23	2	-0.5	23.74	19	8.2	8.8
TENNESSEE	6.5	20.5	0.9	-0.8	24.61	8	6.5	10.5

WEST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
DENVER	9.5	27	2.5	-0.4	23.95	17	9.9	7.1
KANSAS CITY	10.5	26	2.4	0.7	23.49	24	9.7	7.3
LA CHARGERS	9.5	24.5	1.8	-0.6	25.23	2	8.1	8.9
LAS VEGAS	5.5	19.5	1.7	0.4	24.44	12	6.2	10.8

EAST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
PHILADELPHIA	10.5	27	2.8	0.7	22.72	30	10.6	6.4
DALLAS	9.5	24	2.6	0.4	24.11	15	8.5	8.5
WASHINGTON	7.5	23	1	0.1	24.63	7	7.7	9.3
NY GIANTS	7.5	22	1.5	-0.2	24.49	11	7.3	9.7

NORTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
DETROIT	10.5	26	3.2	1	21.99	32	10.4	6.6
GREEN BAY	10.5	26.5	2.3	0.5	23.44	27	10.0	7.0
CHICAGO	9.5	26	2.1	-0.6	24.64	6	9.1	7.9
MINNESOTA	8.5	23	1.8	0.5	23.71	21	8.1	8.9

SOUTH	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
TAMPA BAY	10.5	23	1.5	0.7	23.7	22	8.1	8.9
NEW ORLEANS	7.5	22.5	1.5	-0.4	23.33	28	8.1	8.9
CAROLINA	7.5	22	1.4	-0.9	25.13	3	7.0	10.0
ATLANTA	6.5	21.5	1.8	-0.8	24.57	10	7.0	10.0

WEST	DK WINS	SM PR	HM FLD	RD FLD	SC STR	SC RANK	PRO W	PRO L
SEATTLE	10.5	29.5	1.7	1	24.04	16	11.1	5.9
LA RAMS	10.5	29.5	1.6	0.3	24.76	5	10.7	6.3
SAN FRANCISCO	10.5	27.5	2.4	0.1	23.83	18	10.2	6.8
ARIZONA	4.5	17.5	1.5	-0.1	25.76	1	4.7	12.3

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

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STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
LA RAMS	29.5
SEATTLE	29.5
BALTIMORE	28.5
BUFFALO	28.5
SAN FRANCISCO	27.5
DENVER	27.0
NEW ENGLAND	27.0
PHILADELPHIA	27.0
GREEN BAY	26.5
CHICAGO	26.0
DETROIT	26.0
KANSAS CITY	26.0
HOUSTON	24.5
LA CHARGERS	24.5
CINCINNATI	24.0
DALLAS	24.0
JACKSONVILLE	24.0
INDIANAPOLIS	23.0
MINNESOTA	23.0
PITTSBURGH	23.0
TAMPA BAY	23.0
WASHINGTON	23.0
NEW ORLEANS	22.5
CAROLINA	22.0
NY GIANTS	22.0
ATLANTA	21.5
CLEVELAND	20.5
TENNESSEE	20.5
LAS VEGAS	19.5
MIAMI	18.5
NY JETS	18.5
ARIZONA	17.5

AFC EAST

Division Preview

previews by Jonathan Von Tobel

The AFC East has lost some of its luster with the demolition of Miami's roster in the offseason, but the two heavyweights at the top of the projected standings still give this division some verve heading into the 2026 regular season.

New England looks to defend its division title against Buffalo after stealing it from the Bills and snapping their streak of five consecutive AFC East titles. Drake Maye is poised to potentially compete for an MVP once again, and Josh Allen nearly always finds himself in the mix for the award. Maye is 11-1 to win it and Allen is the favorite.

Buffalo is the favorite to win the division (-125) at DraftKings, and many expect New England to regress after a season in which it played one of the easiest schedules in recent history. Still, the Patriots landed one of the biggest fish in the offseason in wide receiver A.J. Brown, and with a win total of 10.5 there are market expectations of success for the reigning AFC champions.

While both the Bills and Patriots compete with a Super Bowl in mind, the two other division members find themselves dueling only with mediocrity.

New York enters its second season under Aaron Glenn with a new offensive coordinator and new quarterback in Geno Smith. The Jets set records with their futility on defense a season ago, and this season looks to be no better, as they hold a win total of 5.5 and are -1100 to miss the playoffs.

In Miami, the Dolphins are entering a new era under first-time NFL head coach Jeff Hafley and free-agent quarterback Malik Willis. But, with one of the hardest schedules in the league, the expectations for Miami are that it will be focusing on the 2027 Draft earlier than most.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
BUFFALO	28.5	2.8	0.3	23.67 (23)	10.8	6.2	10.5
NEW ENGLAND	27.0	1.1	0.5	24.21 (14)	9.8	7.2	10.5
NY JETS	18.5	1.4	-0.6	24.61 (9)	5.7	11.3	5.5
MIAMI	18.5	2.6	-0.3	24.83 (4)	5.6	11.4	4.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



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BUFFALO

Bills



Regular-season success has become the norm in Buffalo, but despite seven consecutive seasons of 10 or more wins, this was an offseason of change for the Bills. Longtime head coach Sean McDermott was fired and Joe Brady – the team’s offensive coordinator since 2023 – was given the task of breaking through in the AFC. Buffalo will also christen its new stadium this season.

Still, expectations remain the same. Josh Allen is the favorite to win MVP, Buffalo is the favorite to win the AFC East and the second choice to win the AFC. Whether the team achieves its lofty goals remains to be seen, but it is guaranteed that anything short of a Super Bowl victory would be a disappointment in western New York.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 10.5

Buffalo’s baseline of production over the last seven seasons has been at least 10 wins, and the team can still achieve that mark and stay Under its win total. The Bills’ strength of schedule is average – 14th according to Warren Sharp’s rankings – but there are some landmines. Look no further than Weeks 12-16, where the Bills must face five opponents with a win total of at least 9.5 and three of those are on the road. With a first-time head coach and potentially weaker defense, it’s hard to recommend laying a price on 11 or more wins.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 13-6 SU & 9-10 ATS / 10-9 O-U
Head Coach: Joe Brady - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-1.8	@	UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of BUF-HOU h2h series
9/17	-4.7		UNDERDOGS are on a 7-1 ATS run in BUF-DET h2h series
9/27	-7.8		LA CHARGERS are on 5-1 ATS run vs. Buffalo
10/4	-3.4		NEW ENGLAND is on 18-5 ATS extended run at Buffalo
10/12	+2.7	@	OVER the total is 8-2 in L10 of BUF-LAR h2h series
10/18	-7.2	@	OVER the total is 7-0-1 in L8 of BUF-LVR h2h series
11/1	-2.3		HOME TEAMS are on 12-2 ATS surge in BAL-BUF h2h set
11/9	-3.6	@	ROAD TEAMS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of BUF-MIN h2h series
11/15	-9.3	@	BUFFALO has won L5 SU & ATS vs. NY Jets
11/22	-12.7		OVER the total is 10-1-1 in L12 MIA-BUF matchups at Buffalo
11/26	-5		HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in KC-BUF rivalry
12/6	-1.1	@	The L3 games of BUF-NE series in Foxboro went OVER the total
12/13	+0.4	@	HOME TEAMS & UNDER the total are 6-1 ATS in L7 of BUF-GB h2h series
12/19	-6.3		ROAD TEAMS are on 3-0-1 ATS run in CHI-BUF h2h series
12/25	+1.1	@	BUFFALO is 10-3 ATS in L13 games versus Denver
1/3	-8.1	@	UNDER the total is 12-4-1 in BUF-MIA series at Miami since '10
1/10	-13	@	BUFFALO is on 6-0 SU & 5-1 ATS run hosting NY Jets, avg MOV 19 PPG

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.67**
 #23 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.8 / 0.3**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

What does the addition of DJ Moore do for the Bills' offense?

One of the constant questions over the last few seasons has been the depth of the Bills' wide receiver room. There has not been a 1,000-yard receiver in Buffalo the last two seasons, as Khalil Shakir led the team with 821 yards in 2024 and 719 yards in 2025.

To remedy the error, the Bills' front office elected to trade for DJ Moore. The former first-rounder is a recognizable name, but there is no denying his statistical decline. Moore has failed to eclipse 1,000 yards himself in three of the last four seasons, and, in 2025, he did not reach the century mark in a single game. He joins a depth chart that still has Shakir, along with Keon Coleman, who caught just 38 balls for 404 yards, and Josh Palmer. The rest of the projected depth chart at wide receiver caught a grand sum of 18 passes in 2025.

Buffalo finished last season fourth in yards per play (5.9), third in scoring (28.3), and third in EPA per play on offense (+0.12) (Sumer Sports). Much of that production is due to the presence of Allen and a powerful rushing attack led by James Cook. But once again, the Bills enter a season with questions about how their wide receiver room will hold up, and at the top of the depth chart is a wide receiver who is declining with enormous pressure on his shoulders to buoy a position group that desperately needs to stay healthy.

What do all of the changes in personnel and staff do to Buffalo's defense?

McDermott's departure means there is a new voice calling the plays for the Bills' defense. Jim Leonhard assumes the role for Brady this season after spending the last two years with the Broncos in various roles. Leonhard is reportedly installing a new defensive scheme for Buffalo, shifting the team into a 3-4 base as opposed to the 4-3 scheme it ran under McDermott.

Edge rushers Joey Bosa and A.J. Epenesa, as well as cornerbacks Tre'Davious White and Taron Johnson, all departed in the offseason. That is over 2,600 snaps played for the Bills' defense in 2025 that are out the door. The unit, which finished 15th in opponent EPA per play, is making a major transition and dealing with an exodus of production from last season.

Does Joe Brady actually make the Buffalo Bills better?

It could be argued that McDermott needed to be fired, but the reality is that Brady had been on McDermott's staff the previous three seasons. Does the offensive coordinator of the failed head coach from the previous season actually bring the change needed?

Brady will reportedly continue to call plays despite being a first-time head coach. That alone is an issue. He was also the coordinator full-time over the last two seasons, a timeframe which coincides with the absence of a 1,000-yard receiver for Buffalo's offense.

Head coaches add wins at the margins. McDermott's biggest weakness was arguably as a game manager (13 seconds). Does Brady make better decisions in that role than McDermott did? That question will be answered, but it is unknown at this point in the regime.

ODDS TO WIN...

10-1 SUPER BOWL

+500 AFC

-125 AFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.3	4
YARDS PER POINT	13.3	8
PLAYS PER GAME	63.6	9
TIME OF POSSESSION	33:08	1
3RD DOWN CONV. %	44.8%	4
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	376.3	4
YARDS PER PLAY	5.9	5
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	1
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	159.6	1
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	2
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.1	25
COMPLETION %	69.5%	2
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	216.6	15
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8	3
TURNOVERS	1.1	15
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.5	12
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	24
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.4%	24
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	293.1	7
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	15
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	136.2	28
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.1	30
COMPLETION %	59.7%	4
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	156.9	1
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.8	3
SACKS	2.1	20
TURNOVERS	1.2	15

MIAMI Dolphins



Miami enters a new era this season. Gone are Tua Tagovailoa and Mike McDaniel. In their place are free-agent acquisition Malik Willis and first-time NFL head coach Jeff Hafley. Both come from Green Bay, and the Dolphins' front office – led by former Packers VP of Player Personnel Jon-Eric Sullivan – is hoping to capture the consistent winning culture that is a norm in Wisconsin.

Roster turnover is the theme for Miami. It has a new quarterback, new head coach and a litany of position groups which have been gutted. All of that must come together in 2026 and take on the second-hardest schedule in the NFL by opponent win total.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 4.5

The outlook for the 2026 season is bleak for Miami. Malik Willis was a big win in free agency, but there is no denying the questions that remain about the legitimacy of his success in Green Bay. While Willis played well, it came on a sample size of less than 120 dropbacks over two seasons. He is also throwing to arguably the least talented group of pass-catchers in the NFL.

On the other side of the football, there is a dearth of talent. There is no true edge-rusher who can dominate at the line of scrimmage, and the defensive backfield has been pieced together with short-term signings. Coupled with the schedule that is loaded with playoff-caliber opponents and some of the best signal-callers in the league, it would seem unlikely the Dolphins find their way to five or more wins.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 7-10 SU & 8-9 ATS / 9-8 O-U

Head Coach: Jeff Hafley - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/13	+3.4	@	OVER the total is 11-2 in L13 of MIA-LVR h2h series
9/20	+12.1	@	The L5 games of MIA-SF h2h series went OVER the total
9/27	+5.2		HOME TEAMS are on 3-0-1 ATS run in KC-MIA h2h series
10/4	+7	@	MINNESOTA has won its L3 ATS vs. Miami
10/11	+2.6		HOME TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS run in CIN-MIA h2h series
10/25	+1.3	@	The L4 games of MIA-NYJ in New York went OVER the total
11/1	+6.8		The L3 games of NE-MIA series in Miami went OVER the total
11/8	+5.5		DETROIT is on a 3-0-1 ATS run vs. Miami
11/15	+7.2	@	L4 games of MIA-IND series in Indianapolis went UNDER the total
11/22	+12.7	@	OVER the total is 10-1-1 in L12 MIA-BUF matchups at Buffalo
11/29	-2.8		MIAMI is 7-2-2 ATS in L11 hosting NY Jets
12/6	+11.7	@	MIAMI is on a 9-2 ATS surge versus Denver
12/13	+3.9		UNDERDOGS are on 5-0 ATS streak in CHI-MIA h2h series
12/20	+11	@	GREEN BAY is on 6-1 ATS run vs. Miami, L6 at GB went UNDER total
12/27	+2.4		MIAMI is 6-1 ATS in L7 hosting LA Chargers
1/3	+8.1		UNDER the total is 12-4-1 in BUF-MIA series at Miami since '10
1/10	+9.5	@	FAVORITES are on 3-0 ATS streak in MIA-NE series at Foxboro

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.83**
#4 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.6 / -0.3**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

What does the second stint as a starter look like for Malik Willis?

Willis earned his three-year, \$67.5 million deal from Miami by playing extremely well in a backup role for the Packers over the last two seasons. In 118 dropbacks, he went 70-of-89 (78.7%) for 972 yards (10.9 YPA) with six touchdowns and just one turnover-worthy play. He was much improved from his first season in Tennessee, in which he completed 50.8% of his pass attempts for 4.5 yards per attempt with three interceptions.

Bobby Slowik will serve as offensive coordinator for Willis this season. Slowik served in the same role for the Houston Texans from 2023-24. His offensive system is derived from the Shanahan zone-blocking scheme that generally gets the most out of its quarterbacks. De'Von Achane should thrive in this system, but is it fair to be overly optimistic about Willis given the lack of skill-position talent and a play-caller who was fired from the same role just two years ago?

Will the new personnel improve Miami's defense?

Miami went all in on changing its roster from last season. In all, 30 new players have been added to this team. Many of them will play on defense. Joshua Uche and David Ojabo were brought in along the edge to help young pass-rusher Chop Robinson, and both Darrell Baker Jr. and Lonnie Johnson Jr. were brought into the defensive backfield.

The Dolphins finished 27th in opponent EPA per play in 2025 and were average at best in both total sacks (39) and pressure rate (21.3%). Where they really struggled was on the back end, where they allowed the ninth-most yards after catch (2,015) and 11th-most passing touchdowns (29). Hafley will call the team's defense this season, so its success will rest on his shoulders. The Packers finished fifth in defensive efficiency in 2024 and 22nd in 2025, so where the Dolphins land this season will be anyone's guess with so many changes.

How bad will it get with one of the toughest schedules in the league?

Twelve of Miami's contests will be against opponents with win totals of at least 9.5 wins, and seven of those foes have win totals of 10.5, with division rivals New England and Buffalo among them. As it stands, they will be an underdog in almost every game this season, save for a home game against the Jets potentially. Miami owns the second-highest odds to finish with the worst record in the league (+350) and is 14-1 to make the playoffs. The market expectation is that it will not handle this difficult schedule well.

ODDS TO WIN...

350-1

SUPER BOWL

150-1

AFC

40-1

AFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.4	25
YARDS PER POINT	14.7	20
PLAYS PER GAME	55.8	31
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:49	26
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.9%	27
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	300.7	26
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	14
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.4	24
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	120.2	13
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	4
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.2	30
COMPLETION %	67.2%	6
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	180.5	25
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.9	17
TURNOVERS	1.4	27
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.9	24
YARDS PER POINT	14	19
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.9%	17
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	348.8	22
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	26
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	132.4	26
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	28
COMPLETION %	72.0%	32
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	216.4	18
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	27
SACKS	2.3	15
TURNOVERS	1.2	15

NEW ENGLAND Patriots



There is no denying the bright future of the New England Patriots. Drake Maye finished second in MVP voting last season, and he led the franchise back to the Super Bowl, although the result was less than inspiring for Patriots fans and backers.

The franchise had to navigate some turbulence in the offseason due to the moral failings of head coach Mike Vrabel, but expectations remain high after winning the conference in 2025. Many would argue the success of the team was tied directly to its schedule. The Patriots have a great opportunity to prove the detractors wrong in 2026 with a tougher schedule and a new star on offense.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 10.5

New England has every sign of a team that will regress. The Patriots outperformed their Pythagorean win total by about 1.5 wins last season. Add in the tougher slate of opponents – they have the 12th-ranked strength of schedule according to projected win totals – and one should expect New England to be much closer to the middle of the pack in 2026.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 17-4 SU & 14-7 ATS / 12-9 O-U
Head Coach: Mike Vrabel - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/9	+4.1	@	SEATTLE is on 5-1-1 ATS run vs. New England, OVER the total is 7-1 in L8
9/20	-5.1		UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of PIT-NE h2h series
9/27	-0.8	@	HOME TEAMS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of NE-JAC h2h series
10/4	+3.4	@	NEW ENGLAND is on 18-5 ATS extended run at Buffalo
10/11	-8.6		LAS VEGAS has won L3 ATS vs. New England
10/18	-9.8		NEW ENGLAND is 10-1 SU & 8-2-1 ATS in L11 hosting NY Jets
10/22	+1	@	NEW ENGLAND is on 3-0 ATS run at Chicago
11/1	-6.8	@	The L3 games of NE-MIA series in Miami went OVER the total
11/8	-1.5		ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of GB-NE h2h series
11/15	-0.5	vs	FAVORITES are 5-2 ATS in L7 of DET-NE h2h series
11/29	-0.8	@	NEW ENGLAND has won L4 ATS when visiting Chargers
12/6	+1.1		The L3 games of BUF-NE series in Foxboro went OVER the total
12/10	-5		FAVORITES have won L5 SU & ATS in MIN-NE h2h series
12/21	+1.3	@	UNDERDOGS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of NE-KC h2h series
12/27	-8	@	NEW ENGLAND is 6-2 ATS in L8 at NY Jets
1/3	-1.9		UNDERDOGS are on 6-2 ATS run in DEN-NE h2h series
1/10	-9.5		FAVORITES are on 3-0 ATS streak in MIA-NE series at Foxboro

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.21**
 #14 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.1 / 0.5**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

How will the influx of talent at the skill positions manifest for the Patriots' offense?

New England's offense finished first last season in total EPA (140.69) and EPA per play (0.13). Yes, the Patriots faced a litany of basement-dwelling defenses in their run to the top seed in the AFC, but then followed that season up with a strong offseason of investments.

Wide receiver Romeo Doubs signed a four-year, \$68 million contract in free agency, and the organization flipped a 2028 first-round pick for wide receiver A.J. Brown. Brown's presence as a top receiver is an immediate upgrade after the loss of Stefon Diggs, New England's leader in targets (102), catches (85) and receiving yards (1,013) in 2025.

Brown is a perfect fit for Maye as well. Maye was second in pass completions of 20+ yards (41) and third in PFF pass grading on such throws (97.4). Brown was tied for ninth among receivers in deep targets (25) last season, caught four touchdowns on those targets – sixth-most in the league – and sported a 95.6 PFF receiving grade on deep targets.

Can Drake Maye follow up his breakout season?

Maye's second year in the NFL was incredible. He led the league in completion percentage (72.0%), yards per attempt (8.9), adjusted yards per attempt (9.5), passer rating (113.5), QBR (77.1) and total EPA. Despite that, he finished second in MVP voting to Stafford. Maye is 11-1 at DraftKings to finish the job this season, but he faces some challenges.

While Maye deserves credit for handling the schedule that the Patriots were given, it was still one of the easiest in recent history. The Patriots faced just two teams which finished better than 14th in opponent EPA per play in the regular season. In the team's postseason run, its four opponents all finished seventh or higher. As a result, Maye's performance cratered. He completed just 58.3% of his passes, threw six touchdowns with four interceptions, and the Patriots averaged just 14.3 points per game.

Maye will face five teams that finished 10th or higher in opponent EPA per play last season. Three more finished in the top half of the league. Was the playoff run for Maye an aberration, or will he prove his detractors correct against a tougher schedule?

Will the defense regress with a tougher schedule of opponents?

The same criticism could be made of New England's defense. The Patriots finished the 2025 season 11th in opponent EPA per play (-0.05) and opponent EPA per pass (-0.06). New England also faced just one opponent – Buffalo – that finished higher than 13th in EPA per play.

This season, the Patriots' defense will have six contests against foes which finished last season 10th or better in EPA per play. Two other opponents – Kansas City and Jacksonville – finished 11th and 12th, respectively, in the same category. This season will be a much stiffer test for this unit. A statistical step back should be expected by most entering this year.

ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+750

AFC

+120

AFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.8	2
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	6
PLAYS PER GAME	61.4	18
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:17	6
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.9%	6
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	379.4	3
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	2
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.1	6
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	128.9	6
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	14
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.5	23
COMPLETION %	71.9%	1
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	250.5	4
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.9	1
TURNOVERS	0.9	9
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.8	4
YARDS PER POINT	15.7	6
3RD DOWN CONV. %	38.5%	12
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	295.2	8
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	12
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	101.7	6
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	13
COMPLETION %	66.4%	24
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	193.5	9
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	12
SACKS	2.1	22
TURNOVERS	1.1	19

NEW YORK Jets



It was a somewhat humiliating season in Aaron Glenn's first time at the helm in New York. The Jets won just three games, and Glenn's defense – the aspect of the game in which he is supposed to specialize – finished dead last in pass defense and did not intercept a single pass all season.

The Jets seemingly acquired their signal-caller for the 2026 season when they traded for Geno Smith. But, if Smith continues to play at the same level he did in Las Vegas, will New York actually give him a leash long enough to last the entire season? There is almost nowhere to go but up for New York this season, but things do not look promising for Gang Green.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 5.5

It might seem psychotic to expect success for New York, but this is a minuscule hump to get over. Smith did put up solid numbers in Las Vegas on the snaps he was kept clean – 75.6% completion rate and 14 touchdowns on 7.4 yards per attempt. The defense cannot be worse, and the special teams – while not being historically great again – will likely be one of the best in the league. Add in the fifth-easiest schedule in the league and the Jets should be able to reach six wins.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 7-10 ATS / 11-6 O-U
Head Coach: Aaron Glenn - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+3.9	@	NY JETS are 11-2 ATS vs. Tennessee since '98
9/20	+6.7		ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in GB-NYJ h2h series
9/27	+11.7	@	UNDERDOGS are on 3-1 SU & 4-0 ATS streak in NYJ-DET set
10/4	+10.6	@	CHICAGO is on 3-0 ATS streak hosting NY Jets
10/11	-1		NY JETS are 8-3 ATS in L11 vs. Cleveland
10/18	+9.8	@	NEW ENGLAND is 10-1 SU & 8-2-1 ATS in L11 hosting NY Jets
10/25	-1.3		The L4 games of MIA-NYJ in New York went OVER the total
11/1	-0.4		HOME TEAMS are on 11-2-1 ATS run in LVR-NYJ h2h series
11/8	+10.9	@	HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in NYJ-KC h2h series
11/15	+9.3		BUFFALO has won L5 SU & ATS vs. NY Jets
11/22	+8.8	@	NY JETS are 5-2-1 ATS visiting Chargers since '02
11/29	+2.8	@	MIAMI is 7-2-2 ATS in L11 hosting NY Jets
12/13	+6.3		DENVER is 6-2-1 ATS in L9 visits to NY Jets
12/20	+1.5	@	ARIZONA is on 4-0 ATS run vs. NY Jets, UNDER total is also 4-0
12/27	+8		NEW ENGLAND is 6-2 ATS in L8 at NY Jets
1/3	+3.2		FAVORITES are on 5-0 SU & ATS streak in MIN-NYJ h2h series
1/10	+13	@	BUFFALO is on 6-0 SU & 5-1 ATS run hosting NY Jets, avg MOV 19 PPG

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.61**
 #9 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.4 / -0.6**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

How does the quarterback position play out for New York?

Smith posted the second-highest turnover-worthy play rate (4.1%) since his rookie season in 2025, and his 17 interceptions were the second-worst mark of his career. Smith averaged just 6.8 yards per attempt on an average depth of target of just 6.9 yards downfield as well, both also the worst numbers he's put up in his time in the NFL. One could argue Smith was under duress – he was responsible for just 11.5% of pressures, the 10th-best rate among qualified quarterbacks – and that a better system will see him revert back to his form in a Seahawks uniform. Is that better system truly in New York?

The Jets don't have any reliable options outside of Smith. They drafted Cade Klubnik in the fourth round, and the rest of their depth chart currently consists of Brady Cook and Bailey Zappe. If Smith is poor once again, it seems this will be another season of quarterback hell for New York.

The defense is going to be better, right?

It cannot be worse. The Jets finished 30th in opponent EPA per play (0.13), 31st in total sacks (26) and 32nd in opponent EPA per pass (0.25), pressure rate (15.1%), passing touchdowns allowed (36), interceptions (0) and total turnovers forced (4).

Unsurprisingly, the front office invested money and assets via both free agency and trades on that side of the football. Defensive end Joseph Ossai and linebacker Demario Davis were two of the higher-profile free-agent signings. Defensive linemen David Onyemata and Kingsley Enagbare, as well as corner Nahshon Wright, were brought in on short-term deals as well. The big splash was the acquisition of Minkah Fitzpatrick via trade.

How much do these pieces realistically improve New York? Ossai has not registered more than five sacks in a season. Davis is a fine run defender, but allowed 45 receptions on 48 targets and 8.1 yards per reception last season. It's nearly impossible to turn in another season akin to what the Jets did in 2025, but it's hard to envision a leap into the top 20 defenses in the league.

Will the special teams magic continue?

Yes, special teams, but this truly does matter for New York. The Jets were the best special teams unit in the NFL last season. By DVOA standards, they were first (10.2%) and well ahead of another elite unit in the Seahawks (8.6%) by a decent margin.

New York led the league in field goal percentage (96.6%), average kickoff return distance (29.9), made all of their extra-point attempts (22-of-22), and were tied for the league lead in special teams touchdowns (3). Chris Banjo is back as the team's special teams coordinator, so the Jets should once again be on top of the league here. For a team begging for wins, having an elite special teams unit could be the difference in a win-total decision.

ODDS TO WIN...

200-1 SUPER BOWL

86-1 AFC

19-1 AFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.6	29
YARDS PER POINT	14.9	22
PLAYS PER GAME	59.4	23
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:14	31
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.9%	26
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	263.6	29
YARDS PER PLAY	4.4	29
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.8	19
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	123.3	10
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	8
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.1	26
COMPLETION %	60.3%	29
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	140.3	32
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.6	32
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	29.6	31
YARDS PER POINT	12	32
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.3%	10
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	355.6	25
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	23
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	139.5	29
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	23
COMPLETION %	65.2%	20
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	216.1	17
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	26
SACKS	1.5	31
TURNOVERS	0.2	32

AFC NORTH

Division Preview

previews by Adam Burke

What an offseason it has been in the AFC North. Cincinnati's Zac Taylor is the only tenured head coach in the division after Kevin Stefanski was fired by the Browns and what we'll call an "amicable breakup" took place between Mike Tomlin and the Steelers and John Harbaugh and the Ravens.

Todd Monken, Mike McCarthy, and Jesse Minter are the new head coaches in that order and Taylor begins his eighth season at the helm sitting in the chair in his office with a flame-retardant suit on. That said, Taylor, McCarthy, and Minter were cheering in solidarity on June 1 when the Browns traded Myles Garrett to the Rams, sending the future Hall of Famer and single-season sack leader to the NFC West. That was easily the biggest transaction in the division, as pretty much everybody believed that Aaron Rodgers returning to the Steel City was a given.

With Cleveland's division title drought turning 37 this year, or 34 if we exclude the three years when slimeball Art Modell moved the team to Baltimore, it looks like something of a three-team race in the division. The Steelers were the only team to finish with a winning record last season, as the Ravens went 8-9 and the Bengals only had a half-season of Joe Burrow en route to finishing 6-11. The Browns finished last for the 15th time since the NFL went to the current division format in 2002, this time at 5-12.

In an ever-changing NFL world, the AFC North felt like something of a constant up until this year. Harbaugh and Tomlin were going to win a lot of games and Taylor's fate was tied to Burrow's health. Outside of two 11-win outliers, the Browns have been pretty projectable. This season, it feels like anything could happen. One established team went the veteran route. Another established team got younger on the sideline and seems even younger when you think about 30-year-old OC Declan Doyle telling 29-year-old QB Lamar Jackson what to do.

Despite the coaching changes, the Ravens (-115) and Steelers (+500) still have the highest floors of any AFC North team and you could argue that they have the highest ceilings as well, unless the Bengals (+200) can get a full season of Burrow and the Browns (19-1) borrow a time machine to take Deshaun Watson back to 2020.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
BALTIMORE	28.5	2.3	0.9	22.48 (31)	11.4	5.6	11.5
CINCINNATI	24.0	2.2	0.1	22.92 (29)	9.0	8.0	9.5
PITTSBURGH	23.0	2.3	0.4	23.45 (26)	8.3	8.7	8.5
CLEVELAND	20.5	2.5	-1.2	23.47 (25)	7.1	9.9	6.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



12



11



0



0

BALTIMORE Ravens



On September 13, the Ravens will play their first regular season game without John Harbaugh as their head coach since the 2007 season. Tenure as a coach or manager in any sport is hard to come by these days and seeing such an accomplished leader on a different sideline will be jarring for a while. But, the Ravens, and Harbaugh, felt like the team needed a change. The 2012 Super Bowl champs haven't been back since and only won more than one playoff game twice over Harbaugh's 18 years.

So, while it may seem like an incredulous decision, the hiring of Jesse Minter, who is almost 20 years younger than Harbaugh, represents a true changing of the guard and also falls in line with what we're seeing across the league as a whole. Minter, who coached in the Ravens organization from 2017-20, has never been a head coach at any level, but he's long been viewed as a rising star.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 11.5

With additional pre-snap motion from Doyle's offensive scheme, Jackson returning to his 2024 production is not out of the question and improved interior offensive line play can only help Henry. Similarly, the Ravens, who always have a tremendous eye for defensive fit and talent, look poised to be able to rotate in a lot of guys for max productivity. The schedule is quite soft at the start for the team to settle in as well.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 6-11 ATS / 11-6 O-U
Head Coach: Jesse Minter - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-4	@	INDIANAPOLIS is on 10-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore, UNDER the total is 13-2 in L15
9/20	-9.1		ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS run in NO-BAL h2h series
9/27	-5	vs	The BAL-DAL series is on a 5-0-1 OVER the total surge
10/4	-11.5		ROAD TEAMS are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 of TEN-BAL h2h series
10/11	-5.7	@	BALTIMORE is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Atlanta, UNDER the total is also 6-1
10/18	-6.8	@	The L5 games of BAL-CLE rivalry went OVER the total
10/25	-6.3		ROAD TEAMS are 15-4 ATS in L19 of CIN-BAL h2h series
11/1	+2.3	@	HOME TEAMS are on 12-2 ATS surge in BAL-BUF h2h set
11/5	-7.3		JACKSONVILLE is on a 6-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore
11/16	-7.3		ROAD TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS surge in LAC-BAL h2h series
11/22	-5.6	@	CAROLINA is 3-1 SU & ATS in four prior games hosting Baltimore
11/29	-2.4	@	BALTIMORE has won L6 ATS versus Houston
12/13	-7.5		ROAD TEAMS have won L7 ATS in TB-BAL h2h series
12/20	-4.5	@	UNDERDOGS are 10-0-2 ATS in L12 of BAL-PIT series in Pittsburgh
12/27	-11.1		L3 games of CLE-BAL rivalry in Baltimore went OVER the total
12/31	-3.6	@	BALTIMORE is on 7-1 ATS run at Cincinnati
1/10	-7		PITTSBURGH in on 7-3 ATS run in L10 at Baltimore

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **22.48**
 #31 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.3 / 0.9**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

How different will the Ravens look?

Minter was a defensive assistant and defensive backs coach under Harbaugh and also worked under John's brother, Jim, at Michigan and with the Chargers, serving as defensive coordinator for two years at each of those stops. This won't be some enormous change of direction for Baltimore and the overall goals will remain the same.

However, the hiring of Declan Doyle as offensive coordinator is where we could see the new-look Ravens on display. Doyle is only 30 years old and just 10 months older than QB Lamar Jackson. While Doyle didn't call plays for the Bears last season under Ben Johnson, his game-day responsibilities and adjustments led to seven comeback wins. Now he's got a two-time MVP QB to work with and a Hall of Fame running back as a very strong branch of the Sean Payton coaching tree. Make of that what you will, given what Payton did with Drew Brees and what he's more recently done with Bo Nix, who has 175 rushing attempts in two seasons.

How about another changing of the guard(s)?

Yes, a big changing of the guard took place on the coaching staff, but the Ravens have had a big changing of the guards on the offensive line. Jackson was sacked 36 times in just 13 games last season after being sacked 23 times in 17 games in 2024. Derrick Henry had 2.8 yards before contact per attempt last season, down from 3.1 the season before. While Henry still led the league in runs of 20+ yards for the second straight season, he did go down from 5.9 YPC to 5.2 YPC from Year 1 to Year 2 in Baltimore.

The Ravens had atrocious guard play last season, finishing 32nd in pass block win rate at that position. In an effort to fix that, the Ravens reunited with John Simpson, who was the starter at left guard in 2023, and took Olaivavega Ioane with the 14th overall pick. Guard and tackle play will be that much more important with center Tyler Linderbaum in Las Vegas.

Do the Ravens have the right edge on defense?

There are some dull days now and then in the NFL, but March 11 was not one of them. After completing a blockbuster deal to get Maxx Crosby from the Raiders, the Ravens rescinded the trade and backed out of it based on Crosby's physical. Immediately, they pivoted and signed Trey Hendrickson to a four-year deal.

Baltimore had 54 sacks in 2024, second to the Broncos, but only 30 sacks in 2025, tied for 27th. Their 19% Pressure% per Pro-Football-Reference was 28th. In drafting Zion Young, the Ravens got the complement to Hendrickson, who really should only be used as a pass rusher, while Young can play the edge better as a run-stopper. With an astute defensive mind like Minter and a solid DC and longtime defensive assistant in Anthony Weaver, this side of the ball is substantially better on paper.

ODDS TO WIN...

10-1 SUPER BOWL

+500 AFC

-115 AFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.9	11
YARDS PER POINT	13.3	9
PLAYS PER GAME	57.3	29
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:11	24
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.9%	13
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	332.2	16
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	7
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.8	3
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	156.6	2
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.3	1
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.8	32
COMPLETION %	65.9%	12
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	175.6	27
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.8	7
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.4	18
YARDS PER POINT	15.1	11
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.8%	11
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	354.5	24
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	21
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	106.6	10
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	11
COMPLETION %	63.8%	14
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	247.9	30
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	20
SACKS	1.8	28
TURNOVERS	1.2	15

CINCINNATI Bengals



If there was a betting market for “Last AFC North Head Coach Standing”, how many people would have bet on Zac Taylor? The other three teams all have new head coaches, but the Bengals do not, as Taylor begins his eighth season at the helm. Outside of the AFC Championship in 2021, it feels like it has been a disappointing tenure, with just two double-digit winning seasons and a 6-11 showing last year.

Of course, the success of a coach is often tied to the health of the starting QB. Joe Burrow only started eight games last season and has only played three full seasons out of six since he was drafted first overall in 2020. Burrow’s health is hardly the only question in Cincy, but is undoubtedly the biggest one.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 9.5

The Bengals are favored in 15 of 17 games per the early DraftKings lines, but there are a few toss-up games lined at 1.5 or 2.5. Burrow turns 30 in December and he’s already dealt with several significant injuries. While the Bengals did address three positions of need on defense, this still feels like a “stars and scrubs” team short on depth and short on margin for error.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 6-11 SU & 8-9 ATS / 9-8 O-U
Head Coach: Zac Taylor - 8th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-2.9		TAMPA BAY is on 5-1 ATS run vs. Cincinnati but lost LT
9/20	+2.9	@	UNDERDOGS have won the L6 ATS in CIN-HOU h2h series
9/27	+0.8	@	PITTSBURGH is on extended 13-6 ATS run hosting Cincinnati
10/4	-2.7		OVER the total is on 4-1-1 run in L6 of JAC-CIN series at Cincinnati
10/11	-2.6	@	HOME TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS run in CIN-MIA h2h series
10/25	+6.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are 15-4 ATS in L19 of CIN-BAL h2h series
11/1	-6.9		CINCINNATI is on 9-2 ATS run vs. Tennessee
11/8	-3.4	vs	CINCINNATI is on a 3-0 ATS streak vs. Atlanta
11/15	-2.4		UNDERDOGS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of PIT-CIN rivalry in Cincinnati
11/23	+0.3	@	UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS surge in CIN-WAS h2h series
11/29	-4.5		CINCINNATI is 6-1 ATS in L7 versus New Orleans
12/6	-1.5	@	UNDER the total is 4-0-1 in L5 of CIN-CLE series at Cleveland
12/13	+0.1		CINCINNATI is on 5-1 ATS run hosting Kansas City
12/20	-0.3	@	FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in eight prior games in CIN-CAR series
12/27	+1.3	@	L4 games of CIN-IND h2h series went OVER the total
12/31	+3.6		BALTIMORE is on 7-1 ATS run at Cincinnati
1/10	-6.5		L2 games of CLE-CIN series in Cincinnati went UNDER after 7-1 OVER

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **22.92**
 #29 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.2 / 0.1**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is the best defense really a good offense?

It might have to be for the Bengals. You can't spell defense without "D" or "F" and those would be the grades that many would have slapped on the 2025 Bengals. First-year DC Al Golden took over for highly scrutinized Lou Anarumo and his unit nearly allowed 500 points. The Bengals were 30th in points allowed, 32nd in yards per play, 31st in yards per carry, and 28th in third down conversion rate against.

Sure, we can point to Burrow's absence, but the Bengals had the fourth-best average starting field position against and still finished 27th in points per drive allowed. The acquisition of Dexter Lawrence for the 10th overall pick was a bit of a shocker, but Lawrence joins Jonathan Allen, edge rusher Boye Mafe, and safety Bryan Cook in hopes of fixing the worst defense of Taylor's tenure. This is Golden's first NFL DC gig after a very successful stint at Notre Dame from 2022-24.

What is the definition of insanity?

The quote that we all cite, which is wrongfully attributed to Albert Einstein, says that the definition of insanity is trying the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result. If you look at the depth chart for the Bengals, nothing has changed on offense. Orlando Brown Jr. and Dalton Risner were re-signed on the offensive line and the skill group looks the same. Ja'Marr Chase is undoubtedly elite, but Tee Higgins, despite being a Pro Bowler, fell short of 900 yards for the second time in his career and only had 59 catches.

Chase Brown had more than 300 touches with under five yards per touch. After Chase's 185 targets, Higgins had 98 and Brown had 88. Andrei Iosivas was next with 58. Even in Burrow's full season back in 2024, the Bengals were just eighth in yards per play while sitting second in pass attempts. They were ninth in percentage of drives ending with points. This is a good offense, but has it plateaued? Have we seen the ceiling? Do they really believe running basically the same thing back is enough with what will be a below-average defense?

How hot is Zac Taylor's seat?

Coaching uncertainty can permeate a locker room, as everybody is on edge wondering if this loss will be the one that gets a guy fired. Burrow has been hurt a lot, but the Bengals are 19-16 in his last 35 starts. Even when he played the full 2024 season and led the league in completions, attempts, yards, touchdowns, first downs, and passing yards per game, the team went 9-8 with a +38 point differential. He's a two-time Comeback Player of the Year.

At some point, injuries or not, this has to fall on Taylor. In the Taylor/Burrow era, both the OC and DC have been replaced. The team has had a bottom-five rushing offense in each of the last four seasons. The defense has been subpar basically the entire time he's been there. If a genie granted Taylor three wishes, they'd all be for Burrow to stay healthy, but only Andy Reid, Sean McVay, and Kyle Shanahan have had longer tenures than Taylor. Results need to come soon.

ODDS TO WIN...

20-1 SUPER BOWL

10-1 AFC

+190 AFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.4	12
YARDS PER POINT	13.6	10
PLAYS PER GAME	62.2	16
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:08	13
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.4%	5
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	330.4	17
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	16
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.4	29
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	93.6	29
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	22
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	37.6	2
COMPLETION %	64.4%	17
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	236.8	6
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	24
TURNOVERS	1.4	27
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.9	30
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	26
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.4%	28
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	382.1	31
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	32
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	147.1	32
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.2	31
COMPLETION %	65.2%	19
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	235.1	26
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	29
SACKS	2.1	22
TURNOVERS	1.2	10

CLEVELAND Browns



Kevin Stefanski did things that Browns coaches haven't done in a long time. First, he took the team to the playoffs twice, making him the first head coach since Marty Schottenheimer in 1985-88 to lead multiple postseason appearances. Second, Stefanski's six seasons at the helm were the most for a Browns head coach since Sam Rutigliano from 1978-84. He was fired eight games into the '84 season, which pushed Schottenheimer into the role.

An organization well accustomed to futility will now go in a different direction with former Ravens OC Todd Monken, whose only prior head coaching experience came during a three-year stint at Southern Miss over a decade ago.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 6.5

As of now, the Browns are only favored in two games - Raiders and Falcons. Getting to seven wins seems like an arduous task, especially because they have six road games in the first nine weeks, including three in a row Weeks 7-9. The bye, with a rookie head coach, isn't until Week 11. While I ultimately see Under 6.5 coming in, this is one of the most talented rosters in the NFL outside of the most important position on the field.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 8-9 ATS / 8-9 O-U
Head Coach: Todd Monken - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+7.4	@	HOME TEAMS are 6-3 ATS in L9 of CLE-JAC h2h set
9/20	+5.6	@	The L7 games of CLE-TB h2h series went UNDER the total
9/27	-2.3		UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS in CAR-CLE h2h series
10/1	+0.8		CLEVELAND is 7-2 ATS in L9 hosting Pittsburgh
10/11	+1	@	NY JETS are 8-3 ATS in L11 vs. Cleveland
10/18	+6.8		The L5 games of BAL-CLE rivalry went OVER the total
10/25	+2.5	@	CLEVELAND is on 5-1-1 ATS run at Tennessee
11/1	+5.6	@	PITTSBURGH is 11-3-1 ATS in L15 hosting Cleveland
11/8	+5.1	@	UNDERDOGS have won L9 meetings in CLE-NO h2h series
11/15	+1.4		HOUSTON is on a 4-0 ATS streak at Cleveland
11/29	-3.5		UNDERDOGS are on 5-0-1 ATS run in CLE-LVR h2h series
12/6	+1.5		UNDER the total is 4-0-1 in L5 of CIN-CLE series at Cleveland
12/13	-2.7		UNDERDOGS are on 6-1 ATS surge in ATL-CLE h2h series
12/20	+4.6	@	ROAD TEAMS have won L3 SU & ATS in CLE-NYG h2h series
12/27	+11.1	@	L3 games of CLE-BAL rivalry in Baltimore went OVER the total
1/3	-0.9		HOME TEAMS have won L5 ATS in IND-CLE h2h series
1/10	+6.5	@	L2 games of CLE-CIN series in Cincinnati went UNDER after 7-1 OVER

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.47**
 #25 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.5 / -1.2**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Who the f*#\$ is going to start at quarterback?

Want to have a bad NFL team? Have a bad QB room. The Browns certainly have that, as Deshaun Watson might be the leader in the clubhouse for the starting gig as things currently stand, even though he hasn't played a game since October 2024 after suffering a torn Achilles, an injury that many wished was the end of his time with the Browns.

Shedeur Sanders didn't show much over seven starts and one relief outing with a 7/10 TD/INT ratio and just a 56.6% completion rate with 175 passing yards per game. Dillon Gabriel started six games and had a 7/2 TD/INT ratio, but also threw for just 153 yards per game as the starter. While none of the options are enticing, being surrounded by Quinshon Judkins, Jerry Jeudy, Harold Fannin Jr., a retooled offensive line, and 2026 draftees KC Concepcion and Denzel Boston is worthy of some optimism.

So, how will the new offense look?

This is a really good question. Obviously the QB decision made by Monken and OC Travis Switzer will matter in this equation, but Switzer, formerly Baltimore's run game coordinator, doesn't have Derrick Henry on this team regardless. Judkins is a bruising runner and a bowling ball of a back, but the offensive line was awful last season and he averaged just 3.6 yards per carry.

Tight ends featured prominently in the Ravens offense and the Browns have one of the league's best in Fannin, and signed Jack Stoll and drafted Joe Royer to be blocking TEs. This is a much more talented WR corps than Monken and Switzer had in Baltimore and should be a group built on YAC, so all Watson/Sanders should have to do is put the ball on target in space. The bar is low after finishing 31st in EPA/play last season.

What can we expect from the defense?

You could say that I buried the lede, but, honestly, the writing was on the wall for a Myles Garrett deal back in March when his bonus structure was modified to make trading him easier come June 1. And that's exactly what the Browns did, losing a league-leading and single-season record 23 sacks and a league-leading 33 tackles for loss. But, Jared Verse is an excellent player and we'll see what the draft picks become, as Verse was a top-10 edge rusher per PFF and only played 76% of the snaps. He'll play a lot more now.

Jim Schwartz was sort of in the mix for the HC role, but the Browns ultimately burned that bridge to ashes. With Schwartz gone, Monken and the front office hired Mike Rutenberg to be the new DC. Admittedly, I'm a Browns fan and I had to Google the new DC. Rutenberg was Atlanta's defensive pass game coordinator last season and the Jets linebackers coach for four seasons prior to that. He inherits a great foundation, even without Garrett, and has the last two Defensive Rookies of the Year in Verse and Carson Schwesinger. The Browns had the worst average starting field position on defense last season at their own 34.7-yard line and still finished 14th in points per game allowed and fifth in percentage of drives ending in points.

ODDS TO WIN...

200-1

SUPER BOWL

86-1

AFC

21-1

AFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	16.4	31
YARDS PER POINT	16	28
PLAYS PER GAME	60.6	19
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:18	21
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.6%	29
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	262.1	30
YARDS PER PLAY	4.3	32
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.8	26
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	97	27
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	28
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.8	15
COMPLETION %	57.9%	32
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	165.1	31
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.6	31
TURNOVERS	1.5	30
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.3	14
YARDS PER POINT	12.7	27
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.3%	7
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	283.6	4
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	4
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	116.4	16
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	10
COMPLETION %	63.2%	11
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	167.2	3
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.8	4
SACKS	3.1	3
TURNOVERS	1.1	22

PITTSBURGH Steelers



The job security for a head coach certainly isn't what it used to be, but rarely do you see one get let go following a division championship. Mike McCarthy is now the head man in Pittsburgh, as Mike Tomlin, who never had a losing season in 19 seasons at the helm, parted ways with the Steelers after an uncompetitive Wild Card Round loss to the Texans. It was Tomlin's third straight 10-7 season and fifth playoff appearance in six seasons.

It was also Tomlin's sixth straight one-and-done in the playoffs and he never could replicate his early success with a Super Bowl title in his second season and an AFC Championship in his fourth. McCarthy, who was fired by the Cowboys after the 2024 season, is back in his hometown now.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 8.5

Geographically, the schedule isn't bad for Pittsburgh, as their only games in a different time zone will be in Paris and Nashville. They do have three sets of back-to-back road games, no bye after the Paris game, and a trio of short-week games. While there is plenty of talent here and a skill position group that should fit the McCarthy offense, the schedule is tough and the QB is 43 years old.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 10-8 SU & 9-8-1 ATS / 9-9 O-U
Head Coach: Mike McCarthy - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/13	-5		PITTSBURGH has won L5 SU & ATS vs. Atlanta
9/20	+5.1	@	UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of PIT-NE h2h series
9/27	-0.8		PITTSBURGH is on extended 13-6 ATS run hosting Cincinnati
10/1	-0.8	@	CLEVELAND is 7-2 ATS in L9 hosting Pittsburgh
10/11	-3.2		PITTSBURGH is on 5-0 ATS streak hosting Indianapolis
10/18	+1.5	@	PITTSBURGH is on 6-1 ATS run vs. Tampa Bay
10/25	-1.3	vs	PITTSBURGH is on a 4-2-1 ATS run vs. New Orleans
11/1	-5.6		PITTSBURGH is 11-3-1 ATS in L15 hosting Cleveland
11/15	+2.4	@	UNDERDOGS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of PIT-CIN rivalry in Cincinnati
11/22	+6.8	@	PHILADELPHIA has won L5 SU & ATS hosting Pittsburgh
11/27	+0.9		UNDERDOGS are 9-3-1 ATS in DEN-PIT series since 2001
12/6	-0.9		FAVORITES are on 7-1 ATS surge in HOU-PIT h2h series
12/14	+3.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-0-1 ATS surge in PIT-JAC h2h series
12/20	+4.5		UNDERDOGS are 10-0-2 ATS in L12 of BAL-PIT series in Pittsburgh
12/27	-4.6		PITTSBURGH is on 7-game SU & 8-game ATS win streaks vs. Carolina
1/3	-1.6	@	PITTSBURGH is on 4-0 ATS surge vs. Tennessee
1/10	+7	@	PITTSBURGH is on 7-3 ATS run in L10 at Baltimore

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.45**
 #26 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.3 / 0.4**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

A smooth ride into the sunset?

Aaron Rodgers signed a one-year deal in May and said that this will absolutely be his last season. Things have come full circle for Rodgers and McCarthy, as the two were together from 2006-18 in Green Bay. The 43-year-old Rodgers completed 65.7% of his passes with a 24/7 TD/INT ratio last season and threw for slightly over 207 yards per game in Arthur Smith's offense. While Brian Angelichio has the offensive coordinator title, McCarthy will call his own plays.

If nothing else, Rodgers has a better group around him, including 1,000-yard rusher Rico Dowdle, who reunites with McCarthy after their days in Dallas. Departed running back Kenneth Gainwell led the Steelers in receptions last season and only he and D.K. Metcalf had at least 85 targets. Now, Rodgers and McCarthy get to scheme with Michael Pittman Jr. and second-round pick Germie Bernard. Given that Rodgers had the third-lowest time to throw per NFL Next Gen Stats and third-lowest Intended Air Yards, I would think this new-look offense and a familiar scheme make the Steelers much more dynamic on that side of the ball.

Who is T.J. Watt?

Watt, who will turn 32 in mid-October, enters Year 2 of a three-year, \$108 million guaranteed contract coming off of arguably his worst season in the NFL. He missed three games due to a partially collapsed lung, but only had seven sacks in 14 games and ranked 31st out of 115 qualified edge rushers per PFF's grades. Obviously, that's still good, but is the elite player that we've seen as a five-time Defensive Player of the Year top-five finalist and 2021 winner still in there?

Even with Watt not as productive as normal, the Steelers were sixth in sacks and fifth in QB Hits, but also allowed the third-most passing yards and sixth-most yards after catch. Watt played 82% of the team's snaps last season, not far off from the last few seasons. This is an organization that drafts and develops well, so they've rebuilt other parts of the defense on the fly. It's just fair to wonder if Watt will be an impact player this season.

How much will the Steelers miss the Mike Tomlin voodoo?

The Steelers were +10 in point differential last season and won the division at 10-7. They were +33 in point differential in 2024 and slightly overperformed to go 10-7. They were -20 in point differential in 2023 and went 10-7. In 2022, they had a winning record with a -38 point differential and the same thing in 2021 with a playoff berth in a season that finished with a -55 point differential.

Objectively, McCarthy is a good head coach. But, have we ever seen a coach win as many close games and squeeze more out of his talent than Tomlin has? This is a team that hasn't finished in the top 10 in points since 2018 and still made the playoffs five times in that span. They've been outside the top 10 in point differential in six of the last seven seasons, but kept winning more games than they lost. McCarthy has some big, lucky shoes to fill.

ODDS TO WIN...

50-1

SUPER BOWL

22-1

AFC

+500

AFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.4	15
YARDS PER POINT	13.1	5
PLAYS PER GAME	58.1	28
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:25	29
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.0%	15
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	306.5	25
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	17
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	23.9	28
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	103.3	26
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	17
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.4	17
COMPLETION %	66.4%	10
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	203.2	22
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.6	25
TURNOVERS	0.9	4
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.8	17
YARDS PER POINT	15.7	5
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.5%	25
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	358	26
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	19
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	113.1	13
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	15
COMPLETION %	64.6%	16
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	244.9	29
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	22
SACKS	2.8	6
TURNOVERS	1.6	4

AFC SOUTH

Division Preview

previews by Wes Reynolds

Going into last season, the Houston Texans had won two consecutive AFC South titles and were projected to do so again. The Texans concluded their regular season with nine straight victories to go 12-5 and made the playoff Divisional Round before falling at New England, largely due to a nightmarish performance from QB C.J. Stroud.

Indianapolis and Jacksonville both had promising starts to take over the division from Houston and it looked like the Colts would be the one to emerge and win their first division title since 2014. The Colts started 8-2, but then the schedule got more difficult and injuries took their toll, especially with a season-ending Achilles injury to QB Daniel Jones in Week 14. They lost all seven games after the Week 11 bye and became the first team in NFL history to finish the season with a losing record after an 8-2 start.

Ultimately, Jacksonville, who we picked in this guide last year, went 13-4 by winning eight straight games to end the season as AFC South Champions. First-year head coach Liam Coen proved to be a good match for QB Trevor Lawrence as the oft-maligned signal caller posted career-highs for TD passes (29), rushing TDs (9), and had the fewest turnovers (14) ever in a full 17-game season.

Tennessee was at the bottom again with a 3-14 record and Brian Callahan was out after Week 6. Things weren't better under interim coach Mike McCoy, as the Titans went 2-9. Robert Saleh is getting another shot as an NFL head coach after a successful second stint as the 49ers DC last season and will need some of that success for a defense that ranked 29th in DVOA. Fellow former head coaches Brian Daboll and Gus Bradley come in as offensive and defensive coordinators.

The elite defense of Texans (+110) might be enough to get back atop the AFC South but need to have at least a somewhat close version of Stroud from three years ago to go any further. Lawrence had a stable year in Jacksonville (+250) last year, but can he ever be the elite QB that he has long been expected to be? Jones is expected to be ready for the Colts (+400) opener. Cam Ward showed some promise at QB for Tennessee (+800) last season, but the Titans lack playmakers on offense, and the defense is in rebuild mode.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
HOUSTON	24.5	2.1	0.3	23.73 (20)	8.9	8.1	9.5
JACKSONVILLE	24.0	2.3	-0.1	24.32 (13)	8.3	8.7	8.5
INDIANAPOLIS	23.0	2.0	-0.5	23.74 (19)	8.2	8.8	7.5
TENNESSEE	20.5	0.9	-0.8	24.61 (8)	6.5	10.5	6.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



15



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2



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HOUSTON Texans



The Texans improved two games on their 2024 record to go 12-5 courtesy of a nine-game winning streak to end the season. However, it still was not enough to three-peat in the AFC South. Nevertheless, Houston did win a road playoff game at Pittsburgh on Wild Card Weekend before losing at New England.

DeMeco Ryans' defense was one of the best in the league, ranking second both for points allowed (17.3 PPG) and yards allowed (277.2 YPG). They were also second in both Rush Defense and Pass Defense DVOA while ranking third in Takeaways (29). In all, the Texans' stop unit had three All-Pros - DE Will Anderson, CB Derek Stingley Jr., and DE Danielle Hunter - plus three other Pro Bowlers. The group adds second-round DT Kayden McDonald (Ohio State), who was widely considered as perhaps the best run-stopper in this year's crop, and FS Reed Blankenship comes in from Philadelphia after being the QB of Vic Fangio's defense. There is a possibility that this unit could be even better, but all the major questions come on the offense for Houston.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

Houston was given the seventh-easiest schedule based on win-loss opponents' win percentage from the 2025 season. The Texans open with three of their first four games at NRG Stadium. While only having eight home games, they only have eight true road games playing Jacksonville at Wembley Stadium in London. Four road games in cold weather for December/January is not ideal, but this group did go 6-4 on the road last season. It is a bit surprising to see a team that won 12 games last season drop to a total of 9.5 considering the Texans have very few personnel losses, have arguably the best defense in the AFC, and improved the offensive line and running back positions.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 13-6 SU & 10-9 ATS / 7-12 O-U
Head Coach: DeMeco Ryans - 4th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+1.8		UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of BUF-HOU h2h series
9/20	-2.9		UNDERDOGS have won the L6 ATS in CIN-HOU h2h series
9/27	-0.2	@	UNDERDOGS are 7-1 ATS in L8 of HOU-IND rivalry
10/4	-2.6		ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS surge in DAL-HOU in-state battle
10/11	-3.8	@	UNDERDOGS have won L5 ATS in HOU-TEN series at Tennessee
10/18	-0.9	vs	UNDERDOGS are on 9-4 ATS run in L13 of HOU-JAC series
10/25	-5.2		NY GIANTS have won L4 ATS vs. Houston
11/8	+1.9	@	HOUSTON is on a 4-1 ATS run vs. LA Chargers
11/15	-1.4	@	HOUSTON is on a 4-0 ATS streak at Cleveland
11/19	-3.7		INDIANAPOLIS is 12-1-1 ATS at Houston since '13
11/29	+2.4		BALTIMORE has won L6 ATS versus Houston
12/6	+0.9	@	FAVORITES are on 7-1 ATS surge in HOU-PIT h2h series
12/13	-0.4	@	WASHINGTON is 4-1-1 ATS all-time versus Texans
12/20	-2.3		UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of JAC-HOU rivalry in Houston
12/24	+5.4	@	OVER the total is 4-0 in L4 games of HOU-PHI h2h series
1/4	+4.4	@	UNDER the total is 3-0 in L3 games of HOU-GB set in Green Bay
1/10	-6.5		HOUSTON is on 12-4 ATS surge hosting Tennessee

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.73**
 #20 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.1 / 0.3**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Can C.J. Stroud reverse course?

Three years ago, C.J. Stroud was chosen second overall in the 2023 NFL Draft. All he did was throw for over 4,000 yards, 23 TDs, and lead the league in passing yards per game (273.9) as a rookie. Stroud also has a playoff victory in each of his first three seasons, but the numbers do not lie. In 2024, he certainly had a sophomore slump as his passing yards per game plummeted down to 219.2. Some of that can be attributed to an offensive line that allowed 63 sacks (Stroud sacked on 52 of those), but last year he only took 29 sacks and posted just 217.2 passing yards per game.

Granted, he missed Weeks 10-12 with a concussion, but Stroud was awful in the playoffs. The Texans won 30-6 at Pittsburgh despite Stroud committing three turnovers. It was even worse the following week in New England in which Stroud completed just 20 of 47 passes for 212 yards, one touchdown, four interceptions, and a passer rating of 28.0.

Three years ago, he was the franchise savior. Now there is some uncertainty, and it is up to him to eliminate all doubt.

Is this the year that the investment in the offensive line finally pays dividends?

Two years ago, the Texans gave up 63 sacks. Last year, they added second-round pick Aireontae Ersery and free agent Ed Ingram, who became the starters at LT and RG, respectively. This year, the Texans replace the other three starters with Wyatt Teller (Cleveland) and Braden Smith coming in to play LG and RT with first-rounder Keylan Rutledge (Georgia Tech) slotted in at C.

Stroud's best friends should be his offensive line and a running game that needs to improve as the Texans ranked just 22nd in rushing yards per game (108.9 YPG) and scored just nine TDs on the ground, tying for second-to-last in the league.

Can David Montgomery improve the Texans' anemic running game?

Nick Chubb could not provide the answer for the Texans on the ground while platooning with fourth-round pick Woody Marks last year. Marks ended up being Houston's most productive back and runs hard, but did not provide the Texans many game-breaking plays.

Enter David Montgomery, who had to know his days were numbered as the Lions featured back when Jahmyr Gibbs was drafted back in 2023. Gibbs eventually took over the bulk of the backfield work and Montgomery was the No. 2 in Detroit last season. Nonetheless, Montgomery did run for 20 TDs over the last two seasons and was a reliable ball carrier, having only lost two fumbles over three years with the Lions.

ODDS TO WIN...



SUPER BOWL



AFC



AFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.8	13
YARDS PER POINT	13.8	13
PLAYS PER GAME	64	6
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:48	4
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.2%	23
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327	18
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	24
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.9	13
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	108.9	22
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	29
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.2	8
COMPLETION %	62.5%	22
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	218.1	14
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	19
TURNOVERS	0.7	2
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.4	2
YARDS PER POINT	16.1	4
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.2%	6
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	279.1	2
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	5
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	93.7	4
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	7
COMPLETION %	59.3%	3
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	185.4	6
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.9	6
SACKS	2.8	7
TURNOVERS	1.7	3

INDIANAPOLIS

Colts



This time last year, the Indianapolis Colts were facing a new era after the passing of their owner Jim Irsay. Irsay's three daughters, led by eldest daughter and CEO Carlie Irsay-Gordon, were hoping to get the Colts out of their recent mediocrity. The start of the season was very promising with an 8-2 start, and it seemed like the team found a quarterback after they essentially moved on from former first-round draft pick Anthony Richardson as its starter.

After six largely unsuccessful seasons with the Giants, Daniel Jones got a second chance to be a starter in the NFL and was on his way to a career-best season posting career-highs in completion percentage (68%), yards per attempt (8.1), and passer rating (100.2). Jones's season ended in Week 14 at Jacksonville with a torn Achilles tendon. The Colts' season also basically ended as well and they finished with seven consecutive losses to miss the playoffs.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 7.5

Even with all the questions surrounding the Colts, they do have the fifth-easiest schedule based on the opponents' 2025 winning percentage. The offense loses Michael Pittman Jr. (Pittsburgh) at receiver, but the group still has plenty of playmakers with Jonathan Taylor, Tyler Warren, and Alec Pierce. Plus, as bad as it got late in the season, six of the Colts losses were one-score games.

This team has either gone 8-9 or 9-8 in four of the last five seasons, and this is probably another one of those seasons where this club teases its fans enough to think that they are good, but do not have enough to make the playoffs and the Colts remain like the Stealers Wheel song, "Stuck in the Middle with You".

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 9-8 ATS / 9-8 O-U
Head Coach: Shane Steichen - 4th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+4		INDIANAPOLIS is on 10-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore, UNDER the total is 13-2 in L15
9/20	+6.3	@	UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of IND-KC h2h series
9/27	+0.2	@	UNDERDOGS are 7-1 ATS in L8 of HOU-IND rivalry
10/4	+0.6	vs	UNDERDOGS are on 6-3-1 run in IND-WAS h2h series
10/11	+3.2	@	PITTSBURGH is on 5-0 ATS streak hosting Indianapolis
10/18	-4.9		INDIANAPOLIS has won L6 ATS vs. Tennessee
10/25	+2.7	@	INDIANAPOLIS is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. Minnesota
11/1	+3.4	@	JACKSONVILLE is 9-1 ATS in L10 hosting Indianapolis
11/8	-1		HOME FAVORITES are on 6-1 SU & ATS run in DAL-IND h2h series
11/15	-7.2		L4 games of MIA-IND series in Indianapolis went UNDER the total
11/19	+3.7	@	INDIANAPOLIS is 12-1-1 ATS at Houston since '13
11/29	-3.6		The L5 games of the NYG-IND h2h series went OVER the total
12/13	+7.7	@	INDIANAPOLIS is on 7-1 ATS run versus Philadelphia
12/20	-1.5	@	INDIANAPOLIS has won L3 ATS at Tennessee
12/27	-1.3		L4 games of CIN-IND h2h series went OVER the total
1/3	+0.9	@	HOME TEAMS have won L5 ATS in IND-CLE h2h series
1/10	-0.7		JACKSONVILLE is on 8-2 ATS surge at Indianapolis

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.74**
 #19 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.0 / -0.5**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is Indiana Jones really the answer at quarterback?

The Colts have been searching for any answer at QB since Andrew Luck retired just before the 2019 season was to begin. They have tried Jacoby Brissett, Philip Rivers, Carson Wentz, Matt Ryan, Gardner Minshew, Anthony Richardson, Joe Flacco, and a couple others, but all of them were stopgaps or were not up to the job.

Jones was given a one-year deal and looked like he was a fit with Shane Steichen's offense. In Weeks 1-8, Jones completed 173 of 243 (71.2%) passes for 2,062 yards, 13 touchdowns, three interceptions, and a passer rating of 109.5 and the Colts were arguably the best offense in the league. However, some regression came even before the Achilles injury. From Week 9 through the injury, Jones completed 83 of 134 (61.9%) passes for 979 yards, six touchdowns, four interceptions, and a passer rating of 86.6.

The Colts essentially committed long-term to Jones when they traded their 2026 and 2027 first-round picks away for CB Sauce Gardner. The question remains whether they will get early-season Jones or the Jones from the second half of the season?

Can the Colts get pressure on opposing quarterbacks?

Aside from QB, one of the major criticisms of GM Chris Ballard is the inability to find the next consistently dominant edge rusher that the Colts have lacked since the Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis eras. The last time the Colts had a player garner a double-digit sack total was back in 2019.

While also trying several different free agents, Ballard has also whiffed in the draft in finding an impact edge. 2024 first-round pick Laiatu Latu had 8.5 sacks last season and Arden Key joins from Tennessee. The secondary has been in some flux in recent years, but the main culprit for the Colts ranking 31st last season in pass defense is not being able to win up front.

How many lives does GM Chris Ballard have?

Ballard is now in his 10th season in Indianapolis. While he did win Executive of the Year in 2018, his tenure has been mired in mediocrity. The Colts have not won a division title in his tenure and last won the AFC South in 2014. They have also only made the playoffs twice and it has been a five-season playoff drought.

Yes, Luck unexpectedly retired but that was seven years ago! Ballard's tenure has had four different head coaches and eight different QBs with double-digit starts and included a second tenure for 44-year-old Rivers, who had retired for five years, late last season.

Irsay-Gordon elected to not make any changes last year, but eventually enough will need to be enough if the Colts miss the playoffs again.

60-1

SUPER BOWL

28-1

AFC

+380

AFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.4	8
YARDS PER POINT	12.6	3
PLAYS PER GAME	59.9	20
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:15	23
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.6%	8
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	345.6	9
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	8
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26	21
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	117.8	17
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	10
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.2	18
COMPLETION %	65.8%	13
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	227.8	9
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	10
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.2	21
YARDS PER POINT	14.4	16
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.5%	26
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	349.8	23
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	17
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	101.9	7
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	2
COMPLETION %	63.3%	12
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	247.9	31
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	19
SACKS	2.3	15
TURNOVERS	1.2	10

JACKSONVILLE

Jaguars



The hire of Liam Coen as head coach, Jacksonville's fourth in six seasons, proved successful in Year 1, as the Jaguars won the AFC South and their 13 wins last season were the most since 1999. Both the offensive and defensive units rose from the near bottom in 2024 to the top third of the league last season.

Perhaps the biggest improvement for Jacksonville was its culture led by the trio of Coen, new GM James Gladstone, and executive VP of football operations Tony Boselli, the Jags' lone Pro Football Hall of Famer. Last year was the first time this organization had success in a long time before bowing out to Buffalo in the playoffs. There were very few roster changes, so the core of the team is back but now they have higher expectations after far exceeding the ones from last season.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 9.5

Most everything went right for Jacksonville last season. They stayed relatively injury-free, plus took advantage of a +13 turnover margin (second in takeaways - 31), and a softer schedule. The strength of schedule is in the lower third again in terms of opponents' winning percentage from 2025, but the dynamics are much more difficult considering that the Jaguars only play one true home game from Weeks 4-11 due to EverBank Stadium renovations, which call for reduced seating capacity this season from 67,814 to 42,507.

The back-to-back London games in Weeks 5 and 6 save some travel mileage but they are also against tough opponents (Philadelphia and Houston).

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 13-5 SU & 12-6 ATS / 10-8 O-U
Head Coach: Liam Coen - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-7.4		HOME TEAMS are 6-3 ATS in L9 of CLE-JAC h2h set
9/20	+6	@	JACKSONVILLE has won its L5 ATS at Denver
9/27	+0.8		HOME TEAMS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of NE-JAC h2h series
10/4	+2.7	@	OVER the total is on 4-1-1 run in L6 of JAC-CIN series at Cincinnati
10/11	+3.8	vs	FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of PHI-JAC h2h set
10/18	+0.9	vs	UNDERDOGS are on 9-4 ATS run in L13 of HOU-JAC series
11/1	-3.4		JACKSONVILLE is 9-1 ATS in L10 hosting Indianapolis
11/5	+7.3	@	JACKSONVILLE is on a 6-2 ATS run vs. Baltimore
11/15	-2.9	@	JACKSONVILLE has won 14 SU & ATS vs. Tennessee
11/22	+0	@	JACKSONVILLE is 6-2 ATS in eight prior meetings with NY Giants
11/29	-6.2		JACKSONVILLE is on 3-0 ATS streak hosting Tennessee
12/6	+4.6	@	CHICAGO is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Jacksonville
12/14	-3.3		ROAD TEAMS are on 7-0-1 ATS surge in PIT-JAC h2h series
12/20	+2.3	@	UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of JAC-HOU rivalry in Houston
12/27	+3.1	@	UNDERDOGS & OVER the total are 6-1 ATS in L7 of JAC-DAL h2h series
1/3	-3.6		WASHINGTON has won L5 ATS vs. Jacksonville
1/10	+0.7	@	JACKSONVILLE is on 8-2 ATS surge at Indianapolis

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.32**
 #13 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.3 / -0.1**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Can Trevor Lawrence finally become an elite QB?

Trevor Lawrence was drafted No. 1 overall back in 2021. In his five seasons as the Jaguars' franchise QB, he has shown glimmers of potential greatness and made a Pro Bowl back in 2022. Last season was the first one where he solidified himself as an above-average NFL starter and had the best season of his career with multiple highs, including passing TDs and rushing TDs. On the other hand, Lawrence ranked middle of the pack in many categories such as being 14th in EPA per dropback, 12th in DYAR, 16th in DVOA, and 20th in passer rating.

Coen and OC Grant Udinski proved to provide the best system of Lawrence's career using him as both a passing and running threat. However, the Jaguars were fortunate that Lawrence stayed healthy all season, considering the 41 sacks that he took were also a career high.

So, the question remains whether Lawrence can be great or just be pretty good?

Can the Jaguars offense get better production from its OL and running game?

While there were not many roster changes from the Jaguars, one major change was electing to move on from RB Travis Etienne, who signed with New Orleans, not only due to his price tag but also a lack of production at the goal line. Chris Rodriguez (Washington) comes in as a more physical back, but also is less athletic and gives little in the passing game.

The offensive line has always been a bit of musical chairs in Jacksonville over the last several seasons, but this year all five starters from last season are penciled in to start once again in 2026. Continuity is typically a good thing, but this group still allowed 41 sacks, ranked in the bottom third of the league in rushing offense, and was ranked just 24th in PFF's season-ending rankings.

What is Travis Hunter exactly?

The 2024 Heisman Trophy Winner was drafted as the Jaguars version of Shohei Ohtani, as he played both ways at Colorado and in his rookie season last year before suffering a torn LCL that ended his season in late October.

Before the season-ending injury, Hunter played 326 snaps on offense where he caught 28 passes for 298 yards and a touchdown. However, he only played 165 snaps on defense.

His role seems to be a bit undefined considering most NFL talent evaluators believed that he would be a more impactful player on defense. This is not saying that Hunter cannot be used in certain situations on offense, but the Jaguars have a solid receiving corps with Brian Thomas Jr, Parker Washington, Brenton Strange, and Jakobi Meyers, who injected a jolt into the offense after being acquired from the Raiders in a midseason trade. The Jaguars secondary is solid, but Hunter is more needed there than at receiver.

ODDS TO WIN...

30-1

SUPER BOWL

15-1

AFC

+250

AFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.9	6
YARDS PER POINT	12.1	1
PLAYS PER GAME	64.3	4
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:25	5
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.2%	19
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	337.4	11
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	18
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.8	8
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	115.1	20
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	27
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.1	14
COMPLETION %	61.1%	27
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	222.3	12
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.2	11
TURNOVERS	1.1	13
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.8	8
YARDS PER POINT	15.4	9
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.4%	20
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	303.6	11
YARDS PER PLAY	5	8
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	85.6	1
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	5
COMPLETION %	62.4%	7
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	218.1	20
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.8	5
SACKS	1.9	27
TURNOVERS	1.8	2

TENNESSEE

Titans



Tennessee was at the bottom of the AFC South again last season with a 3-14 record for the second consecutive season. Brian Callahan made it through six games into his second season before being fired with a 4-19 record and then Mike McCoy took over on an interim basis and the Titans went 2-9. Callahan was an offensive guy and as is the trend in the NFL, when a coach from one side of the ball fails then organizations go to the other side and Tennessee did that with the hire of 49ers defensive coordinator Robert Saleh.

Saleh and his staff, which includes new coordinators and former NFL head coaches Brian Daboll and Gus Bradley, are tasked with building a defense near the bottom of almost all categories and continuing to develop second-year QB Cam Ward.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 6.5

The Titans do get a last-place schedule this year, but they also had one last year and finished 3-14. Nevertheless, Ward is in his second year and did show some promise in the second half of his rookie season. The offensive line still has some question marks, but there are more skill players to work with this time around and the defense also has more talent on paper.

Perhaps Saleh is more prepared to be a head coach on his second chance. He and his staff, especially the coordinators, are certainly more experienced and seasoned than the Callahan staff.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 7-10 ATS / 11-6 O-U
Head Coach: Robert Saleh - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-3.9		NY JETS are 11-2 ATS vs. Tennessee since '98
9/20	+5.9		HOME TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS surge in PHI-TEN h2h set
9/27	+4.2	@	ROAD TEAMS & UNDER the total are on 4-game ATS streaks in TEN-NYG set
10/4	+11.5	@	ROAD TEAMS are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 of TEN-BAL h2h series
10/11	+3.8		UNDERDOGS have won L5 ATS in HOU-TEN series at Tennessee
10/18	+4.9	@	INDIANAPOLIS has won L6 ATS vs. Tennessee
10/25	-2.5		CLEVELAND is on 5-1-1 ATS run at Tennessee
11/1	+6.9	@	CINCINNATI is on 9-2 ATS run vs. Tennessee
11/15	+2.9		JACKSONVILLE has won 14 SU & ATS vs. Tennessee
11/22	+7.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 5-game ATS win streak in TEN-DAL series
11/29	+6.2	@	JACKSONVILLE is on 3-0 ATS streak hosting Tennessee
12/6	+1.3		ROAD UNDERDOGS are 7-1 ATS in L8 of WAS-TEN series but lost LT
12/13	+9.9	@	TENNESSEE has gone 5-1 ATS in L6 versus Detroit
12/20	+1.5		INDIANAPOLIS has won L3 ATS at Tennessee
12/27	+1.9	@	FAVORITES are 10-3-1 ATS in L14 games of TEN_LVR h2h set
1/3	+1.6		PITTSBURGH is on 4-0 ATS surge vs. Tennessee
1/10	+6.5	@	HOUSTON is on 12-4 ATS surge hosting Tennessee

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.61**
 #8 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **0.9 / -0.8**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Can Cam Ward continue to progress?

Nearly every rookie QB has his ups and downs and Ward was certainly no exception. It was a major struggle in the first nine weeks of the season as Ward completed 170 of 295 passes (57.6%) for 1,760 yards, five touchdowns, six interceptions, and a passer rating of 72.1. In the second half of the season, he completed 153 of 245 passes (62.4%) for 1,409 yards, 10 touchdowns, one interception, and a passer rating of 90.0.

Despite being devoid of much higher-end offensive talent around him, Ward hung in there and kept the Titans competitive in many games while having to face elite defenses like Seattle, Houston, Kansas City, and the LA Chargers in the second half of the season.

Ward, behind a young offensive line, and with the proclivity of young QBs to hold the ball too long, was sacked 55 times (most in the NFL) and did lead the league in fumbles (11) and fumbles lost (7). Daboll showed the ability to work with a younger QB in New York as Daniel Jones had his best season in 2022 during the coach's first season.

Can Robert Saleh build this defense?

The Titans ranked 29th in DVOA and were not particularly proficient in any area, so this group needs a massive overhaul. The group can start with one great piece in DT Jeffery Simmons, who is one of the game's best at the position and had an outstanding season (12 sacks, 64 pressures, 16 tackles for loss, and three forced fumbles) once again in 2025.

To help Simmons, who faces double-teams on every snap, the Titans acquired DE Jermaine Johnson II from the Jets, signed John Franklin-Myers (Denver), and drafted edge-rusher Keldric Faulk (Auburn) late in the first round and MLB Anthony Hill Jr (Texas) in the second round. Saleh and defensive coordinator Gus Bradley play a Cover 3 zone base that relies on the front four to get home and drops seven into coverage, so these new acquisitions will need to produce immediately.

The new scheme is designed to limit explosive passing plays, which they gave up way too frequently last season, but they also spent \$105 million combined on brand new corners Cor'Dale Flott (Giants) and Alontae Taylor (Saints).

Will Carnell Tate be the WR1 that the Titans desperately need?

Ward ended last season with Elic Ayomanor, Chigoziem Okonkwo, and Chimere Dike as his primary receivers, so the Titans had to upgrade the position. Enter Carnell Tate, who was often the second option in three years at Ohio State while playing alongside Marvin Harrison Jr, Emeka Egbuka, and Jeremiah Smith. Tate was drafted No. 4 overall and, while not seen as a speed demon (4.53/40 at the combine), he is a great route runner and makes tough catches. Wan'Dale Robinson also reunites with Daboll from their time with the Giants.

ODDS TO WIN...

130-1 SUPER BOWL

55-1 AFC

+800 AFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	16.7	30
YARDS PER POINT	15.5	26
PLAYS PER GAME	59.1	26
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:08	25
3RD DOWN CONV. %	31.9%	31
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	259.6	31
YARDS PER PLAY	4.4	31
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	22.2	30
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	93.5	30
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	21
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	12
COMPLETION %	59.7%	30
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	166.1	30
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.7	30
TURNOVERS	1.1	15
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.1	28
YARDS PER POINT	12.3	31
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.7%	16
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	345.1	21
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	28
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	114.6	15
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	17
COMPLETION %	68.9%	31
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	230.5	23
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.6	30
SACKS	2.5	12
TURNOVERS	0.8	26

AFC WEST

Division Preview

previews by Matt Youmans

After nearly a decade of division dominance, the Chiefs finally took a fall last season, when their streak of AFC West titles was stopped at nine. Kansas City had been very good and lucky during its run, but all of that changed in 2025, and the freefall was punctuated by a knee injury that ended quarterback Patrick Mahomes' season in December. The change at the top was not a surprise to everyone. While some picked the Chargers to rise to the top, this handicapper correctly bet on the Broncos at +350. Denver's success was due mostly to its defense, though second-year quarterback Bo Nix played his part well. The media focus has been on Mahomes' return from injury, but it's important to note that Nix is not recovering as quickly from a broken right ankle suffered in January during the Broncos' 33-30 overtime victory over the Bills in the AFC divisional round.

Jim Harbaugh has changed the Chargers' culture, and now he must change their postseason failures. Harbaugh posted 11-6 records in each of his first two years as coach, yet wild-card losses to the Texans and Patriots mean there's a lot of unfinished business. The Chargers seem cursed with bad injury luck, and quarterback Justin Herbert, who has done everything but win a playoff game, needs more help from his supporting cast. Herbert could get it this season. The Chiefs' 12-0 record in one-score games in 2024 hinted that regression could be coming, and Kansas City crashed by going 1-9 in one-score games last season, including a 14-12 loss at Las Vegas in a sadly fitting finale. The Broncos will take a step or two back from 14-3, and the Chiefs can be counted on to bounce back from their six-win disaster. The Raiders (3-14) won't be as rotten and doubling their win total to six would mark significant improvement, though the development of rookie quarterback Fernando Mendoza will be the focus.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
DENVER	27.0	2.5	-0.4	23.95 (17)	9.9	7.1	9.5
KANSAS CITY	26.0	2.4	0.7	23.49 (24)	9.7	7.3	10.5
LA CHARGERS	24.5	1.8	-0.6	25.23 (2)	8.1	8.9	9.5
LAS VEGAS	19.5	1.7	0.4	24.44 (12)	6.2	10.8	5.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



11



8



4



0

DENVER Broncos



If he had played his cards right, Sean Payton might have been coaching the Broncos in the Super Bowl. But he blew the high-stakes poker game and later admitted it. Payton made a couple of costly game-management mistakes in the AFC championship that allowed the Patriots to escape from a Denver snowstorm with a 10-7 win. The Broncos were forced to play backup quarterback Jarrett Stidham after Bo Nix went down with a broken right ankle during an overtime victory over the Bills in the divisional round. A Cinderella season came to a crushing ending.

Payton will get a pass from many critics because he has cooked the Broncos' success in short order, going from 8-9 in his first season to 10-7 in 2024 to 14-3 in 2025. Denver was able to win the AFC West due to Nix's sudden rise, an outstanding defense and a soft schedule. Don't bet on the Broncos repeating the feat this season.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 9.5

Payton's teams easily topped the posted win totals the past two years. Why are the Broncos, off a 14-win season, now tagged with a total of only 9.5? Regression is expected, and the fall could be steep if Nix's ankle injury becomes a bigger concern. Drawing the NFC West schedule card is bad luck. In a four-game stretch starting in Week 3, the Broncos face the Rams, 49ers, Chargers and Seahawks. This team seems headed for 9-8 or 10-7 and should finish behind the Chargers and Chiefs in what is arguably the NFL's second-toughest division. Denver, the +225 third choice in the division behind the favored Chiefs and Chargers, is highly unlikely to duplicate its 5-1 division record from last year, when beating the lowly Raiders turned into a difficult task for this team. The win total looks right, so flip a coin.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 15-4 SU & 9-10 ATS / 8-11 O-U

Head Coach: Sean Payton - 4th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/14	+1.4		UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of DEN-KC rivalry in Kansas City
9/20	-6		JACKSONVILLE has won its L5 ATS at Denver
9/27	-0.1		UNDERDOGS are on 7-game ATS win streak in LAR-DEN series
10/4	+3.7		HOME TEAMS are 3-0-1 ATS in L4 of DEN-SF series
10/11	-0.7		FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in DEN-LAC rivalry
10/15	+0.6		OVER the total is 9-4 in L13 of DEN-SEA h2h set
10/25	-7.2		The L8 games of the DEN-ARI h2h series went OVER the total
11/1	-2.4		DENVER has won L5 ATS hosting Kansas City
11/8	-2.8		DENVER is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. Carolina
11/22	-9.2		LAS VEGAS is on 8-2 ATS run versus Denver
11/27	-0.9		UNDERDOGS are 9-3-1 ATS in DEN-PIT series since 2001
12/6	-11.7		MIAMI is on a 9-2 ATS surge versus Denver
12/13	-6.3		DENVER is 6-2-1 ATS in L9 visits to NY Jets
12/20	-5.8		RAIDERS are 9-1 ATS in L10 hosting Denver
12/25	-1.1		BUFFALO is 10-3 ATS in L13 games versus Denver
1/3	+1.9		UNDERDOGS are on 6-2 ATS run in DEN-NE h2h series
1/10	-5.2		FAVORITES have won L3 SU & ATS of LAC-DEN rivalry in Denver

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.95**
#17 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.5 / -0.4**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is Bo Nix the real deal or is he stepping on a banana peel?

Payton was second-guessed for using the 12th overall pick of the 2024 draft on Nix, who was the last of six quarterbacks to go in the first round. Two years later, Nix has outplayed two of the QBs picked before him (Michael Penix Jr. and J.J. McCarthy) and holds his own in comparison with the top three picks (Caleb Williams, Jayden Daniels and Drake Maye). Nix owns a 24-10 record as a starter while completing 64.8% of his passes with 54 touchdowns and 23 interceptions. He also has rushed for 786 yards and nine touchdowns. The stats are solid, but it's tough to completely trust him. Nix misses too many throws and his interception numbers are high. His ankle injury, which has not healed as quickly as hoped, is a separate concern. If Nix is not ready by September, the Broncos could be forced to start Stidham again.

Payton seems to have picked the right franchise quarterback, but there are Nix skeptics out there for a reason. He's still not a quarterback you put your money on with high confidence.

Will the Denver defense remain dominant?

The Broncos were able to win several tight games largely because of a defensive front that constantly harassed quarterbacks. Denver led the NFL with 68 sacks during the regular season and added eight more in two playoff games. Fourth-year linebacker Nik Bonitto led the team and ranked fifth in the league with 14 sacks. Denver's defense ranked No. 3 in scoring (18.3 PPG) and No. 2 against the run (91.1 yards per game). But the Broncos did show some leaks late in the season, allowing 34 points in a loss to Jacksonville, and star cornerback Pat Surtain II had only one interception on the season.

Did the Broncos cash in on close-game luck and a soft schedule?

The margins are thin in the NFL, so winning close games is what it's all about. But close-game luck tends to turn the other way at some point. Denver won seven games by four points or fewer last season, including two of the ugliest games imaginable against the Jets (13-11) and Raiders (10-7). The Broncos also needed a miracle comeback, rallying from an 18-point deficit in the fourth quarter, to beat the Giants 33-32 in Denver in Week 7. The Giants, Jets and Raiders were among the league's worst teams.

20-1 SUPER BOWL

10-1 AFC

+225 AFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.6	14
YARDS PER POINT	14.5	19
PLAYS PER GAME	64.2	5
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:03	7
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.2%	11
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	342.6	10
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	15
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26.8	19
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	118.7	16
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	15
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.1	4
COMPLETION %	63.3%	20
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	223.9	11
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	29
TURNOVERS	1	11
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.3	3
YARDS PER POINT	15.2	10
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.8%	2
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	278.2	1
YARDS PER PLAY	4.5	1
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	91.1	2
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	3
COMPLETION %	57.8%	2
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	187.2	7
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.4	1
SACKS	4	1
TURNOVERS	0.8	26

KANSAS CITY Chiefs



Andy Reid is a bear of a man, but he's not going into hibernation after one lousy year. It was a season in which everything went wrong, and the worst-case scenario — a serious injury to quarterback Patrick Mahomes — was the low point. The Super Bowl loser hangover became reality in Kansas City. In his first 12 years as Chiefs coach, Reid made the playoffs 11 times and won 10 or more regular-season games each time. His 13th season ended with a 6-11 embarrassment. When a heavyweight champ gets knocked down, he doesn't stay down.

A winning organization has its house in order at the top. Kansas City's charge is still directed by three of the best in the business in Reid, general manager Brett Veach and defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo. Reid and Veach started to regroup by smartly executing offseason plans through the draft and free agency.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

The recommendation in this spot last year was to play the Chiefs Under 11.5. The call this time will be Over, and with the options at Circa Sports being 9.5 (-140) and 10.5 (+135), lay a short price and bet on 10-7 as a reasonable expectation. Kansas City has home games against the Cardinals and Jets in addition to facing the Raiders twice, so that's a good starting point. Mahomes' return looks promising and it's a talented team hunting for redemption.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 6-11 SU & 6-11 ATS / 4-13 O-U
Head Coach: Andy Reid - 14th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/14	-1.4		UNDER the total is 7-1 in L8 of DEN-KC rivalry in Kansas City
9/20	-6.3		UNDER the total is 10-2 in L12 of IND-KC h2h series
9/27	-5.2	@	HOME TEAMS are on 3-0-1 ATS run in KC-MIA h2h series
10/4	-5.9	@	UNDERDOGS are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of LVR-KC rivalry
10/18	-4.1		The L5 games of LAC-KC series in Kansas City went UNDER the total
10/25	+4.9	@	KANSAS CITY is 7-2 ATS in L9 vs. Seattle
11/1	+2.4	@	DENVER has won L5 ATS hosting Kansas City
11/8	-10.9		HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in NYJ-KC h2h series
11/15	-3	@	ROAD TEAMS have won L4 ATS in KC-ATL h2h series
11/22	-11.4		KANSAS CITY is 4-0 SU & 3-1 ATS hosting Arizona since '98
11/26	+5	@	HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in KC-BUF rivalry
12/3	+4.8	@	KANSAS CITY is on a 7-0-1 ATS run vs. LA Rams
12/13	-0.1	@	CINCINNATI is on 5-1 ATS run hosting Kansas City
12/21	-1.3		UNDERDOGS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 of NE-KC h2h series
12/27	-1.2		KANSAS CITY is on an 8-0-1 ATS run versus San Francisco
1/3	-0.8	@	UNDERDOGS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of KC-LAC series at Chargers
1/10	-8.1		L3 games of LVR-KC rivalry at Kansas City went UNDER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.49**
 #24 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.4 / 0.7**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is Patrick Mahomes still a superstar or a falling star?

Disaster struck during a Week 15 loss to the Chargers when Mahomes limped off with two ligament tears in his left knee. He underwent surgery the next day and was back on the golf course and practice field about five months later. Full-contact football is a far higher hurdle to clear, of course, but Mahomes is reportedly ahead of schedule in rehab and seems likely to start when the Chiefs open the season by hosting the Broncos on Monday, September 14. Improvisational plays and scrambling are a big part of Mahomes' success, and how much mobility he will have is a mystery.

Mahomes and the offense reached a peak in 2022, when he had 41 touchdown passes and the Chiefs led the league in scoring at 29.2 points per game. In 2023, he dipped to 27 TD passes as the offense slipped to 21.8 points per game. In 2024, he had 26 TD passes and the offense averaged 22.6 points per game to rank 15th in scoring for the second straight season. In 14 games last year, Mahomes had 22 touchdown passes and 11 interceptions as the offense scored 21.3 points per game to rank 21st. After three consecutive seasons of declining numbers, it's fair to wonder if Mahomes' best days are in the rear-view mirror, especially after the injury.

Will two new faces lead to an improved offense?

Matt Nagy was a failure as head coach of the Bears and subsequently flopped as offensive coordinator in Kansas City. Nagy's contract expired and Reid finally cut ties before hiring Eric Bieniemy to return as OC. Hiring a stuffed animal to replace Nagy would have been an upgrade. Bieniemy and Mahomes worked well together in the past. A more important free-agent addition is running back Kenneth Walker, who carried the ball 27 times for 135 yards on the way to Super Bowl MVP honors for Seattle. The Chiefs ranked 25th in rushing offense last year.

Kansas City is also counting on a few familiar faces to rebound. The top three receivers (Rashee Rice, Xavier Worthy and Tyquan Thornton) should be productive playmakers and complementing that group will again be tight end Travis Kelce, who led the team with 76 receptions and also caught Taylor Swift as his soon-to-be wife.

Where's the beef on the defensive front?

Spagnuolo's unit ranked sixth in scoring defense (19.3 PPG), but a steep decline in sack numbers from 55 in 2023 to 39 in 2024 to 35 in 2025 needs to change. Veteran tackle Chris Jones (seven sacks) and end George Karlaftis (six sacks) are getting help. The Chiefs addressed the pass rush in the draft by getting Clemson tackle Peter Woods in the first round and Oklahoma edge R Mason Thomas in the second round. The secondary, which subtracted All-Pro corner Trent McDuffie in a trade with the Rams, adds LSU corner Mansoor Delane (No. 6 overall pick) and safety Alohi Gilman, a free agent from Baltimore.

ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+750

AFC

+160

AFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.3	21
YARDS PER POINT	15.1	23
PLAYS PER GAME	62.4	15
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:48	17
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.4%	22
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	320.6	20
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	23
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.3	25
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	106.6	25
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	20
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.4	7
COMPLETION %	62.2%	23
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	214.1	16
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	21
TURNOVERS	0.9	4
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.3	6
YARDS PER POINT	15.6	7
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.6%	29
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	301.5	10
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	13
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	105.7	9
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	9
COMPLETION %	66.8%	27
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	195.8	12
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	16
SACKS	2.1	22
TURNOVERS	0.8	26

LAS VEGAS Raiders



Another year, another total rebuild for the Raiders, who got it all wrong last year with the hiring of coach Pete Carroll and the signing of quarterback Geno Smith. This time, there's a much greater probability of the Raiders getting it right with the hiring of coach Klint Kubiak and the addition of quarterbacks Kirk Cousins and Fernando Mendoza, the No. 1 overall draft pick. "Just win, baby" is not the mantra this season, and while that would anger late owner Al Davis, the immediate goal under owner Mark Davis is to just compete and improve.

The Lost Vegas Raiders have produced one winning record and one playoff appearance in six years on the Strip, and their 3-14 record with Carroll represented rock bottom. It might not get a lot better this season, but it won't get worse.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 5.5

If the Raiders double their win total to six, that should be considered acceptable progress, especially considering the schedule is brutal. Aside from home games against the Dolphins and Titans and road games against the Saints, Jets, Browns and Cardinals, there's not much hope. But the Raiders did pull an upset at New England to open last season, so strange things happen. DraftKings offers Over 5.5 at -145 and that's worth a bet, but playing Over 6.5 at +125 is too much to ask.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 7-10 ATS / 8-9 O-U
Head Coach: Klint Kubiak - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-3.4	vs	OVER the total is 11-2 in L13 of MIA-LVR h2h series
9/20	+6		LA CHARGERS are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 visits to Raiders
9/27	+4.5	@	ROAD TEAMS are 7-3 ATS in LVR-NO series since '94
10/4	+5.9	@	UNDERDOGS are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of LVR-KC rivalry
10/11	+8.6		LAS VEGAS has won L3 ATS vs. New England
10/18	+7.2		OVER the total is 7-0-1 in L8 of BUF-LVR h2h series
10/25	+8.2	@	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of LAR-LVR h2h series
11/1	+0.4		HOME TEAMS are on 11-2-1 ATS run in LVR-NYJ h2h series
11/8	+10.4	@	HOME TEAMS have won L5 ATS in LVR-SF h2h series
11/15	+8.9	@	RAIDERS are on a 6-0 ATS streak hosting Seattle
11/22	+9.2		LAS VEGAS is on 8-2 ATS run versus Denver
11/29	+3.5		UNDERDOGS are on 5-0-1 ATS run in CLE-LVR h2h series
12/13	+3.1	@	FAVORITES are on 4-0 SU & ATS run in LAS-LVR rivalry in Las Vegas
12/20	+5.8		RAIDERS are 9-1 ATS in L10 hosting Denver
12/27	-1.9	@	FAVORITES are 10-3-1 ATS in L14 games of TEN_LVR h2h set
1/3	-0.5	@	RAIDERS are 4-0 ATS in L4 trips to Arizona
1/10	+8.1		L3 games of LVR-KC rivalry at Kansas City went UNDER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.44**
 #12 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.7 / 0.4**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

When will Fernando-mania become the Raiders' reality?

Tom Brady fills a major role in the organization as a minority owner and football personnel advisor, but his influence has not led to winning, at least not yet. Brady, general manager John Spytek and Kubiak reached a consensus decision to draft Mendoza out of Indiana, and all apparently agree that he should not be the starter immediately. Brady believes in developing quarterbacks the right way instead of throwing them into the fire right away, and a shaky offensive line is another reason to allow the rookie to learn from the sidelines. The signing of Cousins makes him the obvious bridge to Mendoza. Unless he's injured in the preseason, Cousins will start Week 1. How long will he keep the job? Cousins really needs to beat the Dolphins in the season opener to quell a quarterback controversy in September.

While there is no obvious spot on the schedule to give Mendoza his first start, it could be in Week 6 versus the Bills in Las Vegas or Week 8 against the Jets in New York. The Raiders don't get a bye until early December, and it's doubtful Cousins will play well enough or win enough to retain the job that long. Mendoza is a high-IQ player who approaches the game as a true professional, so he won't be a bust, but it's in his best interest not to play too soon.

Why is Kubiak the right head coach?

Kubiak, 39, was an assistant with four other teams before joining the Seahawks as offensive coordinator. He helped veteran quarterback Sam Darnold have a breakthrough season in 2025 en route to winning the Super Bowl with Seattle. The Seahawks ranked No. 3 in scoring offense (28.4 PPG) last season with Kubiak calling the shots. He also worked under his father, Gary, who was the head coach in Denver, and worked with respected offensive coaches such as Kevin Stefanski in Minnesota and Kyle Shanahan in San Francisco. One of Kubiak's main objectives this year will be to develop Mendoza, and Brady plans to be more present to assist with that.

Is Maxx Crosby sticking around to lead the defense?

The Raiders wanted to trade Crosby to the Ravens in March and were thrilled with the deal that brought back two first-round picks. Of course, Baltimore backed out and claimed Crosby failed a physical. The Crosby trade story still has life, according to recent reports, and the Eagles and 49ers are interested parties. Crosby, who turns 29 in August, still has value in the market, but he's had injury concerns while his production has declined. Ironically, the Raiders' biggest free-agent acquisition came from Baltimore when Pro Bowler Tyler Linderbaum was made the highest-paid center in the NFL with a three-year, \$81 million contract. Las Vegas also signed linebackers Nakobe Dean, Kwity Paye and Quay Walker to fill the middle of a 3-4 scheme.

ODDS TO WIN...

150-1

SUPER BOWL

76-1

AFC

20-1

AFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	14.2	32
YARDS PER POINT	17.4	32
PLAYS PER GAME	55.8	32
TIME OF POSSESSION	27:51	32
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.8%	28
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	247	32
YARDS PER PLAY	4.4	30
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	21.7	31
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	77.5	32
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.6	32
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.3	21
COMPLETION %	66.0%	11
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	169.5	28
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	27
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.4	25
YARDS PER POINT	12.5	29
3RD DOWN CONV. %	46.3%	30
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	317.8	14
YARDS PER PLAY	5	11
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	116.8	17
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.9	4
COMPLETION %	68.5%	29
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	201	14
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.5	15
SACKS	2.2	18
TURNOVERS	0.9	23

LOS ANGELES Chargers



This is the year. This is finally the Chargers' year. Eternal optimism and positive reinforcement are Jim Harbaugh's primary motivational tactics. As a coach, he creates an atmosphere that players embrace and he attempts to talk success into existence. If Tony Robbins is ever feeling down, he could call Harbaugh for a boost.

Harbaugh took on the task of changing the culture of a Chargers organization that's famous for underachieving. He took a big step in his first year by inheriting a team that went 5-12 before his arrival and finishing 11-6. A soft schedule was a beneficial launching pad. Harbaugh took another small step last year when an injury-riddled team again finished 11-6. Both seasons concluded with disappointing losses in the wild-card round.

But this is finally the Chargers' year, right?

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

If the Chargers don't start 2-0 after home games against the Cardinals and Raiders, there will be trouble. The first two weeks are as easy as it gets, but the Chargers' schedule for the next seven games — at Buffalo, at Seattle, Denver, at Kansas City, at Rams, Houston, at Baltimore — is about as tough as it gets. If Harbaugh and Herbert can get to 5-4 through nine games, the schedule eases and there's a path to 10 or more wins. This is the most challenging schedule Harbaugh has faced in three years, so betting Over 9.5 is risky business. DraftKings lists the Chiefs (+160) as division favorites with the Chargers (+190) as the second choice, and those teams should run one-two ahead of the Broncos.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 11-7 SU & 9-9 ATS / 7-11 O-U
Head Coach: Jim Harbaugh - 3rd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/13	-9.3		HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in ARI-LAC h2h series
9/20	-6	@	LA CHARGERS are 4-0-1 ATS in L5 visits to Raiders
9/27	+7.8	@	LA CHARGERS are on 5-1 ATS run vs. Buffalo
10/4	+7.7		UNDERDOGS are on 9-1-2 ATS run in LAC-SEA h2h set
10/11	+0.7	@	FAVORITES have won L5 ATS in DEN-LAC rivalry
10/18	+4.1		The L5 games of LAC-KC series in Kansas City went UNDER the total
11/1	+7.6		Designated HOME TEAM is 6-2 in L8 of Chargers-Rams series
11/8	-1.9	@	HOUSTON is on a 4-1 ATS run vs. LA Chargers
11/16	+7.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS surge in LAC-BAL h2h series
11/22	-8.8		NY JETS are 5-2-1 ATS visiting Chargers since '02
11/29	+0.8	@	NEW ENGLAND has won L4 ATS when visiting Chargers
12/6	+1	@	OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of LAC-TB h2h series
12/13	-3.1		FAVORITES are on 4-0 SU & ATS run in LAS-LVR rivalry in Las Vegas
12/17	+0.9		LA CHARGERS are on 5-1 ATS run vs. San Francisco
12/27	-2.4		MIAMI is 6-1 ATS in L7 hosting LA Chargers
1/3	+0.8	@	UNDERDOGS are 5-1-1 ATS in L7 of KC-LAC series at Chargers
1/10	+5.2	@	FAVORITES have won L3 SU & ATS of LAC-DEN rivalry in Denver

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **25.23**
#2 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.8 / -0.6**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Will Justin Herbert get more support from his cast?

Entering his seventh season, Herbert will be hoping his luck is good for a change. His time in Los Angeles has been cursed by coaching changes and injuries, both to himself and his supporting cast. Last year, young stud tackles Rashawn Slater and Joe Alt suffered severe injury setbacks. Slater, the left tackle, went down with a leg injury in an early August practice and needed season-ending surgery on a ruptured patellar tendon. Alt, the right tackle, suffered a high-ankle sprain in November that also required season-ending surgery. The Chargers had to patch together their offensive line, and Herbert took a career-high 54 sacks. The good news is Alt and Slater are expected to be ready for training camp.

Harbaugh's philosophy at Michigan, where he built a national championship team in 2023, was to develop a physical offensive line and punishing running attack. Omarion Hampton, the Chargers' first-round pick in 2025, has the rugged running style Harbaugh loves. Hampton went down with an ankle injury in Week 5 and played in only nine games as a rookie. Herbert was often the top running threat and took too many hits last season, finishing third on the team with 498 rushing yards. Herbert had 26 touchdown passes and 13 interceptions, after passing for 23 TDs with only three interceptions in his first season with Harbaugh.

Is Mike McDaniell the answer as offensive coordinator?

Greg Roman is out as OC and McDaniell should be an upgrade. McDaniell is an odd duck who staged clumsy press conferences and was miscast as a head coach in Miami, but he's a smart play-caller who will make needed changes to the offense. McDaniell was a candidate for other head-coaching jobs and recruiting him was a key move by Harbaugh. The personnel up front appears improved. The team signed veteran center Tyler Biadasz and guard Cole Strange, drafted guard Jake Slaughter from Florida in the second round, and signed veteran fullback Alec Ingold, who was one of McDaniell's favorite players with the Dolphins. Ladd McConkey returns as Herbert's top receiver and there is more speed outside with Quentin Johnson and Tre Harris. The talent is there, and now the players must stay healthy for a change.

Is the defense still in mint condition?

Jesse Minter was a big reason for Harbaugh's success. Minter coordinated defenses that ranked No. 1 in scoring (17.7 PPG) in 2024 and No. 9 (20 PPG) last year. Minter moved on to be head coach in Baltimore, where he's ironically replacing John Harbaugh. Chris O'Leary was promoted from safeties coach to DC. Veteran strong safety Derwin James remains the leader of the defense, and Miami Hurricanes linebacker Akheem Mesidor was a first-round pick. The talent is there on defense, but Minter will be missed.

ODDS TO WIN...

17-1 SUPER BOWL

+850 AFC

+190 AFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.6	20
YARDS PER POINT	15.4	25
PLAYS PER GAME	64.4	3
TIME OF POSSESSION	32:32	2
3RD DOWN CONV. %	45.8%	3
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	333.8	12
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	21
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.4	15
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	121.6	12
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	13
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.5	13
COMPLETION %	64.5%	16
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	212.2	18
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.9	16
TURNOVERS	1.2	17
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20	9
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	18
3RD DOWN CONV. %	35.2%	5
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	285.2	5
YARDS PER PLAY	5	10
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	105.4	8
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	18
COMPLETION %	60.8%	5
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	179.9	5
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.1	10
SACKS	2.6	10
TURNOVERS	1.4	7

NFC EAST

Division Preview

previews by Zach Cohen

Philadelphia is the betting favorite to win this division for a third straight year. Last season, the Eagles snapped a 21-year streak in which the NFC East hadn't produced a back-to-back champion. But if Philly is going to finish on top again, it'll have to do it without A.J. Brown. After four straight 1,000-yard seasons, and some light sideline reading, Brown was shipped to New England in a deal Dianna Russini was born to break. Still, most of the main characters are back from a Philly team that ranks eighth in the NFL in Offensive EPA per play (0.074) and fourth in Defensive EPA per play (-0.068) over the last two seasons.

Dallas sits just below Philadelphia on the NFC East odds board, and the Cowboys — as always — head into the year with serious hype. This time, it might actually be warranted. Everyone is back from a Dallas offense that ranked fifth in EPA per play (0.109) last season, but the bigger story is a dramatically improved defense. The Cowboys hired former Eagles defensive pass game coordinator and DBs coach Christian Parker to replace Matt Eberflus, and they invested heavily on talent this offseason. If Dallas can flirt with top-15 defensive production, you're looking at a genuine NFC East contender — and real postseason threat.

New York made a division-altering move by hiring John Harbaugh. The Giants now have one of the better culture-setters steering the ship, and Harbaugh didn't waste any time shaking up the roster. New York will look to go from worst to first, and given how frequently that happens in the NFL, it can't be dismissed. At the very least, if health permits, there's no reason the Giants can't be a much more competitive team.

Washington didn't move on from Dan Quinn. A 5-12 season was a brutal hangover from a 12-5 campaign in 2024, but the front office felt Quinn deserved another shot. Quinn did make changes of his own, bringing in Daronte Jones as DC and promoting David Blough to OC. Jones has free rein to reshape the defense, and Blough, regarded as one of the NFL's brightest young offensive minds, gets to do the same on the other side of the ball. If things click, Jayden Daniels and Co. can be dangerous again.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025 SM PR	HOME FIELD ADV.	ROAD FIELD ADV.	SCHEDULE STRENGTH (RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	DRAFTKINGS O/U
PHILADELPHIA	27.0	2.8	0.7	22.72 (30)	10.6	6.4	10.5
DALLAS	24.0	2.6	0.4	24.11 (15)	8.5	8.5	9.5
WASHINGTON	23.0	1.0	0.1	24.63 (7)	7.7	9.3	7.5
NY GIANTS	22.0	1.5	-0.2	24.49 (11)	7.3	9.7	7.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



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DALLAS Cowboys



Brian Schottenheimer's first year leading America's Team wasn't all that different from Mike McCarthy's last. Dallas went 7-10 in the 2024 season, then the team went 7-9-1 in Year 1 under Schotty. It certainly wasn't the type of year that Jerry Jones was expecting after backing the former offensive coordinator, and the pressure will now be ramped up in Year 2.

The Cowboys pretty much have everyone back from last year's offense, which was among the best in football. Dak Prescott, CeeDee Lamb, George Pickens, and Jake Ferguson made up an explosive passing game, and Javonte Williams rushed for 1,201 yards and 11 touchdowns in a resurgent year out of the backfield.

Dallas now needs to take a step forward on defense, as the unit really let the rest of the team down in 2025. If there's a real change on that side of the ball, there's nothing keeping the Cowboys from making a deep postseason run. The offense is that special.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

Schedule be damned, Dallas to go Over 9.5 wins is one of the best plays you can make heading into the 2026 season. Available at plus-money odds, this perennial bet-against team looks like the ultimate bet-on group heading into the season. Dallas' offense is as explosive as anyone's, the team has the best kicker in football, and a serious investment was made in improving the defense. On paper, this is an intimidating team.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 7-9-1 SU & 7-10 ATS / 13-4 O-U
Head Coach: Brian Schottenheimer - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-1.3	@	UNDERDOGS are 11-6 ATS in DAL-NYG series in New York since '09
9/20	-3.1		DALLAS is on 8-1 ATS run hosting Washington
9/27	+5	vs	The BAL-DAL series is on a 5-0-1 OVER the total surge
10/4	+2.6	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS surge in DAL-HOU in-state battle
10/8	-3.3		ROAD TEAMS are 7-2-1 ATS in L10 of TB-DAL h2h series
10/18	+4.8	@	UNDERDOGS have won L7 ATS in DAL-GB h2h series
10/26	+5	@	HOME TEAMS are on 12-3 ATS run in DAL-PHI h2h series
11/1	-9.6		ARIZONA is on 8-1 ATS run vs. Dallas, all as underdog
11/8	+1	@	HOME FAVORITES are on 6-1 SU & ATS run in DAL-IND h2h series
11/15	+0.6		SAN FRANCISCO has won L4 SU & ATS vs. Dallas
11/22	-7.3		ROAD TEAMS are on 5-game ATS win streak in TEN-DAL series
11/26	+1.5		DALLAS is on 7-1 ATS surge hosting Philadelphia
12/7	+7.2	@	SEATTLE has won its L5 games ATS vs. Dallas
12/20	+7.1	@	HOME TEAMS are 8-3 ATS in L11 of DAL-LAR h2h series
12/27	-3.1		UNDERDOGS & OVER the total are 6-1 ATS in L7 of JAC-DAL h2h series
1/3	-4.4		L7 games of NYG-DAL series in Dallas went OVER total, avg 60.7 PPG
1/10	-0.8	@	L3 games of DAL-WAS series in Washington went OVER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.11**
 #15 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.6 / 0.4**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is this defense good enough?

Among other miserable numbers, this defense was dead last in third-down EPA per play allowed (0.347) last year. So, for the fourth time in as many years, the Cowboys will have a new defensive play-caller. This time around, it'll be Parker running the show. The 34-year-old has earned some hefty praise for the work he did with the Eagles secondary, and he now steps into an awesome situation. There will be pressure on Parker to get more out of this Cowboys defense, but that's also a ground-level bar to clear.

Dallas also made some sharp moves in the offseason. In yet another Cowboys-Packers swap, the team added Rashaan Gary to add some pass-rushing juice. With Quinnen Williams already on the defensive line, Dallas is now looking scary up front. The Cowboys also drafted Caleb Downs at No. 11. Many believe he'll be an instant-impact player — and possibly compete for Defensive Rookie of the Year. If Cobie Durant, who Dallas signed away from Los Angeles, can play some solid football opposite DaRon Bland II, the Cowboys could move closer to being a top-12 defense. That would make Dallas a real player in the NFC.

What can be expected out of this offensive line?

It wasn't too long ago that the Cowboys O-Line was the class of the NFL up front. However, Dallas has been searching for consistency ever since. There's undoubtedly a world in which everything clicks in 2026. The Cowboys were 19th in Pass Block Win Rate (63%) and 11th in Run Block Win Rate (72%) in 2025, and I don't think anyone would bat an eye if this is a top-10 team in both.

Dallas will just need some development — and better health — from 2024 first-round pick Tyler Guyton. He hasn't lived up to the hype as the blindside protector for this team, and he can't afford to be the weak link as the man responsible for Prescott. The Cowboys are as good as anyone in the middle, as Tyler Smith and Tyler Booker look like a great guard duo. Cooper Beebe is also making strides at center. But ultimately, how good this unit will be is up to Guyton. He needs to be better, and he needs to stay on the field.

How will the Cowboys navigate one of the league's toughest schedules?

According to Warren Sharp, Dallas has the fourth-toughest schedule in the NFL in 2026. One of the more grueling stretches of the year sees the Cowboys traveling to Brazil for a date with the Ravens, then heading back to America for a road game against the Texans and a Thursday Night Football home game against the Buccaneers. In that stretch, Dallas will play three games in 12 days. The Cowboys then play back-to-back primetime road games against the Packers and Eagles.

Nothing about Dallas' schedule is favorable. However, how well Dallas manages it will ultimately come down to how the team answers the previous two burning questions, and how the group holds up physically. If the defense is better, the O-Line is solid, and none of the team's stars suffer injuries, the Cowboys can beat any opponent, anywhere.

ODDS TO WIN...

25-1

SUPER BOWL

13-1

NFC

+250

NFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	27.7	7
YARDS PER POINT	14.1	15
PLAYS PER GAME	65.9	1
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:03	14
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.2%	12
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	391.9	2
YARDS PER PLAY	5.9	4
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.4	16
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	125.6	9
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	9
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	36.7	3
COMPLETION %	67.2%	8
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	266.3	2
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.6	8
TURNOVERS	1.2	17
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.1	32
YARDS PER POINT	12.5	28
3RD DOWN CONV. %	47.3%	32
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	377	30
YARDS PER PLAY	6.1	31
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	125.5	23
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	26
COMPLETION %	68.5%	30
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	251.5	32
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.7	32
SACKS	2.1	22
TURNOVERS	0.7	30

NEW YORK Giants



The Giants decided that the work Brian Daboll did with rookie Jaxson Dart wasn't enough. New York fired him after a 2-8 start, which was a bit of a risky move. When you're invested in a young quarterback, there's nothing more important than his development. But the Giants were rewarded for their boldness, as John Harbaugh hit the open market.

It doesn't get much better than Harbaugh when looking for a leader. It has been quite some time since he won his Super Bowl with the Ravens, as that came all the way back in 2012. But Harbaugh won the AFC North in four of his final eight seasons with Baltimore, and that was viewed as the "down" stretch in his tenure.

There's simply more juice within the organization with Harbaugh at the helm. Let's see what he can do in Year 1.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 7.5

Everything about this team will be a little more serious with Harbaugh pulling the strings, but it's still hard to get there with eight wins. Even with a favorable schedule, you're banking on a completely overhauled defense gelling immediately. You're also hoping for good health out of a reckless group of players. Harbaugh should get this right eventually, but it might take a little more than a year.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 4-13 SU & 9-8 ATS / 11-6 O-U
Head Coach: John Harbaugh - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+1.3		UNDERDOGS are 11-6 ATS in DAL-NYG series in New York since '09
9/21	+9.7	@	NY GIANTS have won L5 ATS when visiting Rams
9/27	-4.2		ROAD TEAMS & UNDER the total are on 4-game ATS streaks in TEN-NYG set
10/4	-6.5		ARIZONA is on 7-1 ATS run at NY Giants
10/11	+1.8	@	WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS vs. NY Giants
10/18	-1.8		UNDER the total is 5-1 in L6 of NO-NYG h2h series
10/25	+5.2	@	NY GIANTS have won L4 ATS vs. Houston
11/8	+7.6	@	HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in NYG-PHI series
11/12	+0		L2 games of WAS-NYG set in New York went OVER the total after 6-0-1 UNDER run
11/22	+0		JACKSONVILLE is 6-2 ATS in eight prior meetings with NY Giants
11/29	+3.6	@	The L5 games of the NYG-IND h2h series went OVER the total
12/6	+3.7		SAN FRANCISCO is on 6-1 ATS run vs NY Giants
12/13	+9.8	@	NY GIANTS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 versus Seattle
12/20	-4.6		ROAD TEAMS have won L3 SU & ATS in CLE-NYG h2h series
12/28	+7.8	@	ROAD TEAMS are 10-2 ATS in NYG-DET h2h series since '94
1/3	+4.4	@	L7 games of NYG-DAL series in Dallas went OVER total, avg 60.7 PPG
1/10	+4.6		NY GIANTS are on 4-2 SU & ATS run as home dog to Philadelphia

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.49**
 #11 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.5 / -0.2**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Does Harbaugh have enough talent to push for the playoffs?

The Giants made some big changes on defense. New York traded star Dexter Lawrence. There's really no one-for-one replacements for Lawrence, but the Giants did their best to recreate him in the aggregate. They added D.J. Reader, Leki Fotu, and Shelby Harris up front. They'll now hope that Abdul Carter, last year's third-overall pick, and Arvell Reese, this year's fifth-overall pick, can be the stars that defensive coordinator Dennard Wilson needs for this unit. They'll also look to unlock Kayvon Thibodeaux's potential.

New York also added Tremaine Edmunds as an immediate contributor in the middle of the defense, plus corner Greg Newsome II joins a group of defensive backs that has been shaky in recent years.

Whether the Giants actually have enough to compete will come down to how this unit looks. Baltimore always had elite defenses under Harbaugh, and he'll need a strong defense in New York.

On offense, there's undeniably talent. Dart is an intriguing dual-threat quarterback, Malik Nabers is a star on the outside, Cam Skattebo is a tank out of the backfield, and the offensive line continues to improve — especially with rookie Sisi Mauigoa adding some serious beef. This group has the potential to take off under Matt Nagy, but that brings us to our next question...

Can the offense's most important pieces stay healthy?

As impressive as Dart looked as a rookie, he suffered a concussion and was evaluated for a handful of others. Dart is clearly a dangerous runner, but running is also a danger to Dart. He needs to find a way to stop putting his body in harm's way, or he risks turning into Not Another Teen Movie's Reggie Ray.

Skattebo is similar. The Arizona State product is as violent a between-the-tackles runner as there is in the NFL. And while he didn't suffer any concussions, his running style does make him prone to injury. His 2025 season ended with a right ankle fracture-dislocation, and getting back to his pre-injury level, and staying there, isn't guaranteed.

Nabers also has to stay healthy. He isn't quite like the other two. He tore his ACL in what was a fluky injury. But his status for Week 1 is in doubt. There's also no guarantee he'll look the same when he returns.

It's just alarming that New York's most talented offensive players are dealing with things, and this unit won't achieve much success without all three of them.

Is Jaxson Dart a franchise quarterback or a stat-sheet stuffer?

When Dart was able to play last season, some of the numbers were very encouraging. He threw for 2,272 yards and 15 touchdowns, and he added another 487 yards and nine scores on the ground.

For those that play strictly player props, or even fantasy football, it sure looked like Dart was lighting it up. However, zooming out you see that New York only won four games with Dart at the helm, and his Completion Percentage Over Expected was -0.2.

Year 2 of the Dart experience should show us whether he's legitimately suited to be a No. 1 in this league. Can he avoid nasty hits, improve his accuracy, and take the necessary steps as a leader? We shall see.

ODDS TO WIN...

70-1 SUPER BOWL

34-1 NFC

+600 NFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.4	17
YARDS PER POINT	14.9	21
PLAYS PER GAME	63.8	8
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:29	11
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.2%	14
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	333.5	13
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	20
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.1	2
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	129.1	5
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	18
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.9	20
COMPLETION %	61.4%	25
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	204.4	21
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	13
TURNOVERS	1	11
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.8	26
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	21
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.2%	13
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	359.5	28
YARDS PER PLAY	5.8	27
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	145.3	31
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5.3	32
COMPLETION %	65.1%	18
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	214.2	16
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.6	17
SACKS	2.3	15
TURNOVERS	0.9	25

PHILADELPHIA

Eagles



The Eagles had a loud offseason with the A.J. Brown saga coming to an end. Philadelphia dealt him to New England, reuniting him with Mike Vrabel. Replacing that kind of talent won't be easy, but expectations for the Eagles haven't changed. It's Super Bowl or bust in Philly.

Nick Sirianni has guided the Eagles to at least 11 wins in four consecutive seasons, and this roster is good enough to raise the Lombardi Trophy again. Jalen Hurts is back under center with all kinds of weapons around him. Philadelphia has also made some big coaching changes, with Sean Mannion's hiring being an exciting one. Kevin Patullo was in over his head last year, and the Eagles front office believes Mannion can be the mind this team has been missing since Kellen Moore left.

Philadelphia just needs someone to step up with Brown gone, and the Eagles have to prove they can rush the passer. But it's hard to worry too much about this organization.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

The Over is a little juiced if you want to take Philadelphia to win 10 games, but a lot would have to go wrong for the Eagles to finish with nine or fewer. This offense is still loaded. Plus, the defense will continue to be scary as long as Fangio is running it. The team also has a favorable schedule this year, with Sharp Football Analysis giving Philly an easier schedule than all but six teams.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 11-7 SU & 10-8 ATS / 7-11 O-U
Head Coach: Nick Sirianni - 6th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-6.3		OVER the total is 10-3 in L13 of WAS-PHI series in Philly
9/20	-5.9	@	HOME TEAMS are on 7-1 ATS surge in PHI-TEN h2h set
9/28	+0.8	@	The L5 games of CHI-PHI h2h series went UNDER the total
10/4	-0.4		OVER the total is 7-1-1 in L9 of LAR-PHI h2h series
10/11	-3.8	vs	FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of PHI-JAC h2h set
10/18	-9.1		ROAD UNDERDOGS are on 4-0 ATS run in CAR-PHI h2h series
10/26	-5		HOME TEAMS are on 12-3 ATS run in DAL-PHI h2h series
11/1	-4.1	@	The L3 games of PHI-WAS series in Washington went OVER the total
11/8	-7.6		HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in NYG-PHI series
11/22	-6.8		PHILADELPHIA has won L5 SU & ATS hosting Pittsburgh
11/26	-1.5	@	DALLAS is on 7-1 ATS surge hosting Philadelphia
12/6	-8.3	@	ARIZONA is 9-1 ATS in its L10 games versus Philadelphia
12/13	-7.7		INDIANAPOLIS is on 7-1 ATS run versus Philadelphia
12/19	+0.3		SEATTLE is on 9-2 ATS run vs. Philadelphia
12/24	-5.4		OVER the total is 4-0 in L4 games of HOU-PHI h2h series
1/3	+2.6	@	FAVORITES are 9-4 ATS in L13 games of PHI-SF h2h series
1/10	-4.6	@	NY GIANTS are on 4-2 SU & ATS run as home dog to Philadelphia

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **22.72**
 #30 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.8 / 0.7**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Will this offense make lemonade with Makai Lemon?

When the Eagles used the No. 20 pick on Lemon, it was pretty clear they were moving Brown. Philadelphia did bring in Elijah Moore, Dontayvion Wicks, and Marquise Brown, but Lemon's the guy that has the best shot at making up for the lost production.

Last season, the 5-foot-11 wideout had 79 catches for 1,156 yards and 11 touchdowns for USC, where he showed off extreme precision as a route runner, was a monster after the catch, and flashed an impressive ability to go up and grab the ball despite being small for a true No. 1. There's a real chance he outperforms his draft slot — which is a theme for USC receivers — and he should hit the ground running. If he does, Philadelphia's offense should be a top-10 unit in the league.

Which version of Hurts is showing up?

Hurts might not have Brown back, but he has plenty of weapons, a strong offensive line, and an all-world running back in Saquon Barkley. As long as he vibes with Mannion's system — which will see Hurts under center more often — there's really nothing keeping him from going out and playing at a borderline MVP level.

Hurts is, however, one of the more inconsistent quarterbacks in football. While he possesses all the talent in the world, we see far too many games in which the Eagles offense is stuck in neutral. Fair or not, that falls on the shoulders of Hurts, who has seen his PFF grade drop in three consecutive seasons.

Hurts has cut down on his interceptions, so that's a positive. He also looks solid when looking at Completion Percentage Over Expected (3.2). But what's keeping him from producing like a top-10 quarterback all year long? And will we see some more from him as a runner? Barkley cut into Hurts' rushing numbers, but the quarterback's yards per carry were down at 4.0. In 2022, he was at 4.6. He should be more efficient with his legs.

Will Philly consistently get to the quarterback?

The Eagles were 20th in the NFL in Pass Rush Win Rate (35%) last year, and that feels like something that should be much better with Vic Fangio running the defense. Will it improve in 2026?

Jonathan Greenard could make this a non-issue. While he had only three sacks a year ago, he recorded double-digit sacks in both 2023 and 2024. That's the guy the Eagles are hoping they acquired from the Vikings.

As long as Philly can put some pressure on opposing quarterbacks, this defense should be great. The Eagles have an awesome group of corners, and there's more upside with Riq Woolen in the mix. Philly also has a very reliable linebacking corps.

ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+800

NFC

+110

NFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.3	19
YARDS PER POINT	14	14
PLAYS PER GAME	59.4	23
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:57	16
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.1%	24
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	311.2	24
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	19
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.1	11
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	116.9	18
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	23
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.2	24
COMPLETION %	64.0%	18
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	194.3	23
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	14
TURNOVERS	0.9	4
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.1	5
YARDS PER POINT	16.4	2
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.5%	21
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	314.2	13
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	7
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	124.4	22
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	16
COMPLETION %	56.8%	1
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	189.8	8
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.9	7
SACKS	2.5	12
TURNOVERS	1.2	10

WASHINGTON Commanders



Things change quickly in the NFL. After an NFC Championship Game appearance in 2024, the Commanders went 5-12 in 2025. Dan Quinn now finds himself on the hot seat, and he's banking heavily on his double coordinator change. The Commanders aren't going to sit around and waste Jayden Daniels' prime.

If there's one positive about having a down year, it's that you get to add some talent. Washington did just that in taking Sonny Styles, a star linebacker out of OSU, with the seventh pick. The team also addressed several other needs through free agency.

The Commanders should also get some better availability out of Daniels, who played only seven games last year.

Will all of that be enough for a turnaround?

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 7.5

New York and Washington have the same win total this season, but give me the Over on the team with Daniels, not Dart. Even with a disappointing group of pass-catchers, Daniels is good enough to turn the Commanders into a top-10 offense again, and there are real reasons to believe Washington will be better on defense. Of course, Washington's schedule isn't as easy as you'd expect for a team that won five games the previous year. But the Commanders have the talent to get back on track.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 5-12 SU & 7-10 ATS / 11-6 O-U
Head Coach: Dan Quinn - 3rd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+6.3	@	OVER the total is 10-3 in L13 of WAS-PHI series in Philly
9/20	+3.1	@	DALLAS is on 8-1 ATS run hosting Washington
9/27	+6.1		ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of SEA-WAS h2h series
10/4	-0.6	vs	UNDERDOGS are on 6-3-1 run in IND-WAS h2h series
10/11	-1.8		WASHINGTON has won L4 ATS vs. NY Giants
10/19	+7.2	@	UNDER the total is 6-2 in L8 of WAS-SF h2h series
11/1	+4.1		The L3 games of PHI-WAS series in Washington went OVER the total
11/8	+5.4		L6 games of LAR-WAS series in Washington went UNDER the total
11/12	+0	@	L2 games of WAS-NYG set in New York went OVER the total after 6-0-1 UNDER run
11/23	-0.3		UNDERDOGS are on 5-1 ATS surge in CIN-WAS h2h series
11/29	-3.7	@	UNDER the total is 4-1 in L5 of WAS-ARI h2h series
12/6	-1.3	@	ROAD UNDERDOGS are 7-1 ATS in L8 of WAS-TEN series but lost LT
12/13	+0.4		WASHINGTON is 4-1-1 ATS all-time versus Texans
12/20	-3.7		WASHINGTON is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Atlanta
12/27	+2.1	@	L3 games of WAS-MIN series went UNDER the total
1/3	+3.6	@	WASHINGTON has won L5 ATS vs. Jacksonville
1/10	+0.8		L3 games of DAL-WAS series in Washington went OVER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.63**
#7 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.0 / 0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Will the retooled defense show up?

The Commanders weren't great defensively in 2024. They finished 22nd in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (0.049), meaning they were a bottom-10 group even when they made the NFC Championship Game. However, they weren't pitiful. That adjective describes Washington's 2025 defense, as the Commanders were 31st in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (0.152). Washington couldn't stop anyone last season.

Quinn is a defensive-minded coach, so he'll be in the trenches trying to figure this thing out. But Jones, who worked for Brian Flores for years, will get to implement his own changes. That should be exciting for Washington fans and bettors given the way Minnesota's defenses have looked.

Look for the Commanders' pass rush to be a force. Washington signed Odafe Oweh away from Los Angeles, where he had 7.5 sacks and a PFF pass-rush grade of 81.0 last year. Styles also figures to be a major factor in getting after the quarterback. He only had one sack last year, but he's an athletic freak and should take well to NFL coaching. The Commanders also have several high-impact vets along the line that can apply pressure.

Washington also added linebacker Leo Chenal, who is excellent in coverage. That signing, along with the moves to bring in Nick Cross and Amik Robertson, should address the disappointing pass defense.

All things considered, there's a real path towards the Commanders being league average on defense.

Is David Blough ready to call the shots?

The lack of play-calling experience is definitely concerning, but Blough seems to be a star in the making. That's part of the reason Washington moved on from Kliff Kingsbury. Daniels had a massive year in his rookie season, so he clearly took a liking to the Kingsbury offense. But Year 2 was an absolute mess, and Quinn wanted to give Blough a shot.

Look for Daniels to play under center more. That should give the running game a different look, and it should also open up the play-action game. Blough seems poised to bring some Sean McVay to this offense. He wants to have a few different looks, but a ton of options Washington can turn to out of those looks. That adds unpredictability.

Does Jayden Daniels have enough help?

You'd have to think Daniels will be healthier in 2026, and that alone should give Washington a shot at finishing as a top-10 offense. However, the Commanders have less talent around Daniels than they did a year ago.

Washington has worked to improve the offensive line, and the team brought in Rachaad White to add some juice out of the backfield. White is very good as a pass-catching weapon, and he'll pair up with Jacory Croskey-Merritt to give the Commanders a nice one-two punch.

The issue is the Commanders don't have enough talent at wide receiver. Terry McLaurin is underwhelming as a No. 1 option, and Van Jefferson and Treyton Burks haven't shown that they can be every-week starters. That's going to put a lot of pressure on Daniels to extend plays and give them time to create separation.

ODDS TO WIN...

60-1

SUPER BOWL

29-1

NFC

+500

NFC EAST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.9	22
YARDS PER POINT	15.2	24
PLAYS PER GAME	58.2	27
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:26	28
3RD DOWN CONV. %	37.6%	21
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	318.8	22
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	12
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.5	9
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	134.7	4
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.7	5
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.6	31
COMPLETION %	61.2%	26
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	184.1	24
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	12
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	26.5	27
YARDS PER POINT	14.5	15
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.3%	23
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	384	32
YARDS PER PLAY	6	30
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	141.5	30
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.8	27
COMPLETION %	64.8%	17
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	242.5	28
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.6	31
SACKS	2.5	12
TURNOVERS	0.6	31

NFC NORTH

Division Preview

previews by Dave Tuley

The NFC North took a step back last season after being the top NFL division in 2024 with an all-time best combined record of 45-23 (66.2%) - even better at 36-14 (72%) removing the 9-9 record against each other. Three teams - Lions, Vikings and Packers - won at least 11 games, and those three made the playoffs.

The Bears were the weak link in 2024. However, they flipped the script in 2025 with seven fourth-quarter comebacks, including an NFL-record six after trailing at the two-minute warning, to win the division at 11-6. The Packers wound up in second place at 9-7-1 and the Lions tied for third (and last) at 9-8. Only the Packers earned a Wild Card, and then the Bears erased a 21-6 fourth-quarter deficit to beat them 31-27 in a wild finish before losing 20-17 to the Rams in the divisional playoffs. So, despite the Bears' thrilling wins, it was a down year for the NFC North.

This season, the Lions are again the divisional future-book favorites at +165 with the Packers again the second choice at +235, followed by the Bears at +360 and the Vikings at +450.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
DETROIT	26.0	3.2	1.0	21.99 (32)	10.4	6.6	10.5
GREEN BAY	26.5	2.3	0.5	23.44 (27)	10.0	7.0	10.5
CHICAGO	26.0	2.1	-0.6	24.64 (6)	9.1	7.9	9.5
MINNESOTA	23.0	1.8	0.5	23.71 (21)	8.1	8.9	8.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



16



3



2



2

CHICAGO Bears



As noted in the NFC North intro, the Bears' 2025 season was wild with seven fourth-quarter comebacks on the way to a surprising 11-6 record and NFC North title under first-year head coach Ben Johnson (former offensive coordinator of the Lions) and second-year QB Caleb Williams. Fans are frustrated with the team's threats to move to the Chicago suburb Arlington Heights (don't get me started on the tearing down of my beloved Arlington Park, where I cut my gambling teeth in the early 1990s) and then Hammond, Indiana, but optimistic to cheer on the current team their beloved Bears are building.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5

The Bears won 11 games last year, but the oddsmakers went ahead and put their Over/Under Season Wins Total at 9.5, and the market has made the Under the favorite between -130 to -135 at Vegas sportsbooks. While we know it's going to be tough for the Bears to improve again on that record, the play definitely looks like it's to take the Over. The offense proved it can come from behind and should be able to do better early in games, especially against weaker teams. They're probably worth a +360 or better wager to repeat as NFC North champs, but the stronger play looks like the Over 9.5 at plus-money.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 12-7 SU & 12-6-1 ATS / 10-9 O-U
Head Coach: Ben Johnson - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-1.6	@	UNDERDOGS are 8-2-1 ATS in L11 of CHI-CAR h2h series
9/20	-4.2		MINNESOTA is on 5-0-1 ATS run at Chicago
9/28	-0.8		The L5 games of CHI-PHI h2h series went UNDER the total
10/4	-10.6		CHICAGO is on 3-0 ATS streak hosting NY Jets
10/11	+3	@	GREEN BAY is on 6-game ATS win streak hosting Chicago
10/18	-1.7	@	CHICAGO is 10-3-1 ATS in L14 vs. Atlanta
10/22	-1		NEW ENGLAND is on 3-0 ATS run at Chicago
11/2	+6.2	@	CHICAGO has won L3 ATS vs. Seattle
11/8	-4.8		HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in TB-CHI h2h set
11/22	-6.4		FAVORITES are 8-4-2 ATS in NO-CHI h2h series since '03
11/26	+3.4	@	FAVORITES are on 9-4 ATS surge in CHI-DET h2h series
12/6	-4.6		CHICAGO is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Jacksonville
12/13	-3.9	@	UNDERDOGS are on 5-0 ATS streak in CHI-MIA h2h series
12/19	+6.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 3-0-1 ATS run in CHI-BUF h2h series
12/25	-0.7		CHICAGO has won L3 ATS hosting Green Bay
1/3	-0.7		DETROIT is 3-1 SU & ATS in L4 trips to Chicago
1/10	-1	@	L3 games of CHI-MIN series in Minnesota went UNDER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.64**
 #6 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.1 / -0.6**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Will the Bears avoid a reversal of fortune?

The Bears went from a 5-12 team in 2024 with a 10-game losing streak to an 11-6 team in 2025 and NFC North champs. My VSiN colleague Steve Makinen warns that only five of the last 54 teams that have improved by six or more wins over the prior year have been able to improve again in the follow-up season. That doesn't bode well for the Bears, especially with all those come-from-behind miracles that many see as flukes. And, while the rallies against the Packers in Week 16 and the Wild Card victory were against a good team, many occurred against subpar teams like the Raiders (3-14), Giants (4-13), Commanders (5-12) and Bengals (6-11).

Can Caleb Williams pitch complete games?

Former Heisman Trophy winner and No. 1 overall draft pick Caleb Williams certainly showed a flair for the dramatic and came through in the clutch again and again in his second season with the Bears. Overall, he improved from 3,541 yards to 3,942 and 20 TD passes to 27, and only increased seven INTs compared to six in his rookie season. But the big question is if he'll be able to be more consistent early in games and keep his team from falling behind so much. It's great to be able to rally your team as all the great quarterbacks do, but you can't count on that every time. The young Bears need to learn how to play in the first quarter as they do in the fourth to have long-term success.

Can the defense keep forcing turnovers at a high rate?

The Bears' defense ranked No. 27 in yards allowed in 2024 and actually dropped to No. 29 (361.8 yards per game) in its first season under defensive coordinator Dennis Allen. They also ranked just No. 23 in points allowed (24.3 points per game). However, a lot of that was giving up early leads as the defense often stepped up late in games to set up the offense's seven come-from-behind wins. The other good news for the defense was ranking No. 1 in takeaways (33) and interceptions (23). The problem is that while defensive players can make their own luck, a lot of turnovers are lucky, and that's a stat that can easily regress to the mean. The Bears' defense has lost eight key players since the end of last season, most notably LB Tremaine Edmunds, S Kevin Byard, S Jaquan Brisker, CB Nahshon Wright and C.J. Gardner-Johnson. The Bears have DE Dayo Odeyingbo and CB Kyler Gordon returning from injuries, plus added free agents LB Devin Bush and S Coby Bryant and drafted Dillon Thieneman.

25-1

SUPER BOWL

13-1

NFC

+300

NFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.9	9
YARDS PER POINT	14.2	16
PLAYS PER GAME	64.9	2
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:53	8
3RD DOWN CONV. %	42.7%	7
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	369.2	6
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	9
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.7	5
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	144.2	3
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.9	3
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.8	10
COMPLETION %	58.2%	31
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	225.1	10
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7	15
TURNOVERS	0.6	1
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.4	23
YARDS PER POINT	14.8	12
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.8%	22
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	361.8	29
YARDS PER PLAY	6	29
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	134.5	27
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	5	29
COMPLETION %	66.6%	25
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	227.2	22
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.2	28
SACKS	2.1	22
TURNOVERS	1.9	1

DETROIT Lions



The Lions went 12-5 in 2023 and 15-2 in 2024, becoming one of the top teams in the NFC and a legit Super Bowl contender. However, they struggled all last season to get back into winning form after losing both coordinators to head coaching jobs in the offseason (OC Ben Johnson to the Bears and DC Aaron Glenn to the Jets). Despite all that, they were 7-4 through 11 games and just one game behind the Bears before going 2-6 down the stretch to finish 9-8 and out of the playoffs. In addition to being the +165 favorite in the NFC North, they also have the highest Over/Under Season Win Total in the division at 10.5 (Over -140) as oddsmakers expect them to reclaim the crown.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 10.5

The Lions are certainly coming off a disappointing 2025 season but have most of their key talented players back (in my opinion, the biggest loss was RB David Montgomery, but he was more of a supplement to now bell-cow Jahmyr Gibbs) to try to turn things back around, plus a rebuilt offensive line. It's still a tough division, but the Lions won 12 games three years ago and 15 two years ago and should certainly improve on last year's nine wins and get back to 11 to win the division (and our bet).

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 9-8 SU & 8-9 ATS / 10-7 O-U
Head Coach: Dan Campbell - 6th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/13	-7.5		OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of NO-DET h2h series
9/17	+4.7	@ 	UNDERDOGS are on a 7-1 ATS run in BUF-DET h2h series
9/27	-11.7		UNDERDOGS are on 3-1 SU & 4-0 ATS streak in NYJ-DET set
10/4	-3.2	@ 	HOME TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS run in DET-CAR h2h set
10/11	-7.6	@ 	DETROIT is on a 5-1 ATS run vs. Arizona
10/25	-1.8		ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1-1 ATS run in GB-DET rivalry
11/1	-5.3		OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of MIN-DET rivalry at Detroit
11/8	-5.5	@ 	DETROIT is on a 3-0-1 ATS run vs. Miami
11/15	+0.5	vs 	FAVORITES are 5-2 ATS in L7 of DET-NE h2h series
11/22	-5.9		FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in L8 of TB-DET h2h series
11/26	-3.4		FAVORITES are on 9-4 ATS surge in CHI-DET h2h series
12/6	-3.3	@ 	UNDER the total is 11-3 in L14 of DET-ATL h2h series
12/13	-9.9		TENNESSEE has gone 5-1 ATS in L6 versus Detroit
12/20	-2.6	@ 	UNDERDOGS are on 10-4 ATS surge in DET-MIN rivalry at Minnesota
12/28	-7.8		ROAD TEAMS are 10-2 ATS in NYG-DET h2h series since '94
1/3	+0.7	@ 	DETROIT is 3-1 SU & ATS in L4 trips to Chicago
1/10	+1.4	@ 	FAVORITES are 5-1 ATS in L6 of DET-GB series at Green Bay

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **21.99**
 #32 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **3.2 / 1.0**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is a new offensive coordinator the answer?

The loss of Johnson last year was obvious early on, and it hurt more as Johnson had the Bears in first place in the division. After Detroit's bye in Week 8, they lost to the Vikings 27-24, prompting Campbell to have a meeting with new offensive coordinator John Morton and take over the play-calling duties himself. It sparked the offense to a 44-42 win over the Commanders in Week 10, but the experiment didn't succeed for long as the Lions went 3-5 the rest of the way and Morton was fired after the season. Drew Petzing takes over as the full-time offensive coordinator, with Mike Kafka now the passing game coordinator. This could work with Petzing's reputation for loving the ground game to help set up QB Jared Goff's play-action skills for Kafka's passing schemes. It'll be interesting to see if Campbell lets them do their jobs or steps in again. We're expecting the former.

Can the offense succeed with a rebuilt offensive line?

While Goff and the Lions' coordinators try to get the offense back on track, he'll be working behind a rebuilt O-line. Last June, Pro Bowl center Frank Ragnow retired and left a big hole in the offensive line. Then injuries decimated it during the season. Goff was sacked 38 times, and the running game also suffered. Fixing the issue was a top priority this offseason, and the Lions appear to have done just that. Pro Bowl LT Penei Sewell is back, but they released Ragnow's replacement, Graham Glasgow, and instead signed former Panther Cade Mays to start at center, though he can play multiple positions if needed. They also added Juice Scruggs from the Texans, Larry Borom from the Dolphins and Ben Bartch from the 49ers, and drafted RT Blake Miller from Clemson.

What areas does the defense need to improve?

While most of the focus was on the offense's decline last year, the defense also dropped from No. 7 in scoring defense in 2024 at 20.1 points per game to No. 22 in 2025 at 24.3 points per game. Injuries were a big part of that decline, as the Lions ranked last in the NFL in adjusted games lost on defense. The rushing defense dropped to No. 29, so that definitely needs to improve, but with a high-scoring offense, they also need to be prepared to be in some shootouts as teams will likely be passing on them, especially in the second halves of games. Last year, the defense used a base scheme (three linebackers) more than any team in the league, and DC Kelvin Sheppard has been quoted as saying he's going to be using more nickel packages (five defensive backs).

ODDS TO WIN...

19-1

SUPER BOWL

+900

NFC

+180

NFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.3	4
YARDS PER POINT	13.2	7
PLAYS PER GAME	62.5	14
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:32	10
3RD DOWN CONV. %	38.8%	20
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	374.2	5
YARDS PER PLAY	6	3
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	26	21
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	120.1	14
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	7
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.2	8
COMPLETION %	67.7%	4
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	254.2	3
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	4
TURNOVERS	0.9	4
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.3	22
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	23
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.9%	9
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	332.8	18
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	18
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	114.5	14
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	21
COMPLETION %	61.6%	6
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	218.2	21
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	18
SACKS	2.9	4
TURNOVERS	1.1	19

GREEN BAY Packers



The Packers regressed from 11 wins in 2024 to 9-7-1 in 2025, with the tie in a rather embarrassing 40-40 game (Week 4 Sunday night) as a 6.5-point road favorite against the struggling Cowboys. But, that tie actually helped them make the playoffs for the third straight year under QB Jordan Love, though they suffered a Wild Card round loss to the Bears. The Packers have had more hurtful losses than helpful additions this offseason and didn't have a first-round draft pick and didn't get to pick until No. 52 because of last year's deal to acquire Micah Parsons, who also won't be available the first few weeks this season.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 9-8-1 SU & 7-11 ATS / 10-8 O-U
Head Coach: Matt LaFleur - 8th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	-2.6	@	UNDERDOGS are 9-3 ATS in L12 of GB-MIN rivalry in Minnesota
9/20	-6.7	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in GB-NYJ h2h series
9/24	-8.5		OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ATL-GB h2h series
10/4	-2.1	@	UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-TB series in Tampa Bay
10/11	-3		GREEN BAY is on 6-game ATS win streak hosting Chicago
10/18	-4.8		UNDERDOGS have won L7 ATS in DAL-GB h2h series
10/25	+1.8	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1-1 ATS run in GB-DET rivalry
10/29	-8.1		CAROLINA is on a 7-2 ATS surge vs. Green Bay
11/8	+1.5	@	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of GB-NE h2h series
11/15	-4.9		FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of MIN-GB series in Green Bay
11/25	+4.5	@	GREEN BAY is 10-1 SU & 11-0 ATS vs. LA Rams since '07
12/6	-2.6	@	FAVORITES are on 6-3-1 ATS in GB-NO h2h series
12/13	-0.4		HOME TEAMS & UNDER the total are 6-1 ATS in L7 of BUF-GB h2h series
12/20	-11		GREEN BAY is on 6-1 ATS run vs. Miami, L6 at GB went UNDER total
12/25	+0.7	@	CHICAGO has won L3 ATS hosting Green Bay
1/4	-4.4		UNDER the total is 3-0 in L3 games of HOU-GB set in Green Bay
1/10	-1.4		FAVORITES are 5-1 ATS in L6 of DET-GB series at Green Bay

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 9.5

In a tough division, the Packers could be the one headed in the wrong direction with their losses on both sides of the football, including the uncertain status of RB Josh Jacobs, who was arrested in late May on alleged domestic violence allegations. Oddsmakers have varied in their Over/Under Season Win Total offerings on the Packers, with most at 9.5, but with William Hill going with 10.5 and the Under favored at -170. I definitely have the Packers not getting to double digits, but I don't like to lay that much juice, so I'm going with the Under 9.5 at plus-money where available.

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.44**
 #27 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.3 / 0.5**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Can the defense succeed without Parsons (or with him)?

As alluded to in the intro, Micah Parsons is expected to miss the first month of the season (four to six games) while still rehabbing from a torn ACL and a meniscus procedure last December. That will take the Packers into mid-October without their star, and the rest of the defense will have to step up. However, it's up for debate how much Parsons improved the Green Bay defense last season – even though he earned a 91.9 overall score from Pro Football Focus, No. 3 among edge rushers – for a unit that ranked No. 5 overall (315.6 yards per game) in 2024 without him and then No. 6 overall (though dropped to 294.6 yards per game) with him in 2025. Other defensive team stats are also similar, so the Packers still have a solid core even with the losses of LB Quay Walker, DE Rashan Gary and CB Nate Hobbs, though they have added DT Javon Hargrave and LB Zaire Franklin. I'm just not sure it's enough to overcome the losses.

Is Jordan Love a top-tier NFL QB or overrated?

Love hasn't been a bust since taking over from the Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers eras in Green Bay that ran from 1992 to 2022. But, the debate rages on if he's a top-tier QB, as he threw for 3,381 yards last season (nearly identical to his 3,389 in 2024) with 23 TDs and only six INTs for a passer rating of 101.2. That was No. 6 behind only Drake Maye, Matthew Stafford, Jared Goff, Lamar Jackson and Josh Allen. Also against his case is a playoff record of just 1-3, with the win coming in his postseason debut in a 2023 Wild Card win over the Cowboys. He has lost the last three times to the 49ers in the 2023 divisional playoffs and the last two years in the Wild Card round to the Eagles and Bears.

Can the Packers keep winning with wide receivers by committee?

Since trading WR Davante Adams to the Raiders after the 2022 season, the Packers haven't really had a No. 1 receiver. Just look at the Packers' leading receivers the past three years: Jayden Reed with 793 yards in 2023, Reed with 857 in 2024, and Romeo Doubs with 724 in 2025. In this pass-happy era, it's not often you see a top team without a 1,000-yard receiver. The Packers have done that for three straight years. Now, they lost Doubs in free agency to the Patriots and traded Dontayvion Wicks to the Eagles. They've added former Chiefs WR Skyy Moore, and Bo Melton is moving back to WR, but it leaves only Reed (who was given a contract extension) as a lukewarm WR1 with the hopes that former No. 1 pick Matthew Golden has his breakout season. But it's not promising after seeing the Packers' dip from No. 5 in overall offense in 2024 to No. 15 last season.

ODDS TO WIN...

18-1

SUPER BOWL

+900

NFC

+215

NFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23	16
YARDS PER POINT	14.5	18
PLAYS PER GAME	59.4	23
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:18	22
3RD DOWN CONV. %	48.8%	2
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	332.6	15
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	10
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.9	7
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	119.8	15
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	24
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.8	27
COMPLETION %	67.1%	9
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	212.8	17
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	6
TURNOVERS	0.8	3
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.2	11
YARDS PER POINT	14.7	13
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	14
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	311.8	12
YARDS PER PLAY	5	9
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	117.7	18
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.2	12
COMPLETION %	65.6%	22
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	194.1	11
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	8
SACKS	2.1	20
TURNOVERS	0.8	26

MINNESOTA Vikings



The Vikings went a surprising 14-3 in 2024, with Kevin O'Connell winning AP Coach of the Year, and were led by former first-round bust QB Sam Darnold, who signed a \$100 million contract with Seattle. We didn't know at the time that Darnold was going to lead the Seahawks to a Super Bowl title, but it was pretty clear the Vikings weren't going to win 14 games again with second-year QB J.J. McCarthy. The Vikings limped out to a 4-8 start, their worst since 2013, but despite being eliminated from a return trip to the playoffs, they closed out the season with five straight wins to finish above .500 at 9-8 and gave the fan base reason for optimism.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 8.5

Last year, it was obvious the Vikings were going to regress with the switch from Darnold to McCarthy, but now we have an Over/Under total that seems low at 8.5, so we have a strong lean to the Over. Whether it's Murray or McCarthy that gets the starting QB nod, the offense still has the potential to be potent with not only Jefferson and Jordan Addison back, but also adding Jauan Jennings from San Francisco. And a healthier offensive line should also help, while the defense has room to improve under Flores and make this a well-balanced team again, as we saw two years ago with an outsider's chance to steal the division crown.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 9-8 SU & 8-9 ATS / 8-9 O-U
Head Coach: Kevin O'Connell - 5th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date Line Opp Series Trend

9/13	+2.6		UNDERDOGS are 9-3 ATS in L12 of GB-MIN rivalry in Minnesota
9/20	+4.2	@	MINNESOTA is on 5-0-1 ATS run at Chicago
9/27	+1.4	@	TAMPA BAY is on extended 11-4-1 ATS run vs. Minnesota
10/4	-7		MINNESOTA has won its L3 ATS vs. Miami
10/11	+0.9	@	OVER the total is on entended 14-5-1 run in MIN-NO h2h series
10/25	-2.7		INDIANAPOLIS is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. Minnesota
11/1	+5.3	@	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of MIN-DET rivalry at Detroit
11/9	+3.6		ROAD TEAMS are 7-2 ATS in L9 of BUF-MIN h2h series
11/15	+4.9	@	FAVORITES are on 4-1 ATS run in L5 of MIN-GB series in Green Bay
11/22	+4.1	vs	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 MIN-SF h2h matchups
11/29	-4.5		UNDERDOGS are 6-2 ATS in L8 of ATL-MIN h2h series
12/6	-4.1		L3 games of CAR-MIN series in Minnesota went OVER the total
12/10	+5	@	FAVORITES have won L5 SU & ATS in MIN-NE h2h series
12/20	+2.6		UNDERDOGS are on 10-4 ATS surge in DET-MIN rivalry at Minnesota
12/27	-2.1		L3 games of WAS-MIN series went UNDER the total
1/3	-3.2	@	FAVORITES are on 5-0 SU & ATS streak in MIN-NYJ h2h series
1/10	+1		L3 games of CHI-MIN series in Minnesota went UNDER the total

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.71**
 #21 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.8 / 0.5**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Who the heck is starting at QB?

McCarthy had a mediocre first season as the starting QB, throwing for just 1,632 yards and just 11 TDs to 12 INTs and an overall passer rating of 72.6, which ranked among the worst in the league among regular starters and closer to part-time starters like Shedeur Sanders, Spencer Rattler and Justin Fields. He did improve his TD/INT ratio in the second half of the season from a dismal 4/8 to a serviceable 7/4. However, as much as we'd like to say he improved, his passer rating with stud WR Justin Jefferson was a league-low 42.9, which seems impossible, and he took too many sacks. So, the Vikings brought in former Cardinals QB Kyler Murray, whose 2025 season only lasted five games before a major foot injury, as he only threw for 962 yards, six TDs and three INTs for a passer rating of 88.6, not great but still better than McCarthy. There have been conflicting reports from mini-camp on which QB had the leg up on the starting job, so this will be one of the most-watched battles in training camp and in the actual preseason games.

Can OT Christian Darrisaw stay healthy?

Offensive left tackle Christian Darrisaw anchors the Vikings' line and protects the starting QB's blind side, regardless of who starts. He only played 10 games last season before a knee injury landed him on injured reserve, and Minnesota had to use 26 different combinations of starting linemen and allowed 60 sacks, tied for second-most in the league. Prior to his first knee injury in 2024, Darrisaw was the No. 4 tackle in the NFL, according to Pro Football Focus. He was a full participant during mini-camp, and his healthy return would go a long way to getting the offense back on track.

Will the defense bounce back?

Under defensive coordinator Brian Flores, Minnesota ranked No. 17 in 2023 but then improved to No. 2 in 2024, as it was as responsible for the Vikings' 14-3 record as Sam Darnold and the offense, but then dipped to No. 8 last season. Flores continues to sue the NFL for his firing by Miami after the 2021 season and what he calls systemic racism in his subsequent search for a head coaching job, but he signed a contract extension for this season. The defense is now without several veteran staples, notably Jonathan Greenard dealt to Philadelphia, Jonathan Allen, Javon Hargrave, and Harrison Smith (though the door is open for his return as an unsigned free agent as of press time), so Flores is definitely in charge of a youth movement.

ODDS TO WIN...

50-1 SUPER BOWL

23-1 NFC

+500 NFC NORTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.2	26
YARDS PER POINT	13.6	11
PLAYS PER GAME	56.1	30
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:19	30
3RD DOWN CONV. %	31.8%	32
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	275	28
YARDS PER PLAY	4.9	28
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	24.1	27
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	108.3	23
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	11
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.5	28
COMPLETION %	61.6%	24
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	166.7	29
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.6	26
TURNOVERS	1.8	32
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	19.6	7
YARDS PER POINT	14.4	17
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.5%	4
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	282.6	3
YARDS PER PLAY	4.7	3
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	124.1	21
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	8
COMPLETION %	62.4%	8
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	158.5	2
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6	9
SACKS	2.9	4
TURNOVERS	1.2	10

NFC SOUTH

Division Preview

previews by Adam Burke

The NFC South was objectively the worst division in football last season. The Panthers won the division at 8-9 due to tiebreakers over the Buccaneers and Falcons. The Saints were 6-11 and a case could be made that they were the division's best team by the end of the season, winning four of their last five games, including victories over Tampa Bay and Carolina. They also outgained Atlanta by 132 yards in the regular season finale, holding them to just 208 yards in a 19-17 loss.

Not only was this the worst division record-wise, but the four teams collectively mustered just 1,350 points, the lowest of any of the eight divisions around the league. With Kevin Stefanski as the lone new head coach in the division, we should see an uptick from the Falcons offense, plus continued improvement out of the Saints in Year 2 for Kellen Moore and perhaps even some offensive strides from the Panthers in Year 3 with Dave Canales and Bryce Young off of career highs in passing yards and touchdowns and a career-low with 27 sacks.

While optimism seems warranted for those three teams, the Buccaneers, who have the longest-tenured coach by far in Todd Bowles, bid adieu to Mike Evans and also OC Josh Grizzard, so Baker Mayfield will have yet another playbook to learn. That said, Tampa Bay might still have the best depth chart on paper in the division and almost by default has the best quarterback.

To say that the NFC South is wide-open in 2026 is an understatement. All four teams finished the 2025 campaign with negative point differentials. It was the Falcons who actually had the most yards per play with 5.4 and the Saints who actually had one of the league's best defenses by YPP allowed with just 4.8. The division champs were outgained by 0.5 yards per play and the Bucs were outgained by 0.6 yards per play. Ironically, the Bucs now have former Falcons OC Zac Robinson because Stefanski brought Browns OC Tommy Rees with him to Georgia.

The bar to win the division might be low, but it sure feels like one of these four teams has the chance to take off and really make some noise. The Bucs (+160) enter as a tepid division favorite, followed by the Saints (+265), Panthers (+310), and Falcons (+450).

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
TAMPA BAY	23.0	1.5	0.7	23.7 (22)	8.1	8.9	10.5
NEW ORLEANS	22.5	1.5	-0.4	23.33 (28)	8.1	8.9	7.5
CAROLINA	22.0	1.4	-0.9	25.13 (3)	7.0	10.0	7.5
ATLANTA	21.5	1.8	-0.8	24.57 (10)	7.0	10.0	6.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



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ATLANTA Falcons



As somebody who left Cleveland to move to Vegas and looks back just about every day, I don't think Kevin Stefanski will do the same from his office in Atlanta. Stefanski was the first Browns head coach to have multiple playoff appearances since Marty Schottenheimer in the late '80s and first Browns head coach to last six seasons since Sam Rutigliano in the late '70s/early '80s. He did all of that while navigating Baker Mayfield, finding the Fountain of Youth with Joe Flacco, and playing the "company man" role about the disastrous Deshaun Watson trade.

Stefanski won Coach of the Year in 2020 and 2023 and was a combined 22-11 over those two seasons. Of course, that means he was 23-45 over the other four seasons. He enters a much better situation in Atlanta than he entered in Cleveland, although, ironically, the biggest question he has to answer is once again at the quarterback position.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 6.5

The Penix/Tua situation will sort itself out and even average QB play with this skill group and what should be an improved defense yet again leaves the Falcons lined too low in the win total market. The schedule is definitely tricky with the NFC North and AFC North, but even a 4-2 record against NFC South foes would be a great start and a reasonable goal to reach.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 9-8 ATS / 8-9 O-U
Head Coach: Kevin Stefanski - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+5	@	PITTSBURGH has won L5 SU & ATS vs. Atlanta
9/20	-1.8		CAROLINA is 5-1 ATS in L6 at Atlanta
9/24	+8.5	@	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of ATL-GB h2h series
10/5	+2.9	@	UNDER the total is 10-3 in L13 of ATL-NO series at New Orleans
10/11	+5.7		BALTIMORE is 6-1 ATS in L7 vs. Atlanta, UNDER the total is also 6-1
10/18	+1.7		CHICAGO is 10-3-1 ATS in L14 vs. Atlanta
10/25	+3.9		HOME TEAMS are 5-1 ATS in L6 of ATL-SF h2h series
11/1	+3.4	@	ATLANTA has won L4 ATS at Tampa Bay
11/8	+3.4	vs	CINCINNATI is on a 3-0 ATS streak vs. Atlanta
11/15	+3		ROAD TEAMS have won L4 ATS in KC-ATL h2h series
11/29	+4.5	@	UNDERDOGS are 6-2 ATS in L8 of ATL-MIN h2h series
12/6	+3.3		UNDER the total is 11-3 in L14 of DET-ATL h2h series
12/13	+2.7	@	UNDERDOGS are on 6-1 ATS surge in ATL-CLE h2h series
12/20	+3.7	@	WASHINGTON is on 6-2 ATS run vs. Atlanta
12/27	+0.8		FAVORITES are 4-1 ATS in L5 of TB-ATL rivalry in Atlanta
1/3	-0.8		NEW ORLEANS is 8-3 ATS in L11 at Atlanta
1/10	+2.3	@	UNDERDOGS are on 6-1 ATS run in ATL-CAR series at Carolina

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.57**
 #10 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.8 / -0.8**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is the Penix mightier?

When the Falcons drafted Michael Penix Jr. while still having Kirk Cousins under contract, the coaching staff and front office were left with a decision between the present and the future. As it turned out, neither Cousins nor Penix played all that well when given an opportunity. Cousins has now moved on and the Falcons brought in more competition for the left-hander by signing fellow southpaw slinger Tua Tagovailoa.

Among 34 QBs with at least 300 plays, Penix was 21st in Adjusted EPA/Play per RBSDM. Tua was 28th with the Dolphins. Penix was -3.6% in Completion Percentage Over Expectation (CPOE), while Tua was +2.0%. In other words, Tua got "luckier" in terms of completing passes than Penix, but the Atlanta holdover was still a better player in terms of EPA, mostly because Tagovailoa threw 15 interceptions and Penix threw just three.

Does Rees have the pieces?

During his Browns tenure, Stefanski mostly called the plays, but there were times when he ceded control of the playbook. That included the second half of last season when wunderkind Tommy Rees got the keys to the car. The 34-year-old had a bad offensive line and a bad quarterback to plan around, so it's hard to grade him based on the small sample size returns. Rees will be calling the plays here based on Stefanski's intro presser back in January.

According to ESPN's offensive line rankings from the 2025 season, the Falcons were 12th overall in pass blocking and 16th in run blocking. The Browns were 31st in both. Bijan Robinson and Drake London are two terrific weapons and Kyle Pitts, who rebounded from a couple of lackluster seasons, should be a focal point given what Stefanski did with David Njoku and what Rees and Stefanski did with Harold Fannin Jr. For a team below average in Explosive Play Rate with the run and the pass, this could be a unit that dramatically improves.

If it ain't broke, why fix it?

When you think about a coaching change, it is usually a sweeping thing across the organization. That is not the case in Atlanta, as Jeff Ulbrich was retained as the defensive coordinator. While pass game coordinator Mike Rutenberg is now the DC with Stefanski's former employer, Ulbrich gets to keep building upon what he did last season. The Falcons forced five more turnovers and made modest strides in yards per play allowed, points per drive, and went from the second-worst third-down defense to around the middle of the pack.

We'll wait to see if any supplemental discipline comes for James Pearce Jr., who was third in the DROY voting, but he had 10.5 sacks, more than any Falcon in 2024, and the team had 57 sacks, an increase of 26 from the previous season. Unfortunately, Kaden Elliss, who had 380 tackles in three seasons with the Falcons, went back to where it all started with the Saints.

ODDS TO WIN...

130-1

SUPER BOWL

55-1

NFC

+425

NFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.8	24
YARDS PER POINT	16	29
PLAYS PER GAME	61.6	17
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:46	18
3RD DOWN CONV. %	33.3%	30
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	333	14
YARDS PER PLAY	5.4	13
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.1	12
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	125.8	8
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.5	12
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.1	19
COMPLETION %	60.9%	28
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	207.2	19
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	20
TURNOVERS	1.1	13
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	23.6	19
YARDS PER POINT	13.8	22
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.9%	18
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	326.6	15
YARDS PER PLAY	5.3	16
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	126.2	24
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	25
COMPLETION %	62.6%	10
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	200.4	13
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	14
SACKS	3.4	2
TURNOVERS	1.4	7

CAROLINA Panthers



If the recent pattern holds, say hello to the 11-6 Carolina Panthers! Dave Canales inherited a 2-15 team from Chris Tabor/Frank Reich and proceeded to go 5-12 in his first season as an NFL head coach. Another three-win improvement in Year 2 was enough to win the NFC South at 8-9, despite the fact that the Panthers scored 30 fewer points. The defense improved by 150 points, which made the three-win improvement and playoff berth possible, but it was disappointing to see the offense under Canales not really move forward.

This remains an organization that hasn't had a winning season since 2017, which was also the last time that the Panthers had a positive point differential. On the surface, it looks like the team is going in the right direction, but is that really the case as we head into 2026?

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 7.5

The ceiling in Charlotte may very well have been what we saw last season. Even though the Panthers faced the NFC West last season, the schedule is objectively more difficult by virtue of winning the division and adding the Eagles, Broncos, and Seahawks to the slate. Unlike last season with the latest possible bye in Week 14, the Panthers now have the earliest possible bye in Week 5. Even though Carolina lost four of their last five after the bye, including the Wild Card Game against the Rams, an early one can be problematic, too.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 8-10 SU & 11-7 ATS / 8-10 O-U
Head Coach: Dave Canales - 3rd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+1.6		UNDERDOGS are 8-2-1 ATS in L11 of CHI-CAR h2h series
9/20	+1.8	@ 	CAROLINA is 5-1 ATS in L6 at Atlanta
9/27	+2.3	@ 	UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS in CAR-CLE h2h series
10/4	+3.2		HOME TEAMS are on 6-1 ATS run in DET-CAR h2h set
10/18	+9.1	@ 	ROAD UNDERDOGS are on 4-0 ATS run in CAR-PHI h2h series
10/25	+0.7		UNDER the total is 9-4 in L13 of TB-CAR rivalry in Carolina
10/29	+8.1	@ 	CAROLINA is on a 7-2 ATS surge vs. Green Bay
11/8	+2.8		DENVER is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. Carolina
11/15	+2.5	@ 	NEW ORLEANS is 4-1 ATS in L5 hosting Carolina
11/22	+5.6		CAROLINA is 3-1 SU & ATS in four prior games hosting Baltimore
11/30	+3	@ 	TAMPA BAY is on 7-0 SU & 5-2 ATS surge hosting Carolina
12/6	+4.1	@ 	L3 games of CAR-MIN series in Minnesota went OVER the total
12/13	-0.9		UNDERDOGS are 8-2-1 ATS in L11 of NO-CAR rivalry at Carolina
12/20	+0.3		FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in eight prior games in CIN-CAR series
12/27	+4.6	@ 	PITTSBURGH is on 7-game SU & 8-game ATS win streaks vs. Carolina
1/3	+6.7		OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of SEA-CAR h2h series but lost LY
1/10	-2.3		UNDERDOGS are on 6-1 ATS run in ATL-CAR series at Carolina

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **25.13**
 #3 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.4 / -0.9**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

How much better can Bryce be?

Bryce Young started 16 games and threw for over 3,000 yards for the first time in his career. He also had more than 20 TD passes for the first time and was only sacked 27 times. While many of the statistical improvements were modest, they were still improvements and that was good to see as Young built on the second half of 2024 and got more comfortable in the Canales offense.

Statistically speaking, we can see how the Panthers offense evolved. Tetairoa McMillan had a lot to do with it, as he led the team in targets (122), catches (70), yards (1,014), and touchdowns (7) en route to the Offensive Rookie of the Year award. McMillan had nearly twice as many catches and targets as anybody else and more than 2.5x the receiving yardage. Young benefitted from having McMillan, but what's next?

He went from 3.7 Completed Air Yards Per Pass Attempt (CAY/PA) to 3.1 and went from 4.1 Yards After Catch Per Completion (YAC/Cmp) to 5.1. His On Target Percentage (OnTgt%) was 77.9%, a 6% increase from 2024, but where does the next level come from? Young had over 200 fewer Intended Air Yards compared to 2024, even though he had 94 more pass attempts.

What are the expectations for the defense?

A case could be made that no defense in the NFL improved more than Carolina's. The 2024 Panthers were outgained by more than 1,800 yards and outscored by nearly 200 points. They were last in points per drive, rushing yards per carry, pass touchdowns allowed, and in the bottom five in several other categories. The 2025 defense was 24th in points per drive, 22nd in yards per carry, and seventh in pass touchdowns allowed. To build on that momentum, the big offseason spends were edge rusher Jaelan Phillips and weak-side linebacker Devin Lloyd.

Does DC Ejiro Evero feel like he can be a little more aggressive now? Phillips is a bona fide pass rusher for a team that only had 30 sacks and ranked 31st in Pressure% per Pro-Football-Reference. The Panthers went from 32nd in EPA/play on defense to 23rd. A similar leap would greatly increase the chances of a division repeat.

Are these coaches right for the Panthers?

A six-win improvement over two seasons sure looks good, but Evero's defense ranked 32nd in third-down defense in 2024 and 31st in third-down defense in 2025. The Canales/Brad Idzik offense was 26th in 2024 and 25th on the money down. Even with McMillan's arrival and the re-tooled offensive playbook, the Panthers went from ninth in red zone efficiency to 24th and even had five fewer red zone trips.

There is something to be said about executing in close games and Carolina won six of their eight games by exactly three points, especially with an offense that was 27th in both points and yards, but execution on important downs has to get better.

90-1

SUPER BOWL

37-1

NFC

+310

NFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18.3	27
YARDS PER POINT	16.2	30
PLAYS PER GAME	59.5	22
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:38	19
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.1%	25
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	295.6	27
YARDS PER PLAY	5	26
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.1	18
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	116.3	19
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	19
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	30.3	21
COMPLETION %	63.9%	19
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	179.3	26
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.4	28
TURNOVERS	1.4	21
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.4	15
YARDS PER POINT	14.6	14
3RD DOWN CONV. %	47.1%	31
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327.2	16
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	20
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	123.3	20
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	22
COMPLETION %	66.3%	23
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	203.9	15
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	23
SACKS	1.8	28
TURNOVERS	1.2	10

NEW ORLEANS

Saints



With a new head coach, it's often not how you start, but how you finish. After losing eight of nine and 10 of 12 to start the season, the Saints reeled off a four-game winning streak in December and missed an opportunity in Week 18 with a 19-17 loss to the Falcons in a game where they had a 132-yard edge. Tyler Shough started nine games with a 5-4 record and was second in Offensive Rookie of the Year voting, even though he's older than backup QB Spencer Rattler.

Kellen Moore had a good first season as a head coach and it sure looked like Brandon Staley was the right hire as DC. With a strong collection of free agents and a lot of players that improved last season, the Saints look like a threat in the wide-open NFC South.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 6-11 SU & 9-8 ATS / 5-12 O-U
Head Coach: Kellen Moore - 2nd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+7.5	@	OVER the total is 6-1 in L7 of NO-DET h2h series
9/20	+9.1	@	ROAD TEAMS are on 5-1 ATS run in NO-BAL h2h series
9/27	-4.5		ROAD TEAMS are 7-3 ATS in LVR-NO series since '94
10/5	-2.9		UNDER the total is 10-3 in L13 of ATL-NO series at New Orleans
10/11	-0.9		OVER the total is on extended 14-5-1 run in MIN-NO h2h series
10/18	+1.8	@	UNDER the total is 5-1 in L6 of NO-NYG h2h series
10/25	+1.3	vs	PITTSBURGH is on a 4-2-1 ATS run vs. New Orleans
11/8	-5.1		UNDERDOGS have won L9 meetings in CLE-NO h2h series
11/15	-2.5		NEW ORLEANS is 4-1 ATS in L5 hosting Carolina
11/22	+6.4	@	FAVORITES are 8-4-2 ATS in NO-CHI h2h series since '03
11/29	+4.5	@	CINCINNATI is 6-1 ATS in L7 versus New Orleans
12/6	+2.6		FAVORITES are on 6-3-1 ATS in GB-NO h2h series
12/13	+0.9	@	UNDERDOGS are 8-2-1 ATS in L11 of NO-CAR rivalry at Carolina
12/20	+2	@	NEW ORLEANS has won L8 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/27	-7		FAVORITES are on a 7-2 ATS run in ARI-NO h2h series
1/3	+0.8	@	NEW ORLEANS is 8-3 ATS in L11 at Atlanta
1/10	+0.1		TAMPA BAY is on 4-0 SU & ATS run at New Orleans, avg MOV 17.8 PPG

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 7.5

The Saints are one of six teams that don't play a Thursday game and they have a bye after the Paris game, so they don't have any short weeks. Finishing last has its advantages the following season, as the Saints draw the Raiders, Giants, and Cardinals as fellow last-place teams.

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.33**
 #28 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.5 / -0.4**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Aw, shoughs or Shough yeah?

Shough came in for Rattler in Week 8 against the Buccaneers and never looked back, going 5-4 as a starter. Given that Rattler is 1-13 as a starter in his career, it didn't take long for Shough to surpass him in the win department. When all was said and done, Shough had a 67.6% completion rate with a 10/6 TD/INT ratio and was sacked 31 times. Rattler had a 67.7% completion rate with an 8/5 TD/INT ratio and was sacked 18 times.

By Adjusted EPA/play, Shough was 25th out of 34 QBs with at least 300 plays, while Rattler was 29th. With Shough, the Saints were able to attack a little bit more, with 4.8 yards after catch per completion compared to Rattler's 3.7 YAC/Cmp. Shough also had more air yards and was a bit more accurate. The Saints only averaged 19.7 PPG in Shough starts and just 16 PPG in Rattler's starts. New Orleans felt that Shough was worth a second-round pick even with Rattler on the roster, so it should be his offense moving forward and it's up to Moore and OC Doug Nussmeier to get more out of him.

Will the Saints go marching on offense?

Shough has more to work with than his predecessors, as the Saints took Jordyn Tyson in the first round, signed Travis Etienne Jr., and added blocking help with guard David Edwards and tight end Noah Fant. Some QBs are gifted enough to make everybody around them better. Shough isn't at that level yet and may never get there, but the supporting cast should make him better. Alvin Kamara only played 11 games with 3.6 yards per carry and 5.6 yards per reception in his age-30 campaign. As a team, the Saints were 31st in yards per carry with just 3.7.

Etienne, Edwards, and Fant will undoubtedly inject life into the ground game. Tyson gives defenses another player to think about after Chris Olave had 100 catches on 156 targets for 1,163 yards and Juwan Johnson was one of the league's most productive receiving TE with 77 grabs for 889 yards. Shough didn't really have a strong WR2 after Rashid Shaheed was traded, but now he does in Tyson for what was the worst red zone offense in the league last season.

Does the Brandon Staley redemption tour continue?

We'll see if Staley gets another kick at the can as a head coach down the line after going 24-24 with the Chargers, but he's impressing as a defensive coordinator again, much like he did back in 2020 for the Rams. This is the first time he'll be a DC in consecutive seasons since he was coaching at John Carroll University, the D-III cradle of coaches just outside of Cleveland.

Under Staley, the Saints shaved off a full yard per play and allowed 1,363 fewer yards. They went from 21st in third-down defense to third at 34.3%. That being said, the Saints allowed nearly an identical number of points per drive (2.01 down from 2.03) and only had three more takeaways. Captain and leading tackler Demario Davis has been replaced by former Saint Kaden Elliss, potentially a downgrade for the second-best run defense by Rush EPA.

90-1

SUPER BOWL

37-1

NFC

+265

NFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	18	28
YARDS PER POINT	17.4	31
PLAYS PER GAME	63.2	11
TIME OF POSSESSION	28:36	27
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	18
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	313.6	23
YARDS PER PLAY	5	27
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	25.6	23
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	94.3	28
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.7	31
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	34.8	6
COMPLETION %	67.2%	7
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	219.3	13
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	18
TURNOVERS	1.4	27
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.5	16
YARDS PER POINT	13.3	25
3RD DOWN CONV. %	34.3%	3
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	299.8	9
YARDS PER PLAY	4.8	6
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	120.6	19
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4	6
COMPLETION %	63.5%	13
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	179.2	4
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.2	11
SACKS	2.6	10
TURNOVERS	1.2	15

TAMPA BAY Buccaneers



In an offseason with 10 new head coaches hired, the Buccaneers opted to hold on to Todd Bowles. Time will tell if that was the right move or not, as OC Josh Grizzard and several position coaches were picked as the scapegoats for last season's 8-9 showing and first playoff miss since 2019. Losing out to the Panthers via tiebreakers snapped Tampa Bay's four-year streak of winning the NFC South, with records of 10-7, 9-8, 8-9, and 13-4.

This is a really big season for the Buccaneers and Bowles. Baker Mayfield is slated for free agency after the season and the team has a \$30 million option on Chris Godwin. Vita Vea also has some more money coming very soon. Mike Evans switched leagues and coasts, so this is officially Emeka Egbuka's offense now and the rest of the division seems to be improving around the Bucs.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 8.5

Ultimately, there are too many mixed signals and rowers going in opposite directions on the same boat. The Bucs were 3-3 last season against the NFC South after going 12-6 in Bowles' first three seasons. Given how that gap has closed, and that the Bucs are 23-27 outside the division in the Bowles era, this is a season likely to fall short of expectations.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 8-9 SU & 5-12 ATS / 8-9 O-U
Head Coach: Todd Bowles - 5th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+2.9	@	TAMPA BAY is on 5-1 ATS run vs. Cincinnati but lost LT
9/20	-5.6		The L7 games of CLE-TB h2h series went UNDER the total
9/27	-1.4		TAMPA BAY is on extended 11-4-1 ATS run vs. Minnesota
10/4	+2.1		UNDER the total is 7-2 in L9 of GB-TB series in Tampa Bay
10/8	+3.3	@	ROAD TEAMS are 7-2-1 ATS in L10 of TB-DAL h2h series
10/18	-1.5		PITTSBURGH is on 6-1 ATS run vs. Tampa Bay
10/25	-0.7	@	UNDER the total is 9-4 in L13 of TB-CAR rivalry in Carolina
11/1	-3.4		ATLANTA has won L4 ATS at Tampa Bay
11/8	+4.8	@	HOME TEAMS have won L6 ATS in TB-CHI h2h set
11/22	+5.9	@	FAVORITES are 6-1-1 ATS in L8 of TB-DET h2h series
11/30	-3		TAMPA BAY is on 7-0 SU & 5-2 ATS surge hosting Carolina
12/6	-1		OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of LAC-TB h2h series
12/13	+7.5	@	ROAD TEAMS have won L7 ATS in TB-BAL h2h series
12/20	-2		NEW ORLEANS has won L8 ATS at Tampa Bay
12/27	-0.8	@	FAVORITES are 4-1 ATS in L5 of TB-ATL rivalry in Atlanta
1/3	+4.9		LA RAMS are on 10-1-1 ATS surge versus Tampa Bay
1/10	-0.1	@	TAMPA BAY is on 4-0 SU & ATS run at New Orleans, avg MOV 17.8 PPG

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.70**
 #22 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.5 / 0.7**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

What is the plan on offense?

Mayfield was drafted 1.1 in 2018 by the Browns, so he's played eight seasons in the NFL. Back in 2022, he started six games for the Panthers and four games for the Rams before finding a more permanent home in Tampa Bay. In those eight seasons, Mayfield is now on his ninth offensive coordinator with Zac Robinson. That is a lot of different playbooks to learn. The firing of Grizzard after one season was something of a surprise, as Mayfield did have arguably his worst season as a Buccaneer, but Evans only played eight games, Godwin played nine, and Bucky Irving missed seven games.

He's certainly a gunslinger with 1,679 pass attempts over the last three seasons and 95 TD against 37 INT. Under Robinson, the Falcons offense was 24th in points, 14th in yards, 26th in passing TDs, and 25th in points per drive, though the running game with Bijan Robinson was highly effective. Expect a healthy Irving to play a much bigger role here, as Robinson had 103 targets. Kyle Pitts and Drake London had 230 combined. The plan will be to get the ball to Irving, Egbuka, and Cade Otton as much as possible. And Baker loves to force throws.

How about looking in the mirror, Todd?

Bowles begins his eighth season with the Bucs and fourth as the head coach. The defense has ranked 29th, 29th, and 27th in passing yards against and 25th, 15th, and 26th in net yards per pass attempt. This was one of seven defenses with a Pressure% under 20% per Pro-Football-Reference, hence the first-round pick of Rubeen Bain Jr. and the signing of Al-Quadin Muhammad.

Over the last three seasons, the Bucs are 24th in Dropback EPA against per RBSDM and 27th in Dropback Success Rate against. Bowles, a defensive back in the NFL and a secondary coach prior to becoming head coach of the Jets from 2015-18, hasn't had much success lately with finding or coaching up DBs. Oh, and the Bucs were 32nd in red zone defense last season, too.

Do the Buccaneers need to evolve?

Veteran head coaches can win in the NFL. Andy Reid and Sean Payton are still doing it. But, the other tenured coaches experiencing success are guys like Sean McVay, Matt LaFleur, and Kyle Shanahan. McVay is 40, the other two are 46, and all of them were viewed as very progressive offensive minds at the time they were hired as head coaches. In the Bowles era, the Bucs have had four offensive coordinators - Byron Leftwich, Dave Canales, Liam Coen, and Grizzard. Two are head coaches now. Grizzard might be now that he's in the Eagles organization.

But, GM Jason Licht seems halfway in and halfway out. He's willing to let a young up-and-comer call plays, but the defense is dated and the head coach who has say over everything is a football lifer in his 60s and is trying to play HC and DC at the same time. If we include the playoffs, Bowles is 36-36 as the Bucs head coach. Perfectly mediocre. How does that change with him in charge?

ODDS TO WIN...

50-1

SUPER BOWL

21-1

NFC

+170

NFC SOUTH

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	22.4	18
YARDS PER POINT	14.3	17
PLAYS PER GAME	62.8	13
TIME OF POSSESSION	31:53	3
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.2%	10
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	320.4	21
YARDS PER PLAY	5.1	25
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.8	14
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	114.5	21
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	26
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	32.8	15
COMPLETION %	62.9%	21
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	205.9	20
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	23
TURNOVERS	0.9	9
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	24.2	20
YARDS PER POINT	13.9	20
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.5%	15
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	337.2	19
YARDS PER PLAY	5.7	25
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	99.1	5
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	14
COMPLETION %	66.7%	26
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	238.2	27
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.1	25
SACKS	2.2	18
TURNOVERS	1.4	7

NFC WEST

Division Preview

previews by Matt Youmans

It's not a stretch to say the Rams were a play away from winning the NFC — and possibly the Super Bowl — last season. And maybe they were one player away, especially if that player has been the most dominant defensive force in the NFL in recent years. Los Angeles pulled off a blockbuster trade with the Cleveland Browns on June 1 and acquired Myles Garrett, a seven-time Pro Bowl defensive end who set the league's single-season sack record with 23 last season. The Rams are hoping the deal means *deja vu*. During the 2021 offseason, the team traded with Detroit for quarterback Matthew Stafford, who led the Rams to a Super Bowl win in Los Angeles. After this season, Super Bowl LXI will again be staged at SoFi Stadium.

While the hype surrounding the Rams is real, their road to redemption goes through Seattle. The rivals locked horns for two classic games last season and the Seahawks won a pair of thrillers on their home field — 38-37 in overtime in Week 16 and 31-27 in the NFC title game. Stafford came up a play short each time, and the Seattle defense went on to suffocate the Patriots in a Super Bowl blowout. Veteran quarterback Sam Darnold's first season in Seattle, which was the second season for coach Mike Macdonald, had a storybook ending.

It's also no stretch to tout the NFC West as the strongest division in the NFL. The division has produced two of the past five Super Bowl winners, and San Francisco lost a Super Bowl in overtime in the middle of that Seahawks-Rams championship sandwich. ESPN's Football Power Index for this season ranks the Rams No. 1, Seahawks No. 4 and 49ers No. 5, and most handicappers' power ratings will look similar. The Seahawks (14-3), Rams and 49ers (both 12-5) combined to win 38 regular-season games. Of course, every division has a basement and the Arizona Cardinals still will be cellar dwellers.

2026 Makinen Projected Standings

TEAM	2025	HOME	ROAD	SCHEDULE STRENGTH	DRAFTKINGS		
	SM PR	FIELD ADV.	FIELD ADV.	(RANK)	PRJW'S	PRJL'S	O/U
SEATTLE	29.5	1.7	1.0	24.04 (16)	11.1	5.9	10.5
LA RAMS	29.5	1.6	0.3	24.76 (5)	10.7	6.3	10.5
SAN FRANCISCO	27.5	2.4	0.1	23.83 (18)	10.2	6.8	10.5
ARIZONA	17.5	1.5	-0.1	25.76 (1)	4.7	12.3	4.5

VSIN Host & Expert Selection Summary



20



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1



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ARIZONA Cardinals



Rams coach Sean McVay should be flattered that so many NFL teams seem to be seeking a head coach like him or one who worked as an assistant under him. The latest McVay protege to land a top job is Mike LaFleur, who was hired by the Cardinals after serving as Rams offensive coordinator from 2023 to 2025. LaFleur had previously worked under 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan, so he should be prepared for a job that is among the league's least desired. The Cardinals concluded last season on a nine-game losing streak to finish 3-14.

The quarterback depth chart is a disaster, but the positive aspect for LaFleur is he's starting from scratch and building his own team. It actually would benefit Arizona to be bad again this year and get a high pick in next year's draft that is loaded with quarterback prospects. The truth is the Cardinals have no choice but to be bad.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Under 4.5

Aside from home games against the Jets and Raiders in late December, the Cardinals can't circle any other games on the schedule as likely wins. The first 13 games are torture. Arizona went 0-6 in division play last year and seems likely to go winless again. The price to bet Under 4.5 wins is high (-190), but you don't pay the juice on a winning bet. Five teams, including the Cardinals, finished with four or fewer wins last season.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 3-14 SU & 6-11 ATS / 10-7 O-U

Head Coach: Mike LaFleur - 1st season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/13	+9.3	@	HOME TEAMS have won L3 ATS in ARI-LAC h2h series
9/20	+11.9		SEATTLE is on 8-1 ATS run vs. Arizona
9/27	+12.1	@	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of ARI-SF h2h series
10/4	+6.5	@	ARIZONA is on 7-1 ATS run at NY Giants
10/11	+7.6		DETROIT is on a 5-1 ATS run vs. Arizona
10/18	+13.3	@	LA RAMS are on 6-3 ATS run hosting Arizona
10/25	+7.2		The L8 games of the DEN-ARI h2h series went OVER the total
11/1	+9.6	@	ARIZONA is on 8-1 ATS run vs. Dallas, all as underdog
11/8	+13.4	@	SEATTLE is on a 4-0 ATS streak hosting Arizona
11/15	+11.2		LA RAMS are 10-1 ATS in L11 at Arizona
11/22	+11.4	@	KANSAS CITY is 4-0 SU & 3-1 ATS hosting Arizona since '98
11/29	+3.7		UNDER the total is 4-1 in L5 of WAS-ARI h2h series
12/6	+8.3		ARIZONA is 9-1 ATS in its L10 games versus Philadelphia
12/20	-1.5		ARIZONA is on 4-0 ATS run vs. NY Jets, UNDER total is also 4-0
12/27	+7	@	FAVORITES are on a 7-2 ATS run in ARI-NO h2h series
1/3	+0.5		RAIDERS are 4-0 ATS in L4 trips to Arizona
1/10	+9		FAVORITES have won the L4 ATS in SF-ARI series at Arizona

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **25.76**
#1 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.5 / -0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is this called a quarterback controversy, carousel or complete mess?

The Kyler Murray era has ended, probably for the better, and Arizona is moving on. But moving on to what? Jacoby Brissett held out for a reworked contract before reporting to minicamp in early June. Brissett, 33, had a 1-11 record as the starter after replacing the injured Murray in Week 6. It's not fair to pin the poor record on Brissett because he didn't have the support of a potent running attack and the Cardinals were woeful defensively. Brissett put up impressive numbers by passing for 3,366 yards and 23 touchdowns with eight interceptions – most teams would take those numbers from their QB. But what's the point of paying and playing a veteran who's not part of the future plans?

Arizona goes to training camp with Gardner Minshew as the backup and rookie Carson Beck, a third-round pick from the Miami Hurricanes, as the No. 3. It was reported that LaFleur wanted to draft Ty Simpson from Alabama, but McVay and the Rams took Simpson in the first round before the Cardinals could take their shot. Beck will get the call to start at some point this season, and he probably should get it before the end of October. The Cardinals and Browns have the worst quarterback carousels in the league. It can't be called a controversy if there are no great options on the depth chart. Is Brendan Sorsby from Texas Tech an option in the supplemental draft?

Is Love in the air or will he hit the ground running?

When you have a below-average offensive line, is it wise to draft a running back in the top 10? No. However, former Notre Dame running back Jeremiah Love is a special talent and the Cardinals decided they couldn't pass on him with the No. 3 overall pick. The No. 1 running back spot is not truly up in the air because it belongs to Love, who will be backed up by Tyler Allgeier. Arizona could have gone another route and drafted an offensive lineman or a receiver to line up opposite of Marvin Harrison Jr., but that's an old debate. Love should top 1,000 yards rushing if he stays healthy. In 2025, the Raiders drafted running back Ashton Jeanty sixth overall and he mustered only 975 yards and five touchdowns in 17 games behind a bad line. Love is more talented than Jeanty and should eventually become one of the league's top runners.

Will there be a 'D' in Arizona?

The Cardinals were embarrassingly weak defensively during their nine-game losing streak to finish the season. Arizona allowed 35.2 PPG, which ranked last in the league, in those nine games. It's not a unit without talent. Veteran linebacker Josh Sweat (12 sacks), safety Budda Baker (team-high 120 tackles) and corner Denzel Burke (three interceptions) return.

ODDS TO WIN...

500-1 SUPER BOWL

200-1 NFC

100-1 NFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.9	23
YARDS PER POINT	15.7	27
PLAYS PER GAME	63.2	12
TIME OF POSSESSION	29:34	20
3RD DOWN CONV. %	41.5%	9
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327	18
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	22
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	21.5	32
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	93.1	31
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	16
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	38.2	1
COMPLETION %	65.8%	14
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	233.9	7
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.7	22
TURNOVERS	1.2	17
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.7	29
YARDS PER POINT	12.5	30
3RD DOWN CONV. %	43.1%	27
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	358.9	27
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	22
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	126.9	25
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.4	24
COMPLETION %	65.6%	21
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	231.9	24
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.9	24
SACKS	1.8	28
TURNOVERS	1.1	19

LOS ANGELES

Rams



Everyone wants to feel loved, but popular teams in the NFL betting sphere are generally teams you don't want to love. After the 2025 draft, the Rams were somewhat of a sleeper team getting Super Bowl odds in the 30-1 range. A year later, no one is sleeping on this team. The Rams are the consensus title favorites, priced at +520 at Circa Sports and +550 at DraftKings, and all other contenders are listed at odds of 10-1 and higher.

The Rams appear to have it all. Veteran quarterback Matthew Stafford was last season's MVP, Myles Garrett was the league's defensive player of the year and Sean McVay is always in the debate about the league's best coach. It's nice to be voted the homecoming king, but what looks great on paper is never easy to deliver in the NFL.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 11.5

In McVay's nine seasons, the Rams have made seven playoff appearances, and this has the potential to be his best team. The Garrett and McDuffie additions make the defense elite. The Rams were No. 1 in most power ratings last season and will be motivated after coming up short against Seattle. Eight teams finished with 12 or more wins last season and three of those teams came from the NFC West. The schedule is tough, but the Rams are built for it, so the Super Bowl favorites should at least match their 12-5 record from a year ago.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 14-6 SU & 12-8 ATS / 12-8 O-U
Head Coach: Sean McVay - 10th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/10	-2.2		UNDERDOGS are 12-3 ATS in Rams-49ers series since '19
9/21	-9.7		NY GIANTS have won L5 ATS when visiting Rams
9/27	+0.1	@	UNDERDOGS are on 7-game ATS win streak in LAR-DEN series
10/4	+0.4	@	OVER the total is 7-1-1 in L9 of LAR-PHI h2h series
10/12	-2.7		OVER the total is 8-2 in L10 of BUF-LAR h2h series
10/18	-13.3	@	LA RAMS are on 6-3 ATS run hosting Arizona
10/25	-8.2	@	UNDER the total is 6-1 in L7 of LAR-LVR h2h series
11/1	-7.6		Designated HOME TEAM is 6-2 in L8 of Chargers-Rams series
11/8	-5.4	@	L6 games of LAR-WAS series in Washington went UNDER the total
11/15	-11.2		LA RAMS are 10-1 ATS in L11 at Arizona
11/25	-4.5		GREEN BAY is 10-1 SU & 11-0 ATS vs. LA Rams since '07
12/3	-4.8	@	KANSAS CITY is on a 7-0-1 ATS run vs. LA Rams
12/13	-0.3	@	LA RAMS have won L3 SU & ATS at San Francisco
12/20	-7.1		HOME TEAMS are 8-3 ATS in L11 of DAL-LAR h2h series
12/25	+1	@	LA RAMS are on 6-1 ATS in L7 at Seattle but lost '25 NFC title game
1/3	-4.9		LA RAMS are on 10-1-1 ATS surge versus Tampa Bay
1/10	-0.2		UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS of SEA-LAR series in Los Angeles

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.76**
 #5 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.6 / 0.3**
 (HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is the MVP still in his prime time at age 38?

Matthew Stafford posted stratospheric numbers last season by leading the NFL in passing yards (4,707) and passing touchdowns (46) while the Rams ranked No. 1 in scoring at 30.5 PPG. He had 12 more TD passes than the No. 2 quarterback on the list, the Lions' Jared Goff. It's going to be difficult to produce similar numbers. In fact, Stafford passed for 20 touchdowns in 2024 and 24 touchdowns in 2023, so he actually took a quantum leap in that category. Puka Nacua and Davante Adams combined for 24 touchdowns as two of the most productive wide receivers in the league. The Rams seemed likely to grab a big-play receiver early in the draft, but the team instead picked a backup quarterback (Ty Simpson from Alabama) in the first round and a tight end (Max Klare from Ohio State) in the second round. Stafford's numbers will probably decline some, although he's not yet showing signs of old age.

Will a pair of future Hall of Famers lead a dominant defensive line?

As soon as Myles Garrett was acquired in a big deal with Cleveland, reports swirled about Aaron Donald coming out of retirement. The Rams are obviously going all-in to win now, sending three high draft picks, including a 2027 first-rounder, and young defensive end Jared Verse to the Browns for Garrett. While it should be a good trade for both teams, the Rams could benefit from a side effect of the deal. Donald, an eight-time first-team All-Pro defensive lineman, is intrigued by the idea of playing with Garrett, who's off a 23-sack season. Donald was a leader of the Super Bowl-winning team of 2021 and retired in March 2024 at age 32, but he's no couch potato and remains in impressive shape. If Donald doesn't return, the Rams still boast a loaded front with Kobie Turner, Braden Fiske, Poona Ford, Byron Young and Garrett leading the 3-4 scheme.

The defensive secondary desperately needed improvement in the offseason. Sam Darnold shredded the LA defense by passing for 346 yards and three touchdowns with no interceptions in the NFC title game. The Rams found their answers in Kansas City by signing former Chiefs cornerback Jaylen Watson in free agency and sending a first-round pick in 2026 to the Chiefs for All-Pro corner Trent McDuffie.

Will the team be fit for a stressful late-season stretch run?

Opening the season against the 49ers in Australia is challenging, yet international games are becoming routine and overseas travel excuses are irrelevant. While predicting the health of key players is impossible, the Rams have a late bye in Week 11 and need to be near full strength in late November and December when they face a serious stress test. In their final seven games, the Rams face the Packers, Chiefs, 49ers, Cowboys, Buccaneers and Seahawks, with the games against Seattle coming in Weeks 16 and 18.

ODDS TO WIN...

+550 SUPER BOWL

+300 NFC

+100 NFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	30.5	1
YARDS PER POINT	13	4
PLAYS PER GAME	63.9	7
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:25	12
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.6%	17
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	394.6	1
YARDS PER PLAY	6.2	1
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	27.4	16
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	126.6	7
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.6	6
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	35.2	5
COMPLETION %	64.9%	15
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	268.1	1
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.9	5
TURNOVERS	0.9	4
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	20.4	10
YARDS PER POINT	16.1	3
3RD DOWN CONV. %	36.3%	7
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	327.5	17
YARDS PER PLAY	5.2	14
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	110.8	12
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	19
COMPLETION %	64.0%	15
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	216.7	19
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.3	13
SACKS	2.8	7
TURNOVERS	1.5	5

SAN FRANCISCO

49ers



It has been two years since the 49ers snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in Super Bowl LVIII in Las Vegas. San Francisco coach Kyle Shanahan and quarterback Brock Purdy had the Chiefs cornered and let them off the hook in a 25-22 overtime loss. Shanahan is regarded as one of the league's brightest coaches, a reputation that is deserved, but he also has blown three Super Bowls (including one as Atlanta's offensive coordinator) and one NFC title game with dubious play calls.

Only seven starters remain from the Super Bowl team, and Shanahan and general manager John Lynch have not drafted particularly well, so the championship window is beginning to close. It's not closed yet, however, and this season will be telling. San Francisco still is a contender despite being the third-best team in the NFC West.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 9.5
Whatever happens on September 10 in Australia, where the 49ers will open the season against the Rams, resist overreacting. It's one game and won't mean much. Week 1 results can be the most misleading of the year. Remember last year's Week 1 when the Raiders were road underdogs and beat the Patriots? The winning team finished 3-14 and the loser reached the Super Bowl. When the smoke clears at the end, it's a good bet that the 49ers, Rams and Seahawks all will have double-digit wins just like last season. The 49ers return from overseas for a three-game homestand against the Dolphins, Cardinals and Broncos. Assuming the health of McCaffrey and other key players, San Francisco should be headed for at least 10 wins. DraftKings is offering 9.5 (Over -145) and 10.5 (Over +125), and the recommendation is to lay the price with the lower win total.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 13-6 SU & 11-8 ATS / 11-8 O-U
Head Coach: Kyle Shanahan - 10th season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/10	+2.2	vs	UNDERDOGS are 12-3 ATS in Rams-49ers series since '19
9/20	-12.1		The L5 games of MIA-SF h2h series went OVER the total
9/27	-12.1		OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of ARI-SF h2h series
10/4	-3.7		HOME TEAMS are 3-0-1 ATS in L4 of DEN-SF series
10/11	+3.2	@	FAVORITES are 13-2 ATS in L15 of SF-SEA series in Seattle
10/19	-7.2		UNDER the total is 6-2 in L8 of WAS-SF h2h series
10/25	-3.9	@	HOME TEAMS are 5-1 ATS in L6 of ATL-SF h2h series
11/8	-10.4		HOME TEAMS have won L5 ATS in LVR-SF h2h series
11/15	-0.6	@	SAN FRANCISCO has won L4 SU & ATS vs. Dallas
11/22	-4.1	vs	UNDER the total is 9-2 in L11 MIN-SF h2h matchups
11/29	+1		UNDER the total is 10-4 in SEA-SF series at SF since 2012
12/6	-3.7	@	SAN FRANCISCO is on 6-1 ATS run vs NY Giants
12/13	+0.3		LA RAMS have won L3 SU & ATS at San Francisco
12/17	-0.9	@	LA CHARGERS are on 5-1 ATS run vs. San Francisco
12/27	+1.2	@	KANSAS CITY is on an 8-0-1 ATS run versus San Francisco
1/3	-2.6		FAVORITES are 9-4 ATS in L13 games of PHI-SF h2h series
1/10	-9	@	FAVORITES have won the L4 ATS in SF-ARI series at Arizona

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **23.83**
#18 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **2.4 / 0.1**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is Christian McCaffrey durable enough to carry the offensive load?

McCaffrey recently turned 30 and has wear-and-tear issues that have led to injuries. After playing only four games in an injury-shortened 2024 season, he returned as strong as ever and earned Comeback Player of the Year honors in 2025 while playing all 17 games. He finished with 311 carries for 1,202 yards and 10 touchdowns in addition to making 102 receptions for 924 yards and seven TDs. He totaled 2,126 scrimmage yards — the second-highest total in the NFL behind Atlanta running back Bijan Robinson — to power the 49ers to a 12-5 record. The previous season, when McCaffrey and several other starters went down to injuries, the 49ers slumped to 6-11. It's obvious his durability will be a big key to San Francisco keeping pace with the Rams and Seahawks. In January, when Seattle slaughtered the 49ers 41-6 in the divisional round, McCaffrey was limited to 35 rushing yards on 11 carries.

How much will Brock Purdy benefit from the team's biggest addition?

The 49ers have moved on from a few of their top receivers, including Deebo Samuel, Jauan Jennings and Brandon Aiyuk, who seems destined to be gone soon. Adding 6-foot-5 veteran Mike Evans with a three-year, \$60 million free-agent contract should fill some holes. Evans surprisingly left Tampa Bay, where he recorded 11 consecutive 1,000-yard seasons before an injury stopped his streak in 2025. A six-time Pro Bowler, Evans will be a big red-zone target for his new quarterback. Purdy was limited to nine games last season, but when he played, he played well and completed 69.4% of his passes with 20 touchdowns. Mac Jones, who played in 11 games last season, remains Purdy's backup. Evans, tight end George Kittle, wideout Ricky Pearsall and new wideout Christian Kirk will give Purdy plenty of options aside from McCaffrey. San Francisco made at least one other big offensive move by re-signing tackle Trent Williams.

Do the 49ers still have a championship-level defense?

Three of the seven starters remaining from the Super Bowl team are linebackers Nick Bosa, Dre Greenlaw and Fred Warner. San Francisco ranked as a middle-of-the-pack defense a year ago by allowing 340 yards per game and 21.8 PPG. Defensive coordinator Robert Saleh left for the Titans coaching job and was replaced by Raheem Morris, who was fired as Falcons coach. Morris is not taking over an elite defense, but he's got talent to work with and there is potential. In their 2023 Super Bowl season, the 49ers ranked No. 3 in scoring defense (17.5 PPG).

ODDS TO WIN...

19-1

SUPER BOWL

+950

NFC

+300

NFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	25.7	10
YARDS PER POINT	13.7	12
PLAYS PER GAME	63.6	9
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:38	9
3RD DOWN CONV. %	49.8%	1
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	351.4	7
YARDS PER PLAY	5.5	11
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.3	10
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	106.9	24
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.8	30
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	33.8	10
COMPLETION %	69.3%	3
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	244.5	5
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	7.5	9
TURNOVERS	1.3	20
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	21.8	13
YARDS PER POINT	15.6	8
3RD DOWN CONV. %	40.1%	19
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	340.2	20
YARDS PER PLAY	5.6	24
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	107.8	11
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.3	20
COMPLETION %	68.2%	28
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	232.4	25
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	6.8	21
SACKS	1.2	32
TURNOVERS	0.9	23

SEATTLE Seahawks



Super Bowl champions are usually subjected to a talent raid. The Seahawks went through the same experience. The headliners: Offensive coordinator Klint Kubiak was hired as the Raiders head coach, and running back Kenneth Walker was signed by the Chiefs. Seattle's team will look similar for the most part, and there's no wiggle room to take steps back in a division with the Rams and 49ers.

Mike Macdonald, who won a championship at age 38, is 27-10 (including the postseason) in two years and deserves to be ranked among the elite coaches in the league. He spent two different stints on John Harbaugh's staff in Baltimore before getting his big break. He's no one-hit wonder — more hits are coming.

WIN TOTAL SELECTION

Over 10.5

It's not considered sharp to bet Over the highest win totals in the league, but the top three teams in the NFC West are also three of the top teams in the league. Even if you don't believe in Darnold as a bet-on quarterback, Macdonald and his defense will make you a believer in this team. The Seahawks are currently favored in 14 games and would be underdogs in road games against the Rams, 49ers and Eagles, but they won't be big 'dogs. Seattle won 14 regular-season games last season, while the Rams and 49ers each won 12. The Cardinals are headed for 0-6 in the division again. Maybe it's square, but lay -115 and expect at least 11 wins.

2025 Record (incl playoffs): 17-3 SU & 15-5 ATS / 11-9 O-U
Head Coach: Mike Macdonald - 3rd season

2026 SCHEDULE

Date	Line	Opp	Series Trend
9/9	-4.1		SEATTLE is on 5-1-1 ATS run vs. New England, OVER the total is 7-1 in L8
9/20	-11.9	@	SEATTLE is on 8-1 ATS run vs. Arizona
9/27	-6.1	@	ROAD TEAMS are 6-2-1 ATS in L9 of SEA-WAS h2h series
10/4	-7.7		UNDERDOGS are on 9-1-2 ATS run in LAC-SEA h2h set
10/11	-3.2		FAVORITES are 13-2 ATS in L15 of SF-SEA series in Seattle
10/15	-0.6	@	OVER the total is 9-4 in L13 of DEN-SEA h2h set
10/25	-4.9		KANSAS CITY is 7-2 ATS in L9 vs. Seattle
11/2	-6.2		CHICAGO has won L3 ATS vs. Seattle
11/8	-13.4		SEATTLE is on a 4-0 ATS streak hosting Arizona
11/15	-8.9	@	RAIDERS are on a 6-0 ATS streak hosting Seattle
11/29	-1	@	UNDER the total is 10-4 in SEA-SF series at SF since 2012
12/7	-7.2		SEATTLE has won its L5 games ATS vs. Dallas
12/13	-9.8		NY GIANTS are 4-1-1 ATS in L6 versus Seattle
12/19	-0.3	@	SEATTLE is on 9-2 ATS run vs. Philadelphia
12/25	-1		LA RAMS are on 6-1 ATS in L7 at Seattle but lost '25 NFC title game
1/3	-6.7	@	OVER the total is 8-1 in L9 of SEA-CAR h2h series but lost LY
1/10	+0.2	@	UNDERDOGS have won L4 ATS of SEA-LAR series in Los Angeles

SCHEDULE STRENGTH **24.04**
#16 toughest of 32

FIELD RATINGS **1.7 / 1.0**
(HOME/ROAD)

THREE BURNING QUESTIONS FOR THE 2026 SEASON

Is quarterback Sam Darnold a one-hit wonder?

Darnold bounced around the league with the Jets, Panthers, 49ers and Vikings before landing in a sweet spot in Seattle last year. It was reported that Tom Brady vetoed the idea of signing Darnold in Las Vegas and instead preferred Geno Smith, who was a bust with the Raiders. Brady is not perfect. Darnold's career record as a starter was 21-35 prior to going 14-3 in each of the past two years with the Vikings and Seahawks. He imploded at the end of his one season in Minnesota, and he was not exactly a star all season in Seattle while passing for 25 touchdowns with 20 turnovers (14 interceptions, six fumbles). Darnold will be adjusting to working with his fifth different offensive coordinator in five years. After Kubiak left for Las Vegas, Macdonald hired Brian Fleury, who was the run-game coordinator and tight ends coach for the 49ers. Darnold has resurrected his career, but turnovers are always a problem, and now he's dealing with more OC turnover.

Darnold still will have doubters. He was shaky in the Super Bowl while completing 19 of 38 passes for 202 yards with a touchdown, but he took only one sack and didn't commit a turnover. It's fair to say he's finally developing in the right situation after being stuck in unstable situations in his younger years.

Which offseason moves were most important?

The loss of Walker, who rushed for 135 yards and was voted Super Bowl MVP, is obviously not ideal, but running backs and receivers always come and go. The Seahawks filled the void by picking Notre Dame's Jadarian Price in the last spot of the first round. Price will play right away and probably split carries with returning back Zach Charbonnet. Seattle signed Jaxon Smith-Njigba to a four-year, \$168 million extension after Smith-Njigba led the league with 1,793 receiving yards and added 10 touchdowns. The team also re-signed receiver Rashid Shaheed, linebacker Derick Hall and cornerback Devon Witherspoon. Aside from Walker, other key losses were safety Coby Bryant (Bears), corner Riq Woolen (Eagles) and linebacker Boye Mafe (Bengals).

Will Macdonald continue to produce Belichick-type defenses?

Seattle ranked No. 1 in the NFL in scoring defense at 17.2 PPG and made Patriots quarterback Drake Maye look bad in the Super Bowl. Macdonald is regarded for his brilliant defensive mind and comparisons to Bill Belichick are valid. The defense ranked third against the run and only experienced major problems when trying to contain the Rams and Matthew Stafford in the teams' final two matchups. Pete Carroll-coached teams used dominant defenses to reach two Super Bowls and win one, and Macdonald is using a similar blueprint for his Seahawks. While the Rams are making major moves, such as the trade for Myles Garrett, Seattle has a head start with a defensive depth chart led by linebackers Ernest Jones, DeMarcus Lawrence, Uchenna Nwosu and Drake Thomas and linemen Byron Murphy and Leonard Williams.

ODDS TO WIN...



SUPER BOWL



NFC



NFC WEST

2025 STATISTICS

OFFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	28.4	3
YARDS PER POINT	12.4	2
PLAYS PER GAME	59.7	21
TIME OF POSSESSION	30:00	15
3RD DOWN CONV. %	39.8%	16
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	351.4	8
YARDS PER PLAY	5.9	6
RUSH ATTEMPTS PER GAME	29.8	3
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	123.3	10
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	4.1	25
PASS ATTEMPTS PER GAME	28.3	29
COMPLETION %	67.6%	5
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	228.1	8
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	8.4	2
TURNOVERS	1.6	31
DEFENSIVE STATISTICS	#	RANK
POINTS PER GAME	17.2	1
YARDS PER POINT	16.6	1
3RD DOWN CONV. %	32.1%	1
TOTAL YARDS PER GAME	285.6	6
YARDS PER PLAY	4.6	2
RUSH YARDS PER GAME	91.6	3
YARDS PER RUSH ATTEMPT	3.7	1
COMPLETION %	62.5%	9
PASSING YARDS PER GAME	193.9	10
YARDS PER PASS ATTEMPT	5.5	2
SACKS	2.8	7
TURNOVERS	1.5	6

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