

NFL BETTING GUIDE

VSin **PRO**

★ POST-PRESEASON ★
UPDATE



OLD DOGS OR NEW TRICKS?

10 NEW HEAD COACHES MAY DEFINE NFL SEASON

OUR **PRO GUIDE** INCLUDES

- POST-PRESEASON TEAM UPDATES
- BETTING SYSTEMS AND CONTEST STRATEGIES
- HOST BEST BETS FOR WEEK 1 AND MORE

VSin

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**ODDS WITHIN GUIDE
ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

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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
YPPT - Yards per Point • YPR - Yards per Rush

Greetings, all!

The preseason is in the books and we are all geared up for the start of the 2026 NFL regular season. It may feel like a long time ago, but we released our NFL Betting Guide back in late June. This is the complement to that, our “Refreshed” NFL Betting Guide 2.0, a post-preseason look at the teams, the rosters, the players to watch, and the betting systems and trends that you need to know to be ready for kickoff.

We also have a new set of best bets from VSiN hosts and experts, whose thoughts have been molded and shaped by what we saw, read, and heard over the last several weeks. Those include Week 1 wagers, season-long prop bets and awards markets, additional season win totals, and more.

Here’s a list of what you will find in the VSiN NFL Betting Guide 2.0, along with those best bets:

- Zachary Cohen (AFC) & Adam Burke’s (NFC) 32 Team Preview Updates and Players To Watch
- Steve Makinen’s Week 1 Betting Systems
- Football Contest Strategies (featuring our friends at PoolGenius) and a 2026 Survivor Blueprint

We have been very busy this summer at VSiN, as that first NFL Guide and the August 3 College Football Guide were the biggest headlines, but we’ve also added new betting tools, more content, and reaffirmed our commitment to bring you the best football handicapping content in the business, including the OptaAI NFL Player Props and our proprietary JOLT and VOLT betting models built by lead developer Jason Latus.

You can find VSiN on SiriusXM Channel 189 (as of 9/1), 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, and through VSiN.com.

Tell your friends, tell your family, tell your colleagues and coworkers, tell anybody who will listen why now is the time to join us here at VSiN, THE Sports Betting Network.

Thank you for your support and good luck this NFL season!

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UPDATED VSIN EXPERT

BEST BETS

PAULY HOWARD

BEARS UNDER 9.5 WINS (-125)

If a +22 turnover differential (and 33 takeaways) wasn't enough last year, how about the fact the Bears won the most games in history when trailing in the final two minutes? The stars will not align this year, and they have already been hit with the injury bug on defense.

WEEK 2: BILLS -3 (-110) VS. LIONS WILLIAM HILL SEPTEMBER SPECIALS: HIGHEST SCORING GAME BILLS-LIONS (12-1)

Two years ago, it was 48-42 in Detroit. Josh Allen had four touchdowns and the Lions had no answer for their offense. This time, the place will be rocking for the first ever game at Highmark Stadium. The Lions will have trouble slowing Allen down again, and Joe Brady will go deep in his bag to confuse the Detroit defense.

DAVE ROSS

COWBOYS OVER 9.5 WINS (+100), ALT OVER 10.5 WINS (+200), TO WIN NFC EAST (+205)

The most intriguing upside team? That's right, the Dallas Cowboys. Say what you want about the "hype," but there's good reason for the optimism. They may start as many as six newbies on defense from a disastrous unit just a year ago — and that can only be good for Cowboy backers and their 34-year-old DC Christian Parker, who came over from Philly. Parker's a big addition in Big D and a big defector from Vic Fangio's brain trust in Eagle land.

The offense has avoided injury this summer, and by all reports this unit is loaded for bear. If the defense improves to at least middle of the pack (and I think they can be even better than that), this is a double-digit win team. I'm playing Over 9.5 and the alt win total Over 10.5.

And at +200 or better, it's too good a price to pass up to win the East.

AARON MOORE

BIG PICTURE FOR SEASON TOTALS

It might sound obvious, but compare lines across every book before making any plays. What I've found anecdotally so far with player season totals: between the two major national books — DraftKings and FanDuel — DK is the place to go for Unders and FD for Overs.

OMARION HAMPTON OVER 7.5 RUSH TDS (-135)

This total moved off 8.5 after new Chargers OC Mike McDaniel talked about the uncertainty of the work distribution in his crowded backfield. Hampton is the No. 1 option, but there will be times when Kimani Vidal and Keaton Mitchell are more than just situational backs.

There won't be any mystery, though, when the Chargers get near the goal line, as the power back Hampton will get the most attempts. Los Angeles lacks a basketball-player-like WR or TE for alley-oops, Justin Herbert's health won't be jeopardized by repeated sneaks, and the addition of a new interior blocking scheme will help pave the way for Hampton in McDaniel's red zone offense.

KYLER MURRAY UNDER 3,049.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

Here's a play based on the ongoing narrative surrounding Minnesota's training camp. All of a sudden, there's a resurgence of love, understanding, and support for Murray because he'll be starting for Kevin O'Connell. Sure, KOC may be known as the QB whisperer, but how well did his guru skills work for J.J. McCarthy last season? Minnesota's backup QB — whether it's McCarthy, Carson Wentz, or a player to be named later — is just a few Murray blunders away from getting back on the field.

Murray's continual battle with injuries has kept him below this modest passing total in three of the past four seasons. Here's an example of comparing season totals between DK and FD: I took this Under at DK, while FD has Murray's total listed at 3,000.5. So a bettor is basically getting an extra quarter's worth of production at DK.

AARON RODGERS UNDER 3,149.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

FD and BetMGM have this total at 3,050.5, so there's even more padding for an Under at DK. Once again, I'm making a wager that goes against the August narratives. This time, I'm not buying the one projecting Rodgers' success now that he's reunited with Mike McCarthy.

A new (former) coach doesn't change the fact that Rodgers will be 43 years old midway through the season. Besides the age component, Rodgers and the Steelers have a stretch from Week 11 through Week 15 where they play at Philadelphia, home against Denver (Friday), home against Houston, at Jacksonville (Monday), and then home against Baltimore. Those physical defenses can easily knock a season passing total off schedule.

HEAD TO HEAD ON DK: DEVONTA SMITH (-105) MORE RECEIVING YARDS THAN A.J. BROWN (-125)

I don't think any player has received more training camp coverage than Brown. For the most part, it's been favorable, based on the thought that he immediately becomes Drake Maye's top target. The receiver's new northern address has many forgetting how cantankerous Brown can be when he doesn't get the ball. Maye can run the ball, hand it off to two quality RBs, and look to Romeo Doubs, so there's no guarantee Brown gets back to the 1,400 yards he hit in 2022 and 2023.

Smith, on the other hand, is younger than Brown, had more receiving yards last year than his former teammate, and is now Jalen Hurts' clear top target. Rookie Makai Lemon, who hopes to fill the Brown void, is already dealing with hamstring issues. This season, Smith is the Philadelphia passing game.

NEW ORLEANS TO FINISH SECOND IN NFC SOUTH (+250 AT BETMGM)

So far during training camp, it looks like Tampa Bay is still the top team in the division, and there's no reason to believe the bottom squad won't be Atlanta. So the second-place finish should come down to Carolina and Kellen Moore's Saints. Based on the schedule, I'm backing New Orleans to finish right behind the Buccaneers. I don't think any early-season injury to Alvin Kamara alters the Saints' trajectory. Since this division is often decided during the last week of the regular season, this play at +250 may allow for some monetization opportunities come Week 18, when the Bucs travel to the Caesars Superdome.

JACOB RODRIGUEZ TO WIN DEFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR (15-1)

For the favorites like Rueben Bain Jr., David Bailey, or Arvell Reese to win this award, they're going to need to accumulate sacks, while Caleb Downs and Mansoor Delane must tally interceptions. Those stats require some good fortune and help from fellow defenders. Rodriguez, playing middle linebacker for Miami, will get plenty of opportunities to load up on tackles all by himself. Expect teams facing Miami to protect their leads by consistently running the ball against the Dolphins. That possibly puts the former Texas Tech stud in position to break Patrick Willis' record for most combined tackles by an NFL rookie (174). Last year, Carson Schweginger flirted with that total (156) while taking home Defensive Rookie of the Year.

So far, reports out of camp have Rodriguez looking the part as he closes in on a starting job, while fellow LB Sonny Styles has appeared overmatched at times.

KELLEY BYDLON

PANTHERS UNDER 7.5 WINS (-136)

They won the division a year ago and have improved by three wins in each of Dave Canales' first two seasons. Bryce Young is coming off a career-high season in passing yards (3,011) and a career low in sacks taken (27). Yeahhhh, I'm zagging...

It was a whole eight wins a season ago, and cool numbers from Young, but the team scored fewer points than they did in 2024, and honestly I still have no idea if Young is any good. He's definitely small, I know that. So expecting him to keep starting 14+ games a season feels like a stretch. The offensive line enters the season banged up with a couple of planned starters currently out, so that doesn't help things. I love Tetairoa McMillan, but he's about the only offensive weapon I'm sold on. The defense is still a bottom-half unit at best, despite adding Jaelan Phillips and Devin Lloyd. And remember that cool division crown from last year? Well, they're punished with a first-place schedule this season — the third-toughest based on win totals.

This is not a division where I really have a ton of trust in any team, which I don't LOVE, but man is it tough for me to get to eight wins with this team.

BEARS OVER 415.5 TOTAL POINTS SCORED (-110)

It was an exciting first season in Chicago under Ben Johnson's leadership. He and Caleb Williams turned in an 11-6 season, winning the NFC North.

That first-place finish is punishing them with a difficult schedule this year (sixth-toughest based on win totals), and a lot of the offseason talk around this team is how the fourth-quarter comebacks and the defense's ability to force turnovers will regress. Yeah, good chance — but I'm a believer in this offense. Maybe not so much in the defense, and they do play in the toughest division in football, but with this bet I'm just zeroing in on the offense finding success again, which I think they will. More importantly, the head coach very much believes in this offense, telling The Athletic in early August:

"I want to have the highest-scoring offense ever, which happens to be the 2013 Denver Broncos. I know how many points per game they scored [37.9], and I want to surpass them. I want shutouts. I want blowouts."

Williams and company were ninth in points per game and yards per play, and SECOND in plays run per game. I definitely think they can keep those numbers up, and that should lead to points — and maybe wins again, too.

A.J. BROWN TO WIN OFFENSIVE PLAYER OF THE YEAR (60-1)

I do think the winner is likely coming from the top of the board here. Gibbs, Robinson, Chase, Nacua, Jefferson, McCaffrey, Barkley, Smith-Njigba, Taylor, Cook, Lamb... all VERY live to win this award, so if I'm betting preseason, I'm looking for a long shot whose odds only get shorter as the season goes on. How about a No. 1 wide receiver added to one of the most explosive offenses in the NFL from a season ago? Enter Brown in New England.

A lot was made of the Eagles' struggles on and off the field last season, but Brown still caught 78 balls for over 1,000 yards and seven touchdowns. He was tied for ninth among wide receivers in deep targets (25) and caught four of those for touchdowns. With a quarterback like Maye, who was second in completions of 20+ yards last season, I expect a lot of deep shots to go Brown's direction. And if this team can roll out close to what they did offensively last season (third in Pro Football Focus grading), I think Brown is right in the mix for Offensive Player of the Year.

TYLER SHOEMAKER

WEEK 1: TITANS -2.5 (-126) VS. JETS

My T Shoe Index has Tennessee projected at -4 in this game, so we're getting through a couple of key numbers here in NFL betting. Power ratings aside, the Jets figure to be about as bad as anyone in the league, and Robert Saleh may have revenge on his mind taking on his former team. Cam Ward enters year two for Tennessee with a shiny new toy in Carnell Tate — preseason production concerns aside — and should take the next step as a passer this season. Ward was substantially better at home than on the road last year, so the home-field advantage may help the second-year QB more than the average bear, and he finished the year with an 8:1 TD:INT ratio over his last four games. I think the Titans get the cover at home in Week 1.

JENSEN LEWIS

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (+105 AT DK)

A 13-win team just a year ago, a defending division champion — and I'm basically getting even money to make the postseason the very next year? My first thought of regression might've been a bit overblown. After taking in some joint practices across the AFC and realizing there are still soft spots in the middle of the projected playoff picture, I'm warming up to Liam Coen's crew. Their early-season schedule can easily have them sitting around 4-2, which makes the pre-flop plus-money postseason price a bargain.

DALLAS COWBOYS TO MAKE PLAYOFFS (+100 AT HARD ROCK)

Alright, I'm drinking the Kool-Aid. A team that returns a top-10 scoring offense, a decidedly improved defense (at least on paper), and a manageable schedule can put the floor of this group at least at the wild-card level. I don't need them to win the division, but a quick 2-0 start in the NFC East over the Giants and Commanders gives us a beautiful head start on the double chance at punching a postseason ticket. Are they better than a coin flip to be one of the seven NFC qualifiers in the tournament? Yes — count me in.

SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS TO MISS PLAYOFFS (+135 AT HARD ROCK)

Where do we start with this team? I guess the easy part is looking objectively at the NFC West: it's the most top-heavy in the league, with defending champion Seattle and preseason Super Bowl favorite Los Angeles leading the way. Training camp is following the same script as the previous couple of seasons: injuries abounding. Nick Bosa limited, Christian McCaffrey and Mike Evans banged up, and Ricky Pearsall already lost for the year. San Francisco can't survive the continued atrophy of its star players, coupled with trying to overcome the other notable NFC contenders in Philadelphia, Dallas, Detroit, Chicago, and Green Bay. Plus-money betting on the 49ers' injury cycle continuing feels like a chance I'm willing to take — and that's without even factoring in the off-the-field distractions that already have this club's mindset anywhere but 100% on the football field.

CHICAGO BEARS TO WIN NFC NORTH (+330 ON FANDUEL)

Prisoner-of-the-moment thinking in the original betting guide tied me to the Lions, thanks to a projected easy schedule and a bounce-back campaign from a disappointing 2025. However, after listening to Ben Johnson talk through the offseason improvements, motivations, and goals for Year 2 — plus the reports on how Caleb Williams is looking through camp — I'm ready to take the leap. There's a viable path for all four teams in this division to win it, so I'll hitch my wagon to a group I feel is incredibly focused, with an "unfinished business" mantra clearly entrenched in their day-to-day routine. If this offense comes anywhere close to Johnson's stated aspiration of being "the highest-scoring offense ever," the modern-day Monsters of the Midway may indeed be born.

GILL ALEXANDER

CALEB WILLIAMS: REGULAR SEASON PASSING YARDS LEADER (20-1 AT BETMGM)

This offseason, Bears head coach Ben Johnson famously told *The Athletic* that he wants "to surpass the 2013 Denver Broncos and have the highest-scoring offense ever." Whether the Bears exceed the Broncos' 37.9 points per game from that season is ultimately of no consequence here, but I do like that moxie for this bet. What I like even more is that in the 106-year history of the Chicago Bears franchise, they've never had a 4,000-yard passer. This is actually a big deal in Chicago, not some obscure stat — and after Williams' 3,942-yard flirtation with that mark in 2025, coupled with Johnson's stated goal from this summer, consider me interested.

"Go on..."

A 4,000-yard passing season and/or an NFL team point total record won't win this bet on its own, but when the Bears are projected to have the worst defensive DVOA this coming season, I'm all in — anticipating that the Chicago D will be a sieve, getting Johnson's offense on the field quickly and often in catch-up situations where they'll have to throw the ball around the yard. That element of this bet could very well put us over the top.





Some stats from Aaron Schatz's crew at FTN to support the rating on defense: last season, 18.3% of Chicago's defensive drives ended in a turnover, the highest rate of the 2020s so far. They were 26th in the league in defensive DVOA on first and second downs, ninth-best on third and fourth. Turnover rate and third-down defense tend to regress heavily toward the mean the next year, while first- and second-down defense is much more predictive. Chicago recovered 10 of the 14 fumbles it forced on defense, and the Bears' fumble recovery rate was very high in 2024, too.

A highly motivated head coach, a QB on the cusp of franchise history, and a defense likely to complement this quest beautifully? The 20-1 to top the passing yardage field is a great bet.

MITCH MOSS

You can find markets called "September Specials" at Caesars and "Fast Futures" at DraftKings. Every team plays three games in the first month of the season, so it's pretty much the same thing. With that in mind, I like these bets:

DEVONTA SMITH: MOST RECEIVING YARDS (20-1)

The Eagles start with the Commanders, Titans, and Bears. PFF grades strength of schedule at every position for the regular season, and its scale runs 0-10, with 0 being the hardest and 10 the easiest. They rate the Commanders' defense vs. WRs as a 10, the Titans as a 9.6, and the Bears as a 6.4. Smith will be the man in the Philly passing offense now that A.J. Brown is gone.

DE'ZHAUN STRIBLING: MOST RECEIVING YARDS (50-1)

Full disclosure: I bet this at 150-1, but I still think 50-1 is worth a bet. This is pretty much self-explanatory at this point. The 49ers' first three games come against the Rams (6 at PFF), Dolphins (6.9), and Cardinals (9). Hopefully the 49ers are getting blasted in Week 1, so Purdy has to throw the ball a lot — and the Miami/Arizona combo in Weeks 2 and 3 is too good to be true.

OMARION HAMPTON: MOST RUSHING YARDS (12-1) & MOST RUSHING TOUCHDOWNS (18-1)

Bell cow in L.A.? New Chargers OC Mike McDaniel has hinted at the opposite, but I don't believe him. The Bolts get the Cardinals (9.6 at PFF), the Raiders (8.9), and the Bills (8.5) to begin the season. Hampton showed flashes when healthy last year, and that was with a demoralized O-line. That unit has already had one setback in training camp, but hopefully Slater, Alt, and the rest of the guys stay upright in the trenches.

DAVID MONTGOMERY: MOST RUSHING YARDS (28-1) & MOST RUSHING TOUCHDOWNS (28-1)

I'll suggest a workhorse here rather than a bell cow. Houston specifically signed Montgomery to take over as the main man in the backfield. His stiffest competition is Woody Marks — as we saw last year, it shouldn't be that stiff. The Texans face the following run defenses in the first three weeks of the season: the Bills (8.5), the Bengals (9.9), and the Colts (6). There are still major concerns with the passing game, as C.J. has gotten worse, and the O-line is a question mark going into the season — BUT the defense is one of the best in the entire league. I expect tight, low-scoring games, and Monty will benefit from healthy game-state situations.

GAMES OF THE YEAR

I'm banking on the Cardinals looking similar to the 2025 version. They closed the season by going Over the total in nine of their final 13 games — and the final combined score hit the 50s or higher in nine of those 13 as well.

I've played the following Overs:

- Week 5 vs. Detroit (48.5 at -110)
- Week 8 at Dallas (47.5 at -110)
- Week 16 at New Orleans (43.5 at -110)

SCOTT SEIDENBERG

SAQUON BARKLEY OVER 1,099.5 RUSHING YARDS (-110)

Last year was a down year for Barkley — but coming off the historic 2,000-yard season, 1,100 rushing yards would qualify as a down year for any back. There is reason for optimism going into 2026, though. New Philly offensive coordinator Sean Mannion is installing his version of a West Coast offense, and according to training camp reports, Jalen Hurts has been under center more than in the shotgun. This fits Mannion's style and benefits Barkley.

Last season, Barkley carried the ball 280 times for a 4.1 yards-per-carry average and posted a +66 Rushing Yards Over Expected (RYOE).

If you break that down by formation, though, the picture gets clearer.

On runs out of the shotgun, Barkley averaged 3.6 yards per carry over 134 attempts while posting a -69 RYOE.

With Hurts under center: 108 carries, a 4.9 average, and a massive +168 RYOE. To put that into perspective, Jahmyr Gibbs posted a +168 RYOE last season, seventh-best in the NFL.

With the new Mannion offense relying more on under-center snaps and play-action passes, I expect a bounce-back year from Barkley that sends him Over his rushing yard total.





DUSTIN SWEDELSON

DAVID MONTGOMERY OVER 7.5 RUSHING TDS & RUSHING TD LEADER (30-1)

The Texans' offense is the only reason people doubt whether this is a Super Bowl team. They finished last season 29th in red-zone offense, and on top of that, C.J. Stroud had major issues with his accuracy. If Houston can finish more drives in the end zone, they become one of the most dangerous teams in the NFL. Adding Montgomery and leaning on him in the red zone will get them there. While splitting duties with Jahmyr Gibbs in Detroit, he had eight, 12, and 13 rushing TDs — all clearing 7.5. Over the last 10 seasons, the average TDs needed to lead the NFL is 16.7. With such a great defense and a need to convert red-zone trips at a higher rate, I don't think it's crazy for Montgomery to get to 16-17 with the added workload.

TYLER WARREN OVER 750.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-110)

The Colts' receiving corps lost Michael Pittman in the offseason and enters the season so banged up that they signed 34-year-old Keenan Allen. That all means more opportunities for Warren to be a go-to guy in this offense. Last season, with Daniel Jones starting at QB, he averaged 53.8 yards per game. Extrapolate that over 17 games and you're looking at a 914-yard season. Indianapolis also has eight games this year against bottom-10 defenses at covering tight ends from last year: the Bengals were 32nd, Commanders 31st, Steelers 29th, Dolphins 28th, Titans 23rd, and Jaguars 22nd.

INTERCEPTIONS THROWN LEADER: SHEDEUR SANDERS (35-1)

Sanders needed just eight games to throw 10 interceptions last year. Once the Browns show the world Deshaun Watson has nothing left in the tank, Sanders can still get there after he takes over. And the Browns need him to start and prove whether or not he's the guy of the future — not just for the franchise's sake, but to quiet the fanbase. We all know he probably isn't a franchise QB, but he doesn't know that. The league leader threw 17 last year, 16 in 2024, 21 in 2023. Sanders' 17-game pace from last year would have been 21 picks. His biggest problem isn't that he can't make all of the throws at the NFL level. His biggest problem is that he thinks he actually can make all of the throws at the NFL level. That hubris will get him into trouble with interceptions.

JOE BURROW TO WIN MVP (+850)

In the first edition of this guide, I made the case for Brock Purdy to win MVP. The other bet in this market I love is Burrow. The Bengals are not messing around this year. Zac Taylor is on the hot seat. And to some degree, Burrow staying in Cincinnati could be a conversation with another disappointing year. Confidence in the Bengals can be a scary thing, but I'm willing to bet on the upside at least one more time. They can win their division and even contend for a top-two seed in the AFC with the defensive improvements they made. On top of that, Burrow has a chance to put up monster numbers in this high-powered offense. Cincinnati will face just one top-five pass defense from last year. They have three of last year's top-10 pass defenses on the slate, but one of them is Cleveland without Myles Garrett now. They'll face last season's 31st, 30th, 29th, 28th, and 27th pass defenses, and they should get off to a fast start, with five of their opening six contests against pass defenses ranked 18th or worse last year. If Burrow finally gets off to a fast start, this number could shorten up quickly.

STEVE MAKINEN



PHILADELPHIA UNDER 10.5 WINS (-140)

Supposedly, the Eagles' locker room will be shored up a bit after WR A.J. Brown was shipped off to New England in the offseason. Is that all that ailed this team, however, in an unsatisfying 11-6 season topped off with a wild-card-round home playoff ouster at the hands of the 49ers? I'm not sure, as this is a team that didn't score well last season (22.5 PPG), won a lot of close games, and benefitted greatly from turnovers. If you follow any of my offseason work ever, you should know that's a trifecta for potential doom. Take a look...1) 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. 2) The key number to look

for in “close wins” is eight; of the last 44 teams with at least that many in a season, only six improved the next season. The average DECLINE of the other 38 teams was 3.4 wins per season. And 3) Only three of the last 29 teams since 2020 with a turnover differential better than +0.5 per game improved their record the next season. The average won-lost percentage decline of the other 26 teams was 16.1% (10% ATS), or about 2.7 wins per season. Perhaps the biggest question for the Eagles, however, is how they hold off three potential rebound teams in the division. To be quite frank, I was close to picking season win total Overs on Dallas, Washington, and the Giants. I settled on just New York. If all three of those teams are better in 2026, the other team in the division probably has to fall.

WEEK 1: ARIZONA +10.5 (-110) AT LA CHARGERS

I have three separate angles in my top Week 1 betting systems piece in this guide that say not to dismiss the Cardinals’ chances of being very competitive at LA in Week 1. First off, underdogs of 6.5 points or more might be just 11-34-1 SU, BUT they are 32-13-1 ATS (71.1%) in Week 1 since ‘13. Second, teams that suffered eight or more close losses in the prior season (eight points or fewer) are also a nice Week 1 option to back the next season, as they have rebounded with a 13-7 SU and 14-5-1 ATS (73.6%) record since ‘13 when not matched up against a similar team. And finally, teams that dropped by five or more wins the prior season are a great rebound option for Week 1 of the follow-up campaign, showing a record of 21-17-1 SU and 26-13 ATS (66.7%) when not facing a similar team in the same time frame. It’s games like this that make betting the NFL very difficult at times. There is no doubt in most people’s minds that Arizona is expected to be the worst team in the NFC this season after losing 14 of their final 15 games of ‘25. However, the Cardinals were very explosive on occasion and arguably have one of the most talented groups of young, skilled offensive players in the league. They added to that core in the offseason by bringing in talented Notre Dame RB Jeremiyah Love. The main question is whether or not they can slow the Chargers enough to be competitive here. Well, considering the LA offense scored just 22 total points in the final three games of ‘25, maybe there isn’t any reason for concern? Plus, do we trust the Chargers as a double-digit favorite against anyone? They haven’t been one since 2020, and they won that contest just 34-28 at home vs. the Jets.

WEEK 1: NY GIANTS +2.5 (-105) VS. DALLAS

Angle No. 1 on my Week 1 NFL betting systems article in this guide has been a very strong and consistent one for me over the last decade-plus. It states that divisional home underdogs are 18-14-2 SU and 25-9 ATS (73.5%) in Week 1 since ‘09. There might not be a single team in the league that is looking forward to 2026 more than the New York Giants. Not only did last season open the door for a potential long-term nucleus of key players to emerge on both sides of the ball, but the franchise brought in one of the most successful coaches in recent memory in John Harbaugh this offseason. Optimism certainly reigns in New York right now, hence it’s somewhat of a surprise to see them open as +2.5 home underdogs to rival Dallas in Week 1. It’s not like the Cowboys lit the world on fire last year, as they finished 7-9-1 and were the only team in the NFL to allow over 30 points per game. They are

expected to be much improved, however, on both sides of the ball, as a healthy QB Dak Prescott returns and several key defensive additions were made. This is a Sunday night NBC contest and should draw significant interest. As of this writing, 70% of the handle at DraftKings is on the visiting Cowboys. That makes this a very dangerous spot. I’ve always been a believer that road favorites with bad defenses make for horrible bets. We know the Dallas offense will be potent. We BELIEVE the defense will be better based on changes made in the offseason. I stress the term believe because we don’t know for sure. Trusting a road favorite in such cases against the much-hyped rival takes some courage.

MATT BROWN

CARDINALS UNDER 0.5 DIVISION WINS (+130)

I, like many, have the Cardinals as one of the worst teams in the NFL headed into the season. I think there’s a decent chance they end up as the single worst team in football this year. The other three teams in the NFC West are all comfortably power-ranked inside the top half of the league, with the Rams and the Seahawks inside the top five. This will be a team led by Carson Beck at some point — testing out the rookie while desperately trying to get to the top of the draft board. If this bet loses, it’s probably the Cardinals stealing one from the 49ers in Week 18, when the Niners might not have anything left to play for. If that’s my fate, so be it.

ZACHARY COHEN

MALIK WILLIS OVER 549.5 RUSHING YARDS (-110)

In diving into the AFC team previews for this guide, I’m not sure there was a player who received more praise than Willis. New Dolphins GM Jon-Eric Sullivan and head coach Jeff Haseley were with Willis in Green Bay, and by signing him to a three-year, \$67.5 million contract, they’ve shown they believe he can be a franchise quarterback. Well, by all accounts, Willis has rewarded them for their belief so far. Willis impressed everyone who got to see him in practices, where he showed good command of the offense, flashed his arm talent, and continued to be a threat with his legs.

The legs are where we should focus. Willis averages roughly 45 yards per game on the ground as a starting quarterback, and doing that over a 17-game season would be good for 765 yards.

Willis is smart about when to take advantage of the green in front of him, and it doesn’t hurt that Miami is expected to be one of the worst teams in football. If the Dolphins are trailing by a decent amount late in games, Willis should pick up solid yardage by taking off against soft defenses that are fine with keeping the ball in front of them.

Realistically, this just feels like a play where we’re hoping Willis stays healthy.



NICK BAKAY

DJ MOORE OVER 824.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-115)

The best quarterback in the game just got a new No. 1 wide receiver. We should see RAC yards galore, and the Bills can finally target someone other than a tight end in the red zone.

DALTON KINCAID OVER 549.5 RECEIVING YARDS (-110)

The only real gamble is whether he stays healthy. So far, so good heading into 2026 — and if he stays on the field, it's a no-brainer.

KYLER MURRAY OVER 3,049.5 PASSING YARDS (-110) & OVER 18.5 PASSING TDS (-110)

Trust me, I have never been a big Murray fan, but I doubt the Vikings coaching staff is willing to suck J.J. McCarthy-hard again unless their wives enjoy packing up the house. So let's do some simple accounting: Murray may not be your idea of a winner, but he's proven capable of putting up serious fantasy numbers, and he just landed in clover. If Kevin O'Connell could resurrect Sam Darnold, what might he unlock here? Now consider the top-tier pass catchers at his disposal: Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison, Jauan Jennings, and T.J. Hockenson. Wow, I just talked myself into this.

MALIK WILLIS OVER 3.5 RUSHING TDS (-160)

Name one Miami wide receiver — you can't! Tyreek Hill and Jaylen Waddle are gone, and so is all hope. With the new QB identity trying to play like Josh Allen, this Over looks tasty.

CAM SKATTEBO UNDER 824.5 RUSHING YARDS (-110)

There's a new coach in Jersey, and he's been known to run the ball. The natural assumption is that this will benefit Skattebo. That is certainly one scenario. However, in my humble opinion, Skattebo's entire identity is woven into a running style that is simply unsustainable in the NFL. The kid didn't even survive his rookie year. He's coming off a major injury, botching backflips at WWE events, and looks like a concussion protocol waiting to happen.

JETS UNDER 5.5 WINS (-110)

No one ever went broke underestimating the Jets. In Year 2 under Aaron Glenn, there is still zero evidence he can actually do the job. It's like in my business: not everyone is a showrunner. You can be a good story guy or a great joke guy, but being a leader is entirely different. Then there's Geno Smith. He's practically 73 years old, with exactly one decent NFL season to his name. I'm not ready to see the light here. The Jets went 5-12 with Aaron Rodgers and 3-14 with Justin Fields and Tyrod Taylor — is Geno really any kind of upgrade? I'm just not seeing it.

To get to six wins, the only games they even have a prayer in are against Tennessee, Cleveland, Arizona, Vegas, and Miami twice. I don't think they will get there.

49ERS UNDER 9.5 WINS (+110)

Christian McCaffrey, George Kittle, Mike Evans, Deebo Samuel, and Nick Bosa are all getting old. This roster would look amazing if the year were 2022, but it's not. Ricky Pearsall is out, Jauan Jennings is gone and will be sorely missed, and even the head coach is dinged up. Sure, they get a few doormats on the schedule — Arizona twice, Miami, Atlanta, the Raiders, and the Giants — but every other matchup is brutal. That includes facing the reigning Super Bowl champion Seahawks and the Rams twice each.

KENNETH WALKER III UNDER 949.5 RUSHING YARDS (-110)

In Andy Reid's 13 seasons in Kansas City, a running back has surpassed 949 rushing yards just three times. Eliminate Jamaal Charles from the equation, and it's happened exactly once. More importantly, it hasn't happened a single time over the past eight consecutive seasons.

DAVE TULEY

BENGALS OVER 10.5 WINS (+100) & TO WIN AFC NORTH (+155)

Back in July, in VSiN's NFL Betting Guide 1.0, I gave out the Lions Over 10.5 (-140) regular-season wins, +180 to win the NFC North, and 18-1 to win the Super Bowl (as well as the Bears Over 9.5 at +115), as I was

mostly focused on the NFC North preview I did in the guide. But as the regular season approaches, I actually like the Bengals better as a divisional and conference winner. When Joe Burrow is healthy, the Bengals can score with anybody, so this is pretty much a play on the offensive line being able to keep Joe Cool upright. Cincy obviously has to overcome Baltimore in the division, but I think the Ravens will regret firing John Harbaugh, and the Bengals will seize the division. And of course, if I like them to win the division, I have to like them to go Over 10.5 wins.

SEAHAWKS TO WIN NFC WEST (+265)

Switching back to the NFC, I feel the defending Super Bowl champion Seahawks aren't getting the respect they deserve. The Rams are the futures-book favorites and a prohibitive -130 to win the NFC West, but we'll take the Seahawks at +265 in what should come down to a two-horse race we see as closer to a pick-'em. The Seahawks went 14-3 to win the division last year. With a bullseye on their back, they probably won't repeat that record, but we like them at plus-money to hold off the Rams again.

WEEK 1: BROWNS +7.5 (-110) AT JAGUARS, BUCCANEERS +4.5 (-123) AT BENGALS, CARDINALS +10.5 (-110) AT CHARGERS, DOLPHINS +3.5 (-110) AT RAIDERS

After the Week 1 schedule came out in May, I did a "Tuley's Takes" column with four bets (Browns +7.5, Bucs +3.5, Cardinals +10.5, and Dolphins +3.5). For my reasons on each pick, you can go back and read that column, but the common thread is that these lines all sit half a point above key numbers, and I don't expect them to be around after Labor Day. As of deadline for this VSiN guide, all were still available, with the Buccaneers up to +4 at Circa Sports. We realize the Bucs are the only decent team we're backing, but we feel these lines are overinflated by oddsmakers with the public fading these teams. We often see the dregs of the league exceed lowered expectations in Week 1.

WES REYNOLDS

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-150)

The Chargers made the playoffs once again last season with an 11-6 record and finished second in the AFC West, but they weren't looking up at the Kansas City Chiefs — it was the Denver Broncos instead.

The "Lightning Bolts" still have one of the game's elite quarterbacks in Justin Herbert, and they went and got him a new offensive coordinator — his fourth in seven seasons — with former Dolphins head coach Mike McDaniel coming into the fold. The play-calling and scheme should be much better, and the team's health held them back from advancing any further last season. So, this should finally be the Chargers' year to win the division for the first time since 2009, right?

Perhaps McDaniel's scheme will be the answer, but this Chargers offense still has average talent (19th WR, 16th RB per PFF). They added David Njoku and Charlie Kolar at tight end, but no one really scares opposing defenses other than the quarterback. They also made additions on the offensive line, but unfortunately, injuries are already plaguing this group and the season hasn't even started. Center Tyler Biadasz, who was brought in from Washington, is already on season-ending IR. Rashawn Slater, despite his high ceiling, has already been hurt in camp. Second-round rookie Jake Slaughter will be taking Biadasz's place, and the two free-agent guards — Cole Strange and Kayode Awosika — are still major question marks.

On defense, Jesse Minter has to be replaced at defensive coordinator, and while Chris O'Leary is a Minter disciple, this is only his second season as a DC anywhere (last year he was the Western Michigan DC). This group, aside from nickel Derwin James, also lacks elite talent. They were ranked near the bottom of the top 10 last season, but are still a question mark against elite offenses.

The Chargers also have a -24 net rest advantage this season and still face a second-place schedule with trips to Buffalo, Seattle, and the LA Rams in the first eight weeks, and they close at Denver, which should be nice and frigid in early January.

JOHN HANSEN

MALIK WILLIS OVER 549.5 REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS (-110)

Willis has five career games with 14 or more pass attempts, and he's rushed for 43 or more yards in four of the five. Fantasy Points is projecting 758 yards on the ground for Willis — a whopping 38% higher than this total — and the man runs like a deer. The Dolphins actually have some hope at receiver in the form of rookies Caleb Douglas and Chris Bell, but there's no question that Willis will be relying on his legs all season, so this looks like a lock if he can play in 13+ games.

DJ MOORE OVER 59.5 REGULAR SEASON RECEPTIONS (-115)

Moore is absolutely giddy to be with Josh Allen (and away from Caleb Williams), and the vibes have been immaculate in Buffalo. He'll play under HC Joe Brady, who ran the Panthers' offense when Moore had arguably his best season. Moore goes from Williams — who ranked 40th in catchable throw rate (69.4%) out of 45 QBs last year — to Allen, who ranked fourth (79.1%). He's a lock to get "WR1" treatment, since they've been looking for an outside wideout who can beat man coverage, and the durable Moore typically sees an elite volume of designed targets. We're projecting a conservative 68 receptions at Fantasy Points, a solid 14% higher than this line.

JADARIAN PRICE OVER 724.5 REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS (-110)

It looks like the Seahawks gave Price the star treatment after his lower-body/leg soreness situation popped up early in camp, and I can't blame them because he looks like a star on the field. He's an explosion waiting to happen, which is why we're projecting 939 rushing yards for Price — a considerable 29.6% higher than this line. Zach Charbonnet will play this year, but maybe not until November, and if Price's early showing is any indication, this should be an easy win if the young buck can stay healthy.

MICHAEL PITTMAN OVER 70.5 REGULAR SEASON RECEPTIONS (-115)

He's missed most of camp with a leg issue, which isn't great, but it's not considered serious. It looks like they're just being cautious with a critical player in their offense, which I think Pittman is. Aaron Rodgers was somehow 59th among QBs last year with a 6.2 aDOT and 46th in deep-throw percentage (9.4%), so I expect Pittman, who saw about 90% of his targets in the short-to-intermediate area, to be their volume receiver. Fantasy Points is conservatively projecting 78 receptions, which is 10.6% over this total.

JORDAN MASON OVER 649.5 REGULAR SEASON RUSHING YARDS (-110)

While rookie Demond Claiborne may have a small role all year in this backfield, all signs still point to Mason being their primary back on early downs — and they have made running the football a major point of emphasis in camp this summer. Mason has looked to be "in the best shape of his career," which doesn't seem hyperbolic if you saw him cut and move this summer. Running behind an OL that has sneaky top-five potential this year now that everyone's healthy, Mason should have this in the bag if he can play 14+ games.

ADAM BURKE

TYLER SHOUGH OVER 3,449.5 PASSING YARDS (-120)

Shough averaged 217 passing yards per game last season over nine starts and two relief efforts. Even if he just averages that, that would be nearly 3,700 yards over 17 games. He's not really going to be in a timeshare this season and he's in Year 2 of Kellen Moore's system. Shough averaged 251 passing yards per start in his nine starts and completed more than 69% of his passes. He is definitely "the guy" for New Orleans this season and actually played pretty well when you dig into the numbers. This should be a pass-first offense and a more dynamic unit if Jordyn Tyson can get healthy.





MOST REGULAR SEASON FIELD GOALS: WILL REICHARD (14-1)

Reichard went 24-of-30 in his rookie season in 2024 and improved greatly to 33-of-35 last season, as his 94.3% success rate was third in the league. He did that with a Vikings team that was dead last in the NFL with 30 turnovers, 21 of them interceptions. The third-year player out of Alabama should get more opportunities with Kyler Murray and with some better care of the football. The Vikings were also 32nd in third down conversion rate, so they squandered some chances to extend drives and have a chance at more points. He also plays for a team that has an excellent defense that could get some extra possessions and better field position.

STORMY BUONANTONY

TREVOR LAWRENCE OVER 3,774.5 PASSING YARDS (-105)

For one, Liam Coen wants to pass the ball, which works well for this angle. He was essentially brought in to fix Lawrence, and we saw the results as last season went on. Lawrence had a significant uptick in his production (and that of the overall offense) over the back half of the season. Something clicked. They won eight of their last nine games and took the Bills to the brink in the wild-card round. Over those last 10 games, Lawrence was averaging nearly 263 passing yards per game. Over a full season, that pace puts him around 4,470. He still ended up with more than 4,000 yards, good for sixth in the NFL. I like the weapons at his disposal. Obviously, bringing in Jakobi Meyers helped, and ideally you get a healthy Brian Thomas Jr. for a full season. Another key to backing Lawrence here is his durability. The dude stays on the field and has played at least 16 games in four of his five seasons as a pro so far. I also think a sprinkle on 20-1 for the NFL's Passing Yards Leader is an attractive look.

JOSH ALLEN OVER 3,624.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

This number has gone up about 85 yards since I was first drawn to it, but I still think it's a worthwhile play. Allen finished last season with 3,668 yards, which was his lowest output since 2019 and is still more than this prop. He is CONSISTENTLY going over this number, and typically by a comfortable margin — he topped 4,200 yards every season from 2020 to 2023, including more than 4,300 in 2023. And he's a durable guy: Allen has played 16+ games in every season since his rookie year. It's a new head coach, but former OC Joe Brady is running the ship, so I don't anticipate much offensive change — plus, he's got a new toy to deliver the ball to this year in DJ Moore. Give me the Over.

MATT YOUNANS

PACKERS UNDER 10.5 WINS (-165)

If the situation doesn't improve in Green Bay, this season should be Matt LaFleur's last. He's lucky to still be the coach after an embarrassing implosion in 2025, when the Packers lost their final four regular-season games to finish 9-7-1 and slip to the NFC's No. 7 seed for the third straight postseason. Things went from bad to worse when LaFleur blew a 21-3 halftime lead in a wild-card loss at Chicago. The defense will be missing Micah Parsons in September, and the running attack could be a weakness again with Josh Jacobs' status in doubt. The Packers are not reaching double-digit wins unless LaFleur and quarterback Jordan Love get their act together — and their act is getting tired. The question here is: do you prefer betting Under 9.5 at +110, or laying a price to make Green Bay get to 11 wins?



FERNANDO MENDOZA UNDER 2,050.5 PASSING YARDS (-110)

I bet this prop Under 2,700 yards (and also 14 touchdown passes) after the draft, and I would still play it at a much lower number — but the market has been moving fast at DraftKings and FanDuel. The Raiders' plan — agreed upon by broadcaster/fashion model/minority owner Tom Brady, general manager John Spytek and coach Klint Kubiak — was always to sit Mendoza early in the season and allow the No. 1 overall pick to learn behind veteran Kirk Cousins until he's ready to roll. After watching three preseason games, it's obvious Mendoza is far from ready. According to those who report from practices, Cousins consistently runs the offense better than the rookie. The fans and media mouth-breathers who say Mendoza should start Week 1 are clueless fools. Mendoza probably gets fewer than 10 starts this season unless a Cousins injury changes the picture in Las Vegas.

DESHAUN WATSON UNDER 1,749.5 PASSING YARDS (-120)

Everyone knows the Browns are starting Watson only as a Hail Mary. Cleveland's trade for Watson — and the subsequent contract extension — was the worst deal in NFL history, and the bozos running the Browns want to try to salvage something from the trash pile. Watson was awful in the preseason and seems unlikely to make it through September.

PICK YOUR SPOTS

how to find an edge in circa million

by Adam Burke

The Circa Million is an NFL Pick 'Em contest with five picks per week over the 18 weeks of the NFL season. The lines come out on Thursday morning and do not move, so every contestant has the same set of point spreads available to them. That is a very important point because it can dictate your strategy from the start or as the season goes along.

Keep that in mind as you read along. There are only 90 points possible in this contest - one point for a win, a half-point for a push, and zero points for a loss. That means that the margin for error is very thin in the quest to cash in the world's most recognizable NFL point spread contest.

In the history of Circa Million, which dates back to 2019, the winning point totals going from 2025 to 2019:

2025: 60.5 (60-29-1, 67.4%)
2024: 62 (60-26-4, 69.8%)
2023: 62.5 (62-27-1, 69.7%)
2022: 61.5 (59-26-4-1, 69.4%)
2021: 63 (63-27, 70%)
2020: 57 (56-27-2, 67.5%)
2019: 58.5 (57-25-3, 69.5%)

In 2019 and 2020, the season only had 17 weeks instead of the 18 it has now, so that's why the point totals are lower, but the win rate is still pretty similar. Making the money is going to require 65% or better. Like I said, the margin for error is very thin.

Here are some potential contest strategies for the Circa Million (most are also applicable to other NFL Pick 'Em contests):

1 PLAY THE "STALE" LINES

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

Sometimes you'll get an even more obvious example like when a quarterback gets hurt on Friday or is ruled out. For example, if Patrick Mahomes were to be ruled out in Week 1, the Broncos would flip to a favorite. If that announcement came down on Friday, it would be really hard not to take Denver with that much line value. Those opportunities will come up throughout the season for sure.

2 FADE THE CONSENSUS

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

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

3 PLAY ONLY HALF-POINT LINES

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

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

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

4 BE MINDFUL OF THE QUARTER PRIZES

One of the best characteristics of Circa Million is that you have a chance to make money in smaller segments of the contest, even if your season-long record is not very good. The season is broken into four quarters (Weeks 1-4, 5-9, 10-13, 14-18), and the prizes for cashing in a quarter are very lucrative. Stay locked in, even if the season isn't going the way that you want it. You might still be able to salvage something by getting hot for four or five weeks across 20 or 25 picks.

Whether you are participating in the Circa Million or a different Pick 'Em contest, consider these strategies when making your picks.

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12 MONEY-MAKING WEEK 1 NFL BETTING SYSTEMS

by Steve Makinen

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SYSTEM #2

Home teams priced in the range of +3 to -3 in Week 1 non-conference games have gone just 5-16 SU and 3-17-1 ATS since 2015 (Loss: -15.6 units, ROI: -78%, Grade 75)

2026 Potential Plays: AGAINST PITTSBURGH

Analysis: In general, home teams have not fared all that well recently in Week 1. Arguments have often been made lately about the validity of home-field advantage overall. When you consider the unfamiliarity that comes with playing an out-of-conference opponent in Week 1, that home-field edge may shrink even further. Whatever the case, hosts have not been performing well in this scenario over the last decade. Over the last three years, hosts have lost three straight ATS. Last year, no games qualified. This year, only one officially does, but the NE-SEA and TB-CIN games showed lines of -3.5 at press time.

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The anticipation for the start of the NFL regular season each September is unmatched, especially for sports bettors. Like any other season, bettors will once again look for the best info they can find to get their campaigns off to a profitable start in Week 1. As such, it's an ideal time to take a closer look at 12 different betting systems that have been successful and consistent when focusing exclusively on past Week 1 action.

These are angles that take into account the type of matchup, line positioning, how the teams fared the previous year and transition into the follow-up season opener, and a few other variables.

SYSTEM #1

DIVISIONAL HOME UNDERDOGS ARE 18-14-2 SU AND 25-9 ATS (73.5%) IN WEEK 1 SINCE 2009 (WIN: +14.1 UNITS, ROI: 41.4%, GRADE 75)

2026 Potential Play: NY GIANTS

Analysis: Unlike last year, when there were eight divisional matchups, this year there are only five. And only two of those games fit the bill for this very successful system. There isn't a whole lot more motivating than an opening week contest at home against a targeted team in the division. In most past cases, the road favorite in this scenario was a returning playoff team, while the home dog was an aspiring one. However, note that in a very rare losing season, last year's Week 1 home dogs were just 1-3 ATS with no outright upsets. New York has high aspirations for 2026, and a fast start against a fierce divisional rival would do a lot to get the ball rolling.

SYSTEM #3

NFL opening week road teams that won between 4-6 games the prior season are 56-24-5 ATS (70%) since 2004 (Win: +30.6 units, ROI: 38.3%, Grade 75)

2026 PLAYS: PLAY ON NEW ORLEANS, CLEVELAND, WASHINGTON

Analysis: Teams in the 4-6 win range usually qualify as potential bounce-back teams the next season, with the start of the new season offering fresh motivation and momentum. In many cases, bad luck, injuries, or even tanking soured their records the prior season. Over the last two seasons, these teams have gone 7-3 ATS, including an outright upset by the Raiders in New England last year. As you can see, three teams qualify for this angle in 2026.

SYSTEM #4

LAYING BIG POINTS IS RARELY A GOOD IDEA IN A WEEK 1 NFL CONTEST, AS UNDERDOGS OF 6.5 POINTS OR MORE MIGHT BE JUST 11-34-1 SU, BUT THEY ARE 32-13-1 ATS (71.1%) IN WEEK 1 SINCE 2013 (WIN: +17.7 UNITS, ROI: 39.3%, GRADE 75)

2026 POTENTIAL PLAY: PLAY NEW ORLEANS, CLEVELAND, ARIZONA

Analysis: There is a lot to be said about a team's ability to start over in the NFL, and with every Week 1 game comes a fresh slate. All that happened last year is forgotten as both teams go into these games with 0-0 records. In many cases, strange or fluky happenings from the past season caused these Week 1 lines to be so inflated. Trust that the underdogs will show up and compete, regardless of what the prior-year records indicated or the doom and gloom the talking heads are sharing about these franchises' prospects. Note that over the last two years, the qualifying teams went 0-5 SU but 5-0 ATS.

SYSTEM #5

Opening week home favorites hosting teams that were above .500 the prior season are 54-30-5 ATS (64.3%) since 2000 (Win: +21 units, ROI: 25%, Grade 67)

2026 PLAYS: SEATTLE, MINNESOTA, KANSAS CITY

Analysis: Home favorites hosting a quality opponent are likely a very strong team themselves, or at least expected to be much better, and opening the season provides extra motivation. After a 4-0 ATS performance last season, this angle could be gaining steam again. For 2026, three plays are on tap.

SYSTEM #6

DIVISIONAL ROAD/NEUTRAL UNDERDOGS OF 6.5 POINTS OR LESS ARE ON AN 18-16 SU AND 22-12-1 ATS (64.7%) RUN SINCE 2013. (WIN: +8.9 UNITS, ROI: 26.2%, GRADE 65)

2026 Potential Play: SAN FRANCISCO, WASHINGTON, GREEN BAY, DENVER

Analysis: There are five divisional contests on the NFL Week 1 slate, but only three of those feature road underdogs we can focus on as of Wednesday 8/26, as the others feature road favorites. Strangely, two of the qualifying teams are returning playoff teams. That said, this angle was 1-2 SU and ATS a year ago, after 0-2 SU and ATS the prior season. It could be losing its luster.

SYSTEM #7

NON-CONFERENCE ROAD FAVORITES OF 6 POINTS OR FEWER HAVE BEEN NEARLY AUTOMATIC IN WEEK 1 NFL ACTION SINCE 2015, GOING 15-2 SU AND ATS (88.2%). (WIN: +12.8 UNITS, ROI: 75.3%, GRADE 70)

2026 Potential Play: NONE QUALIFY THIS SEASON

Analysis: There has been so much focus recently on intra-divisional battles in Week 1 in recent seasons, including by myself, that these non-conference road favorite mismatches have been overlooked. The teams qualifying for this angle have outscored their opponents 27.6-16.6 on average while laying just 3.3 points. Unfortunately, all four of our non-conference matchups for Week 1 of 2026 show home favorites. Perhaps next year.

SYSTEM #8

TEAMS THAT AVERAGED BETTER THAN 26 PPG IN THE PRIOR SEASON ARE PLAY-AGAINST TEAMS IN WEEK 1 OF THE FOLLOW-UP CAMPAIGN, SHOWING A RECORD OF 42-26 SU BUT JUST 27-41 ATS (39.7%) WHEN NOT MATCHED UP AGAINST A FELLOW HIGH-SCORING TEAM SINCE 2013 (AGAINST WIN: +11.3 UNITS, ROI: 16.7%, GRADE 60)

2026 Plays: AGAINST LA RAMS, DETROIT, JACKSONVILLE, BUFFALO, INDIANAPOLIS, DALLAS

Analysis: You will see in the next system that defense "travels" better from season-to-season, at least when it comes to Week 1 success. This offensive fade angle has some foundation because the teams qualifying for it are usually among the most popular or public picks based on their scoring ability. Oddsmakers tend to shade lines against such teams.

SYSTEM #9

TEAMS THAT ALLOWED FEWER THAN 20 PPG IN THE PRIOR SEASON ARE PLAY-ON TEAMS IN WEEK 1 OF THE FOLLOW-UP CAMPAIGN, BOASTING A RECORD OF 30-10 SU AND 27-13 ATS (67.5%) WHEN NOT MATCHED UP AGAINST A FELLOW STRONG DEFENSIVE TEAM SINCE 2017 (WIN: +12.7 UNITS, ROI: 31.8%, GRADE 68)

2026 Plays: JACKSONVILLE, HOUSTON, PHILADELPHIA, MINNESOTA

Analysis: Strong defensive stats would seem to be more reliable for backing in Week 1 of a follow-up season than offensive scoring numbers. Assuming these stout units are still intact, you should feel no fear in going back to the well with them in their openers. There were eight teams that allowed fewer than 20 PPG last year, but four of them square off against one another.

SYSTEM #10

TEAMS THAT SUFFERED THROUGH A SEASON WITH A TURNOVER DIFFERENTIAL OF -0.9 OR WORSE PER GAME REBOUND NICELY IN WEEK 1 OF THE FOLLOW-UP CAMPAIGN, GOING 11-8-1 SU AND 14-5-1 ATS (73.6%) SINCE 2013 WHEN NOT MATCHED UP AGAINST SIMILAR TEAMS. (WIN: +8.5 UNITS, ROI: 44.7%, GRADE 68)

2026 Plays: NY JETS

Analysis: It is said that the teams with the worst turnover differentials in any given season have some of the worst luck. They also typically have very bad records. This makes them the ideal candidates to back in Week 1 of a season, as they are usually sided against heavily by oddsmakers and their slate for the new season is as clean now as anyone's. It also helps when those teams make changes at the position that drives much of the turnover differential: quarterback.

SYSTEM #11

TEAMS THAT SUFFERED EIGHT OR MORE CLOSE LOSSES IN THE PRIOR SEASON (8 POINTS OR FEWER) ARE ALSO A NICE WEEK 1 OPTION TO BACK THE NEXT SEASON, AS THEY HAVE REBOUNDED WITH A 13-7 SU AND 14-5-1 ATS (73.6%) RECORD SINCE 2013 WHEN NOT MATCHED UP AGAINST A SIMILAR TEAM. (WIN: +8.5 UNITS, ROI: 44.7%, GRADE 68)

2026 Plays: ARIZONA, KANSAS CITY

Analysis: Losing a lot of close games in any given season is also considered an unlucky trait, and one that teams have a good chance to bounce back from. Apparently, the bouncing back starts as soon as Week 1. Remember, each team's slate is clean. They don't give a thought to what happened last season, other than believing they are a better team than the prior year's record indicated.

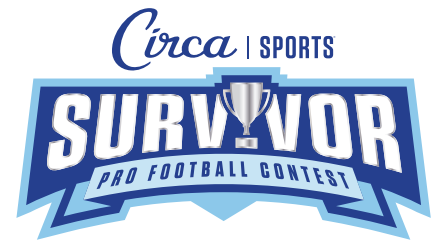
SYSTEM #12

TEAMS THAT DROPPED BY FIVE OR MORE WINS THE PRIOR SEASON ARE A GREAT REBOUND OPTION FOR WEEK 1 OF THE FOLLOW-UP CAMPAIGN, SHOWING A RECORD OF 21-17-1 SU AND 26-13 ATS (66.7%) WHEN NOT FACING A SIMILAR TEAM SINCE 2013. FOR THE RECORD, THESE GAMES HAVE ALSO BEEN HUGE UNDER THE TOTAL OPPORTUNITIES, 28-11 (71.8%). (WIN: +11.7 UNITS, ROI: 30%, GRADE 67)

2026 Plays: DETROIT, ARIZONA, WASHINGTON, MINNESOTA, KANSAS CITY

Analysis: For teams to suffer a 5+ win decline from one season to the next, something other than simple execution had to have gone wrong. In most cases, it's due to injuries, but it can also come from bad turnover luck, several heartbreaking losses, or even untimely schedule difficulties. The massive drop makes them ideal candidates to rebound the next season, starting as early as Week 1.

SURVIVAL OF THE SAVVIEST: HOW TO NAVIGATE CIRCA SURVIVOR



by Adam Burke

Survivor contests have really increased in popularity over the last few seasons because the concept is really simple. Just pick a team to win every week, but once you use them, you lose them. Some Survivor pools have wrinkles, and Circa Survivor is absolutely one of them. I'll get to that in a second, but first, some additional context on Survivor contests.

As simple as the concept itself is, the execution is not. Big favorites can and will lose, and we'll see more than a few take out large swaths of the Survivor field during the upcoming season. One of the benefits of the Circa Survivor is that contestants are allowed to have up to 10 entries, so you can spread out your exposure and have the opportunity to advance with multiple entries on multiple teams or not get knocked out completely because you happened to pick the big favorite that went down.

Here are some potential strategies for Circa Survivor:

1 CREATE A BLUEPRINT FOR THE SEASON

I cannot stress this point enough. There is no guarantee that you get to Week 6, Week 8, Week 12, Week 15, or the end, but if you do get to a certain point, you want to make sure that you have good options available.

Some contestants like to have the entire year planned out because you can only use each team once. That might mean staying away from division games or having to use a road team, so you study the schedule to find the best options on a weekly basis. Contestants will start with, say, the Rams and find the game where they are going to be the largest favorite. That looks like Week 6 against the Cardinals.

However, the main wrinkle of the Circa Survivor format is that Thanksgiving and Christmas are their own "weeks", so there are five "Thanksgiving" games, with one on Wednesday, three on Thursday, and one on Friday. There are also three games on Christmas, which falls on a Friday this year. The Packers, Rams, Bills, Broncos, and Bears play on BOTH holidays. That means only one Christmas team (Seahawks) doesn't play in one of the five Thanksgiving games.

Injuries and other things happen, so you would like to keep as many of those teams available as possible. With the Rams, while Week 6 looks like a layup, if not a slam dunk, can you risk not having them for a holiday "week"?

Independent of the holiday weeks, you still want to plan ahead. Is there a week with limited big favorites later in the season? For example, in Week 10, the "safe" picks look like the Bills on the road against the Jets, Seahawks at the Raiders, Colts at home against the Dolphins, and the Rams on the road against the Cardinals. Well, it's tough to use the Rams, Bills, and Seahawks because of the holiday weeks. If you use the Colts prior to Week 10, you might end up being pushed into a short favorite as opposed to a favorite of close to a touchdown.

When my partner Marc Goldberg (Spooky Express) and I made it to the final 15 entries in 2023, we didn't take a single road team. It was a personal preference, but we also structured our available teams accordingly to not have to trust a team playing away from home.

2 JUST GO 1-0

The other primary option is to just try to go 1-0 for 20 straight weeks and take whatever the best pick is that week and not worry about saving a team for later. What difference does it make if the Ravens will be -10 against the Browns in Week 16 if you don't make it that far? Why save a team if you need them right now?

The other advantage to this mindset is that holding off on the Ravens until Week 16 is all well and good, but what if Lamar Jackson gets injured or if the Ravens don't really need to play anybody that week because of the playoff picture?

The only game that matters is the one coming up that weekend. Somebody could always get hurt or something could happen that makes a team much more attractive than they would have looked at the start of the season. A team you were unlikely to use suddenly becomes an option due to injuries, a coaching change, or a QB change. The NFL season is very fluid.

Also, you have to pick 20 of the 32 teams to win, so being able to "sneak" a lesser opponent through could create a huge advantage. That's true of both the 20-0 mindset and the 1-0 mindset, but sometimes it's easier to make that call while living in the present. On the other hand, you could get caught on a week where there aren't many big favorites and have to take a weak team because you didn't plan accordingly, as mentioned above.

3 AVOID THE MOST POPULAR PICKS?

Back in 2023, the Circa Survivor contest lost 34.2% of the field after the Bengals lost in Week 1 to the Patriots. That was 4,895 entries that didn't even get a single win. Nearly 80% of the field that season was out by the end of Week 4. Nothing is a lock.

Upsets do happen. In fact, 33 double-digit favorites have lost since the start of the 2016 season. Yes, 270 of them have won, per the KillerSports database, but you don't want to be on #34 or #35 this season. There have been 140 favorites of a touchdown or more that have lost in that span.

In the last 303 games with a double-digit favorite, the underdog has won outright about 11% of the time. Some Survivor players will shy away from the most obvious pick in hopes that the team slips up and goes down and a large chunk of the field gets eliminated. Not only could that mean staying alive while others falter, but it could also mean saving that team for a future game when there are tougher decisions on the board.

There is risk involved, to say the least, but the reward could be really nice, especially if you like another team nearly as much. There is risk in each and every one of these strategies and a hybrid approach is probably the way to go, including whatever strategy you or your entry partners would like to implement.

It takes perfection to cash in Survivor. While that absolutely includes a degree of luck, you can also set yourself up for success as much as possible.

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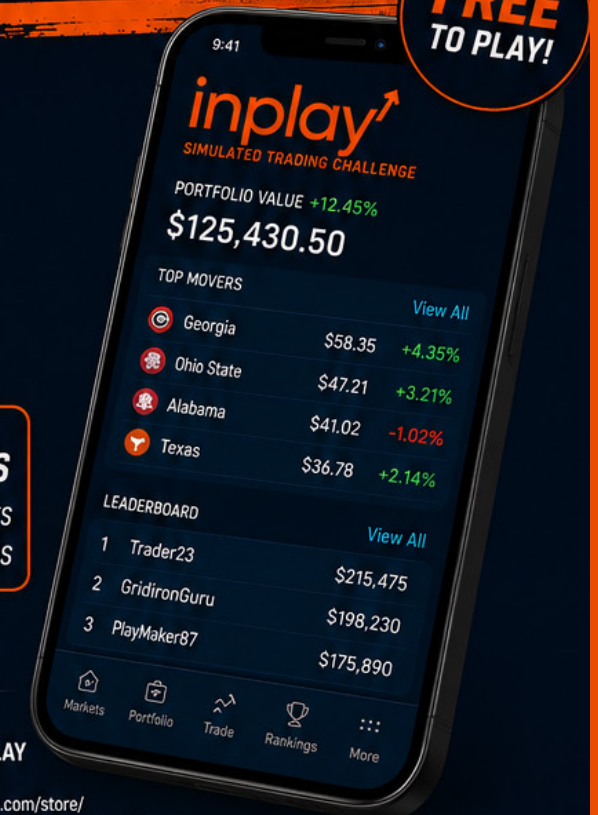
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WHY YOU NEED TO PLAN FOR CIRCA SURVIVOR'S HOLIDAY WEEKS NOW

by Team Rankings

Twelve teams play Circa's two holiday legs. Six play both. And by the time Thanksgiving arrives, our projections say most entries won't have them available.

The best team on Circa Survivor's 2026 Thanksgiving slate is the Los Angeles Rams, a 5.5-point favorite over Green Bay on Thanksgiving Eve. Our projections have them available to only 38% of the entries that make it that far, because there will be many tempting weeks to use them.

Christmas is worse. Philadelphia is the slate's top option at 54% win odds, and all of the matchups currently look very even. All eight Christmas teams also have high value throughout the contest, and availability could be an issue for most of them. Philadelphia, Houston, and Buffalo are the only three teams we project to be available to at least 30% of entries by then.

Availability, the share of remaining entries that haven't already spent a given team, is the number that should be driving your 2026 planning. It's also a number some players won't look at until mid-November. By then, the decisions that produced it are eight weeks old.

Circa Survivor runs 20 picks: Weeks 1 through 18 plus separate Thanksgiving and Christmas legs, at \$1,000 per entry, up to 10 entries per person, \$20 million guaranteed, no rake. Each team can be used once. One loss and you're out. In 2025, 18,718 entries produced five survivors at roughly \$3.74 million each.

The common advice is to save your holiday teams for the holidays. In 2026, that is going to be put to the test right away in Week 1, and throughout the year, as the best teams for the holiday weeks will also be among the top pick options in many other weeks.

MORE HOLIDAY GAMES SHOULD MAKE THIS EASIER. THEY DON'T.

Both legs expanded this year. Thanksgiving is now five games, one Wednesday night, three on Thursday, and one on Black Friday, with picks limited to those ten teams and a deadline of Wednesday at 4 p.m. PT, less than 48 hours after Monday Night Football. Christmas is four games across Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, up from three a year ago, with picks limited to those eight teams.

More inventory should mean more room. It doesn't, because the additional inventory is concentrated among teams you'll badly want to use somewhere else.

Here's the Thanksgiving board (right) as it projects as of Friday, August 28.

The Rams are the only team on the slate favored by more than a field goal. They also project as the biggest favorite in three other weeks before we get to Thanksgiving, including two matchups against Arizona when they could be one of the largest favorites of the year.

Christmas is tighter still. No team on the slate projects above 54% win odds, and three of the four games are inside a point and a half.

MATCHUP	DAY	SPREAD	WIN ODDS	PROJ. PICK %	PROJ. AVAILABILITY
LA Rams vs. Green Bay	WED	-5.5	68%	30%	38%
Detroit vs. Chicago	THU	-2.5	61%	17%	42%
Buffalo vs. Kansas City	THU	-2.5	60%	13%	61%
Denver at Pittsburgh	FRI	-1.5	55%	12%	74%
Dallas vs. Philadelphia	THU	-1.5	51%	10%	41%

Put those together and the shape of the problem is clear. Christmas is close to a coin flip across the board. Thanksgiving is mostly the same, and the biggest favorite has projected odds under 70%. Several of the same teams appear on both legs.

Want to see which teams you can afford to use before the holidays? PoolGenius's Circa Survivor tools let you compare projected availability, future value, win odds, and full-season paths across all 20 Circa legs.

CAN YOU MAKE IT TO WEEK 9 WITH MOST OF YOUR HOLIDAY TEAMS INTACT?

Of the 12 teams that play on Thanksgiving or Christmas, only Pittsburgh falls outside our Top 20 in future value. And remember, you have to use 20 picks to get through the full contest.

What that means is that you are either going to use most of those 12 holiday teams at some point in the contest in a week that is not Thanksgiving or Christmas, or you are going to save them and have to dip deeper into the team pool, picking more teams like the New York Giants, Washington Commanders, or perhaps the Las Vegas Raiders in Week 1 against Miami.

You face some early calls where a few of the holiday teams show up among the options, like Detroit or Philadelphia in Week 1.

The pressure to use the holiday teams really kicks in by Week 9. In each of Weeks 9 through 11, four of the five biggest favorites in our projections also play on a holiday. In Week 11, the week right before any Thanksgiving decision, eight of the top nine teams could also be in consideration for a holiday pick.

It continues in between the two holidays as well, as the top options are again nearly universally holiday teams. That includes Denver vs. Miami and Philadelphia vs. Arizona in Week 13, Seattle vs. the New York Giants and Detroit vs. Tennessee in Week 14, and Green Bay vs. Miami in Week 15.

With the two key holiday weeks looking so muddled as we start the year, the entries that can maintain as much flexibility as possible through Week 9 will have an advantage. They can then set their paths and react to how teams have evolved, along with how Circa contestants have been saving and using teams.

Before you lock in those early-season choices, view the PoolGenius offers available to VSIN readers and map out how your Week 1 decisions could affect Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the weeks in between.

DO NOT FORGET THE THANKSGIVING UNDERDOG PLAY, BUT UNDERSTAND WHY IT WORKED

YEAR	MOST POPULAR PICK	PICK SHARE	RESULT
2020	Dallas -2.5	43.7%	LOST
2021	Dallas -7	59.7%	LOST
2022	Buffalo -9.5	58.6%	WON
2023	Detroit -8.5	58.2%	LOST
2024	Kansas City -13.5	53.7%	WON
2025	Philadelphia -7	54.3%	LOST

In 2025, every one of the 45 survivors heading to Week 14 had used an underdog on the Thanksgiving pick, mostly Chicago. Philadelphia made up over half of all picks on Thanksgiving, and Baltimore another 30%, so when the top two favorites lost, it destroyed the pool. Those that went directly against the popular Eagles benefited directly from that one key result.

The Circa contest has a history of underdogs being key picks on Thanksgiving. Here are the most popular Thanksgiving picks in Circa, and the result, since 2020.

The crowd's Thanksgiving pick has lost in four of Circa's six seasons. While you would not predict that

many upsets, the strategy behind going against the popular pick is much stronger on a holiday week with limited options than in a normal survivor week.

The edge came from the concentration on the favorite, not merely from picking an upset with any underdog. When one team holds more than half the field, a single upset dramatically changes the value of the entries that get through.

As of right now, we are not projecting any team to get as concentrated as last year. So the relative payoff on an underdog may not materialize. However, things change. Surprises or a key injury will emerge, and you will want to evaluate whether the holiday favorites are the right picks or the right opportunities to pick against because a large portion of the pool will flock to them.

Watch pick popularity outlooks as each holiday week develops. If a favorite pushes toward 50%, the math flips fast. If the field spreads across five games, taking the best team you still have will probably be the better play.

See which teams you can afford to use early and which ones you should save. PoolGenius's Circa Survivor tools combine current win odds, projected pick popularity, projected availability, and future value in a full-season planner built around all 20 Circa legs.

View VSIN Offers & Pool Picks Discounts

THE TOOLS BUILT FOR CIRCA SURVIVOR



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2026 CIRCA SURVIVOR A BLUEPRINT FOR ALL 20 WEEKS

by Adam Burke



The NFL is such a juggernaut of a league that we think about it all year long. With the opening game on September 9 and the Super Bowl on February 14 (better talk your way into alternate Valentine's Day plans now), there are 159 days when the league is truly in-season, and 206 days without it, yet here we are obsessing over the draft in April and the schedule release in May.

But, that also means it's never too early to plot out your course of action in NFL Survivor pools. Obviously we have a big one right here at the Circa Resort & Casino, where you can wave hi to our hosts in the world's largest sportsbook and take your shot at winning an enormous prize guarantee. There are also some very, very noticeable wrinkles that are not exclusive to this contest, but are certainly not classified as the traditional settings.

As an annual Circa Survivor participant and somebody who was down to the final 13 back in 2023 with my partner Marc "Spooky" Goldberg, the contest never seems to stray that far from my mind and I don't think I'm alone in that. Whether you are in Circa Survivor, a big pool somewhere else, or even ones with just friends/family/co-workers, you know that the concept is simple and the execution is not.

Pick one team to win each week. Once you take a team, you cannot take them again. Like I always say about Circa Survivor, which is 18 weeks plus a "week" for Thanksgiving and a "week" for Christmas, you have to take 20 of the 32 NFL teams to win. There are not 20 really good teams in the NFL. In order to know when to deploy those lesser teams in the most advantageous spot possible, creating a blueprint for each week is a good way to get in the right mindset, organize your thoughts, and have a plan of attack.

As we all know, "the best-laid plans often go awry," but even poet Robert Burns had to believe in having a plan. You just have to be adaptable. That is especially true in a contest such as this. Injuries happen. Teams overperform. Teams underwhelm. Coaches get fired. Applying some game theory presents opportunities that you hadn't previously considered. By no means is your plan in the spring or summer going to be gospel for the entire season, but preparedness matters a lot in Survivor.

The most obvious example for the 2026 season is that six of the eight teams that play on Christmas Eve or Christmas also play on Thanksgiving Eve, Thanksgiving, or Black Friday. Remember, you can only take each team once. As mentioned, in Circa Survivor, where the holidays are their own "weeks," that means that you'd like to have as many of those teams available as possible because those games are in late November and late December where anything can happen.

The Packers, Rams, Bears, Bills, Eagles, and Broncos are the six teams. Not only are Packers vs. Bears, Bills vs. Broncos, and Rams vs. Seahawks brutal games to pick from in a contest with literally zero margin for error, but what if Josh Allen gets hurt? What if Matthew Stafford gets hurt? What if Bo Nix is missing three offensive linemen? What if the Packers are down four or five starting defensive players?

So that's one part. The other part is trying to isolate the teams that you want to pick on early, late, and often. The Cardinals (+250), Dolphins (+350), and Jets (+850) are all lined in single digits to have the fewest wins. The next tier has the Raiders (10-1), Browns (+1050), Falcons (15-1), and Titans (17-1). Your view may vary on these two sets of teams, but they are likely to be underdogs more often than not and likely significant underdogs more often than not.

Lastly, let's talk about your Survivor goal. Your goal is to go 18-0 (or 20-0, in the case of Circa Survivor), but that starts by going 1-0 each week. Weighing the risk and reward of "saving" a team for another week, another spot, another game can be both a blessing and a curse. If you are saving the Ravens for Week 5 instead of taking them in Week 1 and Lamar Jackson gets hurt in Week 4, that plan goes out the window. However, if Jackson is still healthy and you took a lesser team in Week 1 to get by, you may have a stronger option than some of the others in the pool. You have to thread the needle between planning to go 18-0 or 20-0 while not hurting your chances too badly of going 1-0 by thinking more about the future than the present.

The schedule has been out for a while. We can see the situational spots to consider. We can see when there might be some really young teams to pick on early or some older teams to attempt to pick on late when everybody is tired. With 10 new head coaches around the league, we can see who their early assignments are. Again, you're not tied to this by any means, but it is an exercise to show how to plan your route to winning your NFL Survivor pool.

Let's go week-to-week and plot out a path for 2026 Survivor.

All odds are from DraftKings as of August 19.



WEEK 1

JAGUARS (-7.5) OVER BROWNS

The first game of the Todd Monken era comes against a team that went 13-4 and won nine of their last 10 regular season games for first-year head coach Liam Coen. That was also with an offense that put up just 5.2 yards per play.

On the Cleveland side, you're either going to get Deshaun Watson, who hasn't played since October 20, 2024 and is coming off of a torn Achilles where he had some setbacks, or Shedeur Sanders, who had 10 interceptions against seven touchdowns.

While I think the Jaguars have a pretty reasonable schedule, this looks to be their biggest favorite role of the season, outside of maybe Tennessee at home in Week 12. Most importantly, they are not a Thanksgiving or Christmas team, so we don't need to think about saving them.

Considerations: Lions (-7) over Saints, Bengals (-3.5) over Buccaneers, Chargers (-10.5) over Cardinals

Used: Jaguars

WEEK 2

CHARGERS (-8.5) OVER RAIDERS

One game is in the books for Kirk Cousins/Fernando Mendoza and the Chargers now have some meaningful film to analyze. We should also have a Chargers team that has either cleaned up some mistakes from playing the lowly Cardinals or one that got a whole lot of positive vibes rolling in that game. There's even a chance that they lost and are hellbent on righting that wrong.

No matter what, the Chargers are among the biggest favorites on the board. Much like the Chargers in Week 1, the 49ers draw that distinction in Week 2, but saving them is a reasonable option. One of the major considerations in this contest is deciding when to deploy a team. For example, as we look ahead to Week 3, the 49ers are the only double-digit favorite per the early DraftKings odds. The other TD+ favorites in Week 3 are the Chiefs on the road in Miami, Lions at home against the Jets, and the Packers against the Falcons on TNF. KC and DET play on Thanksgiving. GB plays on both.

So, with that in mind, the Chargers get deployed here, as they'll have a book on the new-look Raiders and can spend the week reading it, while the 49ers get pushed a week.

By the way, you'll notice a pattern with the "considerations" section in that a lot of the holiday teams will be listed there. As mentioned in the intro, the goal is to hold the line with them as long as you can, but they are all good teams.

Considerations: Rams (-8.5) over Giants on MNF, 49ers (-10.5) over Dolphins, Ravens (-7.5) over Saints, Buccaneers (-5.5) over Browns

Used: Jaguars, Chargers

WEEK 3

49ERS (-11.5) OVER CARDINALS

The first time picking on the Cardinals and it surely won't be the last. I went through the thought process under the Week 2 heading, but it's pretty simple. The 49ers don't play on Thanksgiving or Christmas, they are the biggest favorite on the board, and it looks like the optimal time to deploy them.

The other place to use the 49ers is in Week 9 when they host Las Vegas and will be coming off of the bye. That is a week to consider using Seattle hosting the Cardinals, even though the Seahawks are a Christmas team. The Browns are also at the Saints that week. New Orleans is an option this week against the Raiders at home, but I'd rather wait on them, as they face Cleveland coming off of the bye.

Considerations: Packers (-7.5) over Falcons on TNF, Lions (-9.5) over Jets, Chiefs (-7.5) at Dolphins

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers

WEEK 4

VIKINGS (-7.5) OVER DOLPHINS

This is the toughest week of the season thus far. Not because there aren't options, but because there may very well be too many options. That means that you need to weigh the risk and reward of all of them. The Bears play on both holidays, so they're out, despite being tied for the biggest favorite role.

Where it gets more difficult is with the Giants and Ravens. The Giants have good home options in Week 3 (Titans), Week 4 (Cardinals), Week 6 (Saints), and Week 15 (Browns). Fading the Cardinals with an early kickoff and their third road game in four weeks is very easy to do and this is a spot where I did agonize over the decision a little bit.

The Ravens are going to be favored a fair amount, but this is arguably the best spot to take them. Still, my eyes are on Week 16 at home against Cleveland, since that's the other situation in which they could be a favorite of this size.

Ultimately, it comes down to this - you have to take 20 of the 32 NFL teams to win. There are other spots in which the Giants or Ravens can be used. The Vikings don't play the Browns, Cardinals, or Raiders, and play the Jets on the road in Week 17. To me, this is the only place to use them with some confidence, at least as of now.

Considerations: Giants (-7) over Cardinals, Bears (-8.5) over Jets, Ravens (-8.5) over Titans

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings

WEEK 5

BENGALS (-6) OVER DOLPHINS

So, there's a method to the madness here, as Cincinnati is a road team and that's never a fun sweat in Survivor. The reality is that the Patriots are probably the best play, but Week 6 has fewer options than Week 5 as things currently stand.

Joe Burrow in good weather seems like a reasonable bet. Plus, with his injury history, maybe it's better to deploy the Bengals sooner rather than later. Of course, Cincinnati has been absolute hell on Survivor players over the last few years, so this one has potential to be plenty scary.

But, look. The Bengals have a bye right after this and then take on the Ravens after the bye. This is a third road game in four weeks, but it's not a particularly daunting spot and all of the games are early kickoffs, so there's no extensive travel or anything.

Saving the Bengals for the potentially hapless Browns is always an option, but that game isn't until Week 18 at home. Cincinnati's schedule becomes a bit discombobulated after the bye with a potential letdown spot against the Titans in Week 8 in advance of the trip to Madrid and off of a game against the Ravens. It seems like we just hope to chalk this one up as a win and fight another day.

Considerations: Cowboys (-3.5) over Buccaneers on TNF, Patriots (-8.5) over Raiders, Lions (-8.5) at Cardinals

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals

WEEK 6

PATRIOTS (-9.5) OVER JETS

These damn holiday games, man. The NFL put together a set of bangers on both holidays, and that means that a lot of good teams have to be held in reserve and that's why there will be a lot of bobbing and weaving early in the Survivor season.

The biggest example is that the Rams are nearly a two-touchdown favorite against the Cardinals here in Week 6, but they play on Thanksgiving Eve and Christmas Day. In my opinion, you cannot afford to burn a holiday team this early. That's why the Patriots, who are probably the best Week 5 option, had to slide to Week 6 and a little bit more of a dice roll on the road Bengals was ultimately the Week 5 decision.

This is a microcosm of what I always say about Survivor. The concept is simple. Pick a team to win. The execution is so much harder because of the holidays and because there are only so many good teams. But, the Patriots are one of them and they're actually a bigger favorite in Week 6 on the early numbers than they are in Week 5.

Considerations: Rams (-13.5) over Cardinals, Ravens (-6.5) at Browns, Colts (-3.5) over Titans, Bills (-6.5) at Raiders, 49ers (-5.5) over Commanders on MNF

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots

WEEK 7

TEXANS (-5.5) OVER GIANTS

This was a week that I looked at quite a bit. The holidays are very much a factor here and will continue to be a bigger and bigger factor as we start using and crossing off teams that are above average or better. There are only so many teams that you want to trust and you'll have to find almost perfect scenarios to want to back other teams.

Overall, this strikes me as a decent spot to let the Texans loose. It may not be ideal, as they're coming back from London without the bye week. They have the bye week after this, so it should be a "circle the wagons" type of situation. It is the same situation for the Giants, who have the bye week after this, but there is enough equity in the Texans to take them here and try to fight another week.

The Titans are a very serious consideration here. They won't have many favorite roles, and if we pass on them in Week 1 against the Jets and Week 7 against the Browns, we may not get another favorite role and they'll be tossed in the pile of 12 teams that don't get selected.

Considerations: Titans (-2.5) over Browns, Broncos (-7.5) at Cardinals, Rams (-7.5) over Raiders

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans

WEEK 8

COWBOYS (-10.5) OVER CARDINALS

The first holiday team comes off the board here, but let's walk through it. First, the Cowboys only play on Thanksgiving, leaving nine other teams under consideration. Second, barring multiple injuries, I don't think I'd feel overly comfortable taking Dallas against Philadelphia, and, frankly, the Cowboys might be the team I'd be least likely to select. Third, that Thanksgiving Eve game is big because we have 10 teams now instead of eight. Given that five teams play on both holidays, we're pretty handcuffed.

But, this is the biggest favorite role of the season for the Cowboys and I feel content with taking them here. The quality of the double-holiday teams becomes more and more of a drag each week because you know that they are off-limits. Bending a little bit to take Dallas off the board seems reasonable at this juncture.

Considerations: Packers (-7) over Panthers on TNF, Bengals (-6.5) over Titans, Buccaneers (-4.5) over Falcons, Steelers (-6) over Browns, Patriots (-7) at Dolphins

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys

WEEK 9

SAINTS (-3.5) OVER BROWNS

This week represents everything that makes a Survivor contest with the holiday wrinkles tough. The Seahawks are almost a two-touchdown favorite against the Cardinals. The 49ers, who I used earlier to protect some holiday teams, are over a touchdown favorite at home against the Raiders. The Eagles will probably be around a touchdown favorite at home against the Giants. The Lions are nearly laying a touchdown and PAT against the Dolphins. The Chiefs are bordering on a double-digit favorite against the Jets.

But, I used the Cowboys, so I need to save the Eagles for Thanksgiving in case they become an option. Same with the Chiefs at Buffalo. The Lions are a home team on Turkey Day. The Seahawks are one of eight Christmas teams.

So, it falls to the Saints, but it is a phenomenal spot for New Orleans. The Saints are coming off of the bye and the Browns are coming off of playing the rival Steelers in their ninth game in a row, and this will be their third straight road game. This looks like the epitome of a "schedule loss" if I've ever seen one. It's also entirely possible that Cleveland beats Pittsburgh the week prior given that the Steelers will be coming back from the league's first-ever Paris game. If that's the case, add a letdown spot to the mix.

Considerations: Chiefs (-9.5) over Jets, Eagles (-5.5) over Giants, Lions (-6.5) at Dolphins, 49ers (-8.5) over Raiders, Seahawks (-13.5) over Cardinals

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints

WEEK 10

COLTS (-6.5) OVER DOLPHINS

Whoa-oh, we're halfway there. And hopefully still livin' on a prayer.

This is a really strong setup and a pretty easy pick to make. Fading the Dolphins should prove to be fruitful, and there is nothing overly compromising about this spot for Indy. They do have to play at Houston on a short week in Week 11, but this is a second straight home game and is very far removed from their early-season trip across the pond.

Again, not the biggest favorite on the board, but the play that seems to make the most sense.

Considerations: Bills (-7) at Jets, Rams (-10.5) at Cardinals, Seahawks (-7) at Raiders

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts

WEEK 11

CHIEFS (-11.5) OVER CARDINALS

I originally wrote this article in May and updated it for the NFL Guide 2.0. If Josh Allen gets hurt prior to the Week 12 Thanksgiving night game against the Chiefs, then obviously we'd have to adjust accordingly. For now, taking Kansas City on a short week with travel to face the Bills is not at the top of my Thanksgiving list.

To some degree, this is a contentious pick. There's some equity in taking one of the five Thanksgiving teams that does not play on Christmas so that you can save all of those options. Given that the Cowboys were the Week 8 pick, only three Thanksgiving options fit that criterion - Lions, Steelers, Eagles - with a KC selection.

I'm okay with that and okay with the Chiefs here as a result. Basically, I've isolated either the Lions or Rams as my preferred Thanksgiving picks. The risk of QB injury is always there, but embracing risk is a major tenet of playing a Survivor contest.

So, I'll roll with the Chiefs as clear favorites, especially because the only remaining time to take them confidently looks like Week 18.

Considerations: Bills (-11.5) over Dolphins, Chargers (-9.5) over Jets, Cowboys (-6.5) over Titans, Broncos (-7.5) over Raiders

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs

THANKSGIVING WEEK

LIONS (-2.5) OVER BEARS

None of the five games feel overly appealing, but like I said, the Lions only play on one holiday. The Rams were a really strong consideration here because I don't know that I'd want to take them on the road at Seattle, but I believe in keeping all the Christmas teams for as long as I absolutely can.

The Lions are home for a second straight week after coming back from Munich, and that's good enough for me with a bunch of coin-flippy games otherwise.

Considerations: Rams (-4.5) over Packers, Eagles (+1.5) over Cowboys

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions

WEEK 12

BUCCANEERS (-3.5) OVER PANTHERS

Back to regularly scheduled programming, but here's the thing. Ten teams were part of the Thanksgiving "Week", so we're down to 22 teams and 11 games on the weekend. This is where the cost you paid to get to this point starts to take a toll. The Jaguars and Bengals look like better options on paper. But, sometimes the lesser of evils has to be the play.

Initially, my eyes went to the Vikings -4.5 over the Falcons. Here's the problem - Minnesota is coming back from playing in Mexico City (2,000+ feet higher in elevation than Denver) and the Falcons are coming off of the bye. That was enough to scare me away with that one.

The other option is the Commanders -4.5 on the road against the Cardinals. Frankly, by Week 12, that may be a much better play and a more obvious one. It is tough to take a team on a short week (Commanders off MNF vs. Cincinnati) on a long trip out west. But, the Cardinals are pretty clearly worse than the Panthers.

Torn in three directions, I somewhat reluctantly land on the Buccaneers as the pick on Monday Night Football. Their Week 10 bye compared to Carolina's Week 5 bye was definitely part of the internal monologue here. And, who knows, maybe the Browns are a viable option by this point against the visiting Raiders, especially if the late November weather cooperates.

Considerations: Commanders (-4.5) at Cardinals, Vikings (-4.5) over Falcons, Bengals (-6.5) over Saints, Jaguars (-5.5) over Titans, Browns (-1.5) over Raiders

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers

WEEK 13

EAGLES (-8.5) AT CARDINALS

Ultimately, the big decision for me here is taking the Eagles on the road or burning the Broncos at home against the Dolphins. Philadelphia is a Christmas Eve team and Denver is a Christmas Day team, so both are part of the Christmas "week".

Philly is on extra rest after playing on Thanksgiving, so that's a positive, especially with a long trek to the desert. Arizona has the bye week after this and you know damn well that team is going to be looking forward to a week in Cancun by this point.

Factoring in the scheduling spots and the desire to hold onto the Broncos, this wound up not being that hard of a decision, even though you can absolutely convince me that Eagles vs. Texans > Broncos vs. Bills for Christmas.

Considerations: Broncos (-9.5) over Dolphins, Vikings (-3.5) over Panthers

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles

WEEK 14

RAVENS (-6) OVER BUCCANEERS

Fingers crossed that Lamar Jackson is healthy. The Ravens are a pretty good team to have this deep into the season, as we can assume that they'll be playing for something, and they are also coming off of the bye. Not too shabby of a setup for Week 14 given all the bobbing and weaving we've done to this point.

The Bucs are not off of the bye, and this is a standalone road game and the last remaining outdoor road game for the warm-weather Floridians.

No Christmas concerns. Rested team, so even if Jackson is dinged, he's got some extra time. Sign me up.

Considerations: Patriots (-4.5) over Vikings on TNF, Eagles (-5.5) over Colts, Bears (-5.5) at Dolphins, Broncos (-5.5) at Jets, Lions (-7.5) over Titans, Seahawks (-7.5) over Giants

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens

WEEK 15

PACKERS (-10.5) OVER DOLPHINS

When you get this deep in the contest, it consumes every part of your life. Sleeping will be difficult. You'll zone out during conversations. That work project doesn't matter. You're just constantly running the scenarios through your mind. By this point, these are probably six-figure decisions, or at least high five-figure decisions. There's a lot of pressure in that.

Is now the time to burn another Christmas team? There are seven Christmas options left on our hypothetical list. Using the Packers means that there would be six. Green Bay plays on the road at Chicago. If you ranked the seven picks 1 through 7, would the Packers be the least attractive option? I would say Houston at Philly, but that would leave Green Bay sixth.

Ultimately, you have to get to the point where you have to make that choice and I think passing on a double-digit favorite at this stage of the game would be extremely difficult. I do think the Packers would be near the bottom of my list, so I'll let 'em rip here.

I'll tell you what, though. The Giants are a sneaky good pick to have available here and might be the safety net and lifeline that we need.

Considerations: Giants (-4.5) over Browns, Buccaneers (-3.5) over Saints, Commanders (-3.5) over Falcons, Rams (-6) over Cowboys

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens, Packers

CHRISTMAS

BRONCOS (+1.5) OVER BILLS

Now, I should note that Christmas Eve is Texans vs. Eagles, and the Eagles might be the best option of them all, so saving them may end up being the optimal play. In this hypothetical exercise, I did not.

All of the Christmas games were 1.5-point spreads based on the early lines, with the Eagles moving to -2.5 over the summer. My thought process here is that I'll take Denver at home with the elevation on a short week with travel for Buffalo, even as an underdog. Theoretically, the Bills have the safety nets of the Dolphins and Jets if they need them the final two weeks of the season. Athletes probably don't think that way, but it's at least an increased margin for error that Denver does not have.

Unless there is some truly significant injury, none of the eight Christmas "week" options are what I would consider trustworthy. You just hope for the best.

The Bears might also be the stronger option here given that they are at least favored, but the late-season altitude factor is the deciding point for me.

Considerations: Eagles (-2.5) over Texans, Bears (-1.5) over Packers

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens, Packers, Broncos

WEEK 16

STEELERS (-3.5) OVER PANTHERS

Once again, the cost of surviving takes its toll here, as the Chargers (-7) at Dolphins, Saints (-5.5) vs. Cardinals, Ravens (-10) vs. Browns, Patriots (-6.5) at Jets, and Lions (-4.5) vs. Giants on MNF are all bigger favorites.

Simply put, it's going to be cold in Pittsburgh on December 27. Based on how the schedule looks for Carolina, this will be their one and only cold-weather game of the season, as they play four of their final five games at home and two of their previous three road games are indoors, with the other in Tampa.

Like I keep saying - you have to take 20 of the 32 NFL teams to win this thing. Sometimes, you're going to be left with something like this.

Considerations: Chargers (-7) at Dolphins, Saints (-5.5) over Cardinals, Ravens (-10) over Browns, Patriots (-6.5) at Jets, Lions (-5.5) over Giants

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens, Packers, Broncos, Steelers

WEEK 17

SEAHAWKS (-5.5) AT PANTHERS

I will be honest - this game scares me the most of any on this list. This game is sandwiched between games against the Rams, is a cross-country trip for an early kickoff in Week 17, and the Panthers may very well be playing for something.

But, it seems really counter-intuitive to let the reigning Super Bowl champions go unused, doesn't it? Ultimately, I want to save the Bills for Week 18 for the purposes of this exercise, even though who knows what Weeks 17 and 18 will look like by the time we get there.

This is actually a second long trip east in three weeks for Seattle, but they do have an extra day and a half of rest or so after playing on Christmas Friday. Carolina will be playing a 12th straight game after having their bye very early in Week 5. Admittedly, I don't love this and maybe should have structured things differently to get to this point, but the reality is that the Seahawks are the second-biggest favorite on the board with the early Week 17 lines and one would assume they're playing for something.

Considerations: Jaguars (-3.5) over Commanders, Bills (-7.5) at Dolphins, Cowboys (-4.5) over Giants

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens, Packers, Broncos, Steelers, Seahawks

WEEK 18

BILLS (-10) OVER JETS

I cannot stress how much of an accomplishment it is to make a deep run in Survivor, let alone still be alive in Week 18. I hope to find out one day what it's like to be on the cusp of winning this contest, but I know that there was an immense sense of pride once the disappointment wore off about the deep run we had back in 2023.

If we look over the past three NFL seasons, underdogs of 7+ points have 48 outright wins. Sure, that comes over the span of more than 200 games, and they only have a 22.4% win percentage, but it happens. And avoiding those landmines takes a lot of luck, good fortune, and sharp planning.

The main takeaway from this exercise is precisely what I said in the intro. You have to plan to go 18-0 or 20-0, but also prioritize going 1-0 each week. Sketching out a plan for the season is a good way to do that, if for no other reason than to familiarize yourself with the schedule and when the best opportunities are to use teams.

Considerations: Patriots (-10.5) over Dolphins, Bengals (-7.5) over Browns, Chiefs (-8.5) over Raiders, Texans (-7) over Titans, 49ers (-8.5) at Cardinals

Used: Jaguars, Chargers, 49ers, Vikings, Bengals, Patriots, Texans, Cowboys, Saints, Colts, Chiefs, Lions, Buccaneers, Eagles, Ravens, Packers, Broncos, Steelers, Seahawks, Bills

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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

BUFFALO

Bills

The Bills were No. 3 in the NFL in EPA per play (0.145) last season, and that was without anyone who could pass as a serviceable WR1. Buffalo now has that in DJ Moore, who allegedly turned heads throughout training camp. This offense will once again be amongst the best in football as long as Josh Allen can remain healthy, though it should be noted that Ty Johnson is dealing with a hamstring injury that could impact his Week 1 availability. The Bills can manage without him, but Johnson is a good pass-catching third-down back.

It's the defense that will make or break Buffalo's season. Jim Leonhard, who was an elite defensive coordinator with Wisconsin before serving as an assistant for the Broncos the last few seasons, is being tasked with fixing this unit. Buffalo has more depth than it had a year ago, especially with some intriguing young players to help with the pass rush — and some that have already impressed. However, the secondary is the most concerning part of this defense, and safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson is already a little banged up.

PLAYER TO WATCH: LB JAVON SOLOMON

Solomon looks to be way more comfortable in Leonhard's system, as he's being used as more of an outside linebacker than a traditional EDGE. The 2024 fifth-round pick popped in Buffalo's preseason meeting with Cleveland, as he had two pressures and a sack. This Bills defense will be looking for contributions from wherever they can get them, and Solomon, who offers speed and energy, could be a surprising factor as a rotational piece.



ODDS TO WIN...

10-1

SUPER BOWL

+500

AFC

-135

AFC EAST

MIAMI

Dolphins

Nobody is expecting much of anything from Miami this season. The Dolphins have very little in the wide receiver room, many believe they have a bottom-10 offensive line, and there are holes all over Jeff Hafley's defense. That's why the Dolphins have one of the lowest win totals in football heading into the 2026 season. However, not everything was bad throughout August.

One thing Miami fans should be excited about is Malik Willis. The Dolphins signed him to a three-year, \$67.5 million contract, hoping that he could be their franchise quarterback. So far, we have heard nothing but good things. Willis has always been known for his explosivity as a runner, but people raved about his arm throughout camp. We also saw him manufacture a gorgeous scoring drive against the Commanders in a preseason game. Perhaps this offense will be a nightmare this season, but Willis could be a guy to target with player props — or draft in fantasy leagues. He'll be given ample opportunities to try and lead Miami back when trailing in games, and the Dolphins have no incentives to sit him the second half of the year.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR MALIK WASHINGTON

Washington had 46 catches for 317 yards and three touchdowns last season, but it sure sounds like he's the No. 1 option in the passing game heading into 2026. With Jaylen Waddle and Tyreek Hill no longer wearing aqua, orange, and blue, Washington is the most reliable returning weapon. Washington might be a little small, but he plays a bit bigger and is a dangerous catch-and-run option. He also appears to have a nice rapport with Willis, with the two connecting early and often in camp.



ODDS TO WIN...

350-1

SUPER BOWL

150-1

AFC

40-1

AFC EAST

NEW ENGLAND

Patriots

The Patriots lost in last year's Super Bowl, meaning they'll be eager to take things a step further in 2026. However, they'll be doing so with a massive target on their backs, as they're not sneaking up on anyone this year. New England did make a splashy move to address the offense, acquiring A.J. Brown from Philadelphia. Drake Maye now has a big, physical target down the field, but will he have time to throw? One of the main talking points in camp was the progression of Will Campbell. The tackle was miserable upon returning from a knee injury toward the end of last season, and the Pats are hoping he can be an elite blindside protector. Mike Vrabel, who wasn't in the news at all after that Super Bowl loss, spoke glowingly about Campbell's development, so maybe we'll see New England near the top of the league in EPA per play once again.

Outside of that, one of the main storylines of the Patriots offseason was the contract status of star cornerback Christian Gonzalez. Nobody can deny Gonzalez's talent, but he's coming off a season in which he had a 65.8 Pro Football Focus player grade and wants to be one of the league's highest-paid defensive backs. That said, this could be a messy situation that lingers.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR KYLE WILLIAMS

The Patriots traded wideout Kayshon Boutte to the Texans, bringing back safety Jaylen Reed and a 2028 seventh-round draft pick. Boutte had 33 catches for 551 yards and six scores a year ago, and New England also has to replace 85 receptions for 1,013 yards and four scores from Stefon Diggs. Naturally, a lot of that will go to Brown and Romeo Doubs, but there's room for others. Why not Williams? We have seen some explosive plays out of him as a downfield threat in preseason, and he's excellent at creating space before getting into his routes.



ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+770

AFC

+125

AFC EAST

NEW YORK

Jets

Expectations aren't very high for the Jets this season, but the team is hoping to be competitive and see some positive signs from some of its core pieces. One of those pieces is No. 2 overall pick David Bailey, who did nothing but impress his coaching staff and the media members who got to see him in camp. He seems like he's going to be a force getting into the opposing team's backfield, and he'll make an otherwise miserable defense somewhat fun to watch.

Offensively, Geno Smith is going to hope to stabilize the quarterback position. His best football is behind him, but he's a major upgrade over what New York has had recently. Unfortunately, it seems like Smith will be working without first-round pick Kenyon Sadiq for the foreseeable future. The rookie has been dealing with a hernia issue that derailed his training camp. Also, Breece Hall has been experiencing some pain in his groin, so the Jets offense could be down some playmakers to open the season.

PLAYER TO WATCH: C JOSH MYERS

Myers had a Pro Football Focus grade of 52.9 in 2025. He was pretty clearly the weakest link along the Jets offensive line, and many were hoping New York would go out and address the center position after the season. Well, Myers now appears to be settling in for the Jets. By all accounts, New York's offensive line handled the defensive line throughout camp, and Myers hardly stood out. For an offensive lineman, if nobody is saying your name, it usually means you're doing something right. Look for Myers to do some solid work up front in 2026.



ODDS TO WIN...

200-1

SUPER BOWL

86-1

AFC

19-1

AFC EAST

BALTIMORE

Ravens

The Ravens will have a different look on the sidelines this season, as Jesse Minter replaces John Harbaugh as Baltimore's new head coach. With Minter comes a new offensive coordinator (Declan Doyle) and defensive coordinator (Anthony Weaver), and these changes only add to the Super Bowl expectations for this franchise. However, this is a team that will be looking to simply fine-tune some things, so don't expect a massive overhaul.

Baltimore will still be looking to pound the rock with Derrick Henry and allow Lamar Jackson to be the brilliant playmaker he has been all throughout his career. And defensively, the Ravens are hoping to get back to being one of the toughest teams in the league. There are some questions to answer in the secondary, but they're hoping the scheme from Minter and Weaver can help hide some weaknesses.

The one major concern for Baltimore is the center spot. After losing Tyler Linderbaum to the Raiders, the Ravens were hoping Danny Pinter could man the middle of the line. But Pinter suffered a season-ending patellar injury, meaning Baltimore will be relying on either Ethan Pocic or Jovaughn Gwyn. Those are two uninspiring options.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR JA'KOBI LANE

Lane's lack of precision in running routes could ultimately hurt his chances of being an instant contributor, but he was the breakout star of training camp. The third-round pick made big play after big play, and there's definitely some room for someone to break into the pass-catching rotation. Realistically, it could also be Elijah Sarratt or Devontez Walker, as both wideouts also had moments. But there's something different about a 6-foot-4 receiver with a big catch radius. It also doesn't hurt that he comes from USC, as the Trojans have been sending productive receivers to the league forever.



ODDS TO WIN...

10-1

SUPER BOWL

+500

AFC

-115

AFC NORTH

CINCINNATI

Bengals

Toward the end of training camp, Ja'Marr Chase went down with a non-contact knee injury. It was extremely scary for the Bengals, their fans, and Cincinnati backers, but it ended up being a hyperextension. That means there isn't much to worry about for the Bengals offense, which once again features Joe Burrow, an elite group of pass-catchers, and a good stable of running backs. If Cincinnati's offensive line can just look decent this year, the Bengals will put up an absurd amount of points.

As always, it'll be up to the Cincinnati defense to take this team to another level. The Bengals have invested a lot on this side of the ball, but this still projects to be a below-average unit. Al Golden is going to need to coach his butt off, and Cincinnati will need some contributions from younger players. Two guys that could hit the ground running are DJ Turner II and Cashius Howell. Turner will start at corner, and the coaching staff loves what he has done to this point. And Howell should get chances to play as a rotational pass-rushing piece. Some of Cincinnati's veterans loved the way Howell looked in practice.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR DOHNTE MEYERS

With Chase's late-August injury scare, Meyers becomes even more important for the Bengals. Already viewed as a potential breakout player in the 2026 season, there's a chance we'll see the CFL import in a legitimate role right away. Meyers has impressed the Bengals staff as both a receiver and a special teams player, and it seems Burrow enjoys working with him. Of course, with Chase, Tee Higgins, Andrei Iosivas, and two capable pass-catching tight ends in the fold, targets will be hard to come by. But Meyers has seemingly earned a spot on this team, and Cincinnati plans to get him on the field.



ODDS TO WIN...

20-1

SUPER BOWL

10-1

AFC

+185

AFC NORTH

CLEVELAND

Browns

Sometimes playing well in training camp and preseason matters, and that's especially true in what's supposed to be a tight quarterback battle. However, despite the fact that Shedeur Sanders held his own in a competition with Deshaun Watson, who seems to hate Cleveland as much as Cleveland hates him, the latter was named the Week 1 starter. It's unfortunate for the Browns fanbase, and it's also unfortunate for first-year head coach Todd Monken. Cleveland's offense should be a painful kind of unwatchable, and it's a big part of the reason Jacksonville will likely be the most popular Week 1 Survivor selection.

Despite all the offensive deficiencies, we'd normally be able to say that the Browns defense will be good enough to keep the team in games. However, with Myles Garrett now playing for the Rams, are we sure that's true? Cleveland actually did well in the Garrett trade, acquiring Jared Verse and some valuable draft picks. But the Browns are undoubtedly worse than usual on this side of the ball, and ESPN Cleveland's Tony Rizzo was on Follow The Money toward the end of August saying the Under on 5.5 wins is the right way to play the Browns. There's very little excitement in the area.

PLAYER TO WATCH: CB MICHAEL COATS JR.

Coats Jr. suffered a leg injury toward the end of camp, but the undrafted free agent had made a strong case for a roster spot before that. Coats looked great in coverage in a preseason meeting with the Bears, and his ballhawking ability was on display whenever he was on the practice field. In many ways, Coats did exactly what he did across multiple levels of college football competition. The Browns might find it hard to make room for him, but he certainly belongs on a roster — even if it's not this one.



ODDS TO WIN...

200-1

SUPER BOWL

86-1

AFC

21-1

AFC NORTH

PITTSBURGH

Steelers

After 19 seasons with the Steelers, Mike Tomlin decided to step down as head coach after last season. It was probably a mutual decision, but that's neither here nor there. Mike McCarthy, who is 185-123-2 in his head coaching career, now gets to coach this team, which is a good story with the 62-year-old being born and raised in Pittsburgh.

Aaron Rodgers is back under center for the Steelers, and the 42-year-old has some better weapons around him. DK Metcalf and Pat Freiermuth were the only guys Rodgers really trusted last year, but Pittsburgh went out and brought in Michael Pittman Jr., a 6-foot-4 receiver who can make plays all over the field. Also, Germie Bernard and Roman Wilson had moments in camp.

The issue with Pittsburgh is that the offensive line has some question marks, and dealing 2023 first-round pick Broderick Jones to the Cowboys doesn't help answer them. Also, the defense is lagging behind its reputation. But the Steelers did ink Keanu Benton to a four-year, \$72 million extension, and some younger defensive pieces stood out in practice. Perhaps Pittsburgh can get back to performing like a top-five defense, giving Rodgers and the offense a chance to make another run at the top of the AFC North.

PLAYER TO WATCH: QB DREW ALLAR

We might not see Allar this season, as the Steelers are hoping Rodgers can lead them to the playoffs. However, it does seem like Allar has the goods. Once considered to be a surefire first-round pick, Pittsburgh got him in the third round after a disappointing final season with Penn State. Allar then retooled his mechanics, worked hard on some basic fundamentals, and really tried to rewire himself. So far, so good. Allar looked tremendous in the preseason, flashing mobility, a big arm, and solid decision making. It's now hard not to see him as a future starter, and it'll be interesting if he's forced into action this year.



ODDS TO WIN...

50-1

SUPER BOWL

23-1

AFC

+500

AFC NORTH

HOUSTON

Texans

The Texans were No. 2 in the NFL in EPA per play allowed (-0.108) last season, finishing as a top-five team against both the pass (-0.097 Dropback EPA per play allowed) and run (-0.129 Rush EPA per play allowed). DeMeco Ryans has proven to be a fantastic head coach, and it's pretty clear he's going to field elite defenses on a yearly basis. That said, when looking at this Texans team, most of the focus needs to be on CJ Stroud and the offense.

Houston is hoping that a somewhat revamped offensive line will mean a much-improved offensive output, and it's entirely possible that's the case. Stroud can be an effective quarterback when he has time to set his feet, so the group up front is extremely important heading into 2026. The Texans should also have a better running game to work off, as they brought in David Montgomery as a between-the-tackles hammer.

The Texans did suffer one of the bigger depth chart blows of training camp though, as Jayden Higgins tore his ACL. For a team looking for someone to step up behind Nico Collins, that was a rough loss. Houston responded by trading for Kayshon Boutte, who had a good camp with New England.

PLAYER TO WATCH: TE MARLIN KLEIN

While many will be looking for guys like Boutte, Xavier Hutchinson, Tank Dell, and Jaylin Noel to pick up the pass-catching slack, Klein, the team's second-round pick in the 2026 draft, could be a real weapon at tight end. He's big and has an elite combination of speed and athleticism for his position. Klein had a big gain on a seam route in a preseason meeting with the Chargers, and that's something he apparently did often in camp. He also looks like he could be a YAC monster.



ODDS TO WIN...

18-1

SUPER BOWL

+870

AFC

+110

AFC SOUTH

INDIANAPOLIS

Colts

With Daniel Jones entering this season off an Achilles tear, the battle for the backup quarterback job was important in Indianapolis. Well, Riley Leonard ended up beating out Anthony Richardson to be the No. 2, signaling a massive fall from grace for the fourth pick in the 2023 draft.

In other news, the Colts also made the late decision to bring in 34-year-old wideout Keenan Allen. Last year, Allen had 81 receptions for 777 yards and four touchdowns, so there's still a little left in the tank here. But it's not a great sign that Indianapolis appeared desperate for help after having moved Michael Pittman Jr. to Pittsburgh. Shane Steichen is a good offensive coach, and Jonathan Taylor is an elite running back working behind a good offensive line. But does this team have the pass-catching options required to take a major step forward?

The Colts are also a little banged up heading into the season, and Charvarius Ward's back injury is one to monitor. He had a Pro Football Focus grade of 77.1 last year, and it's crucial that he gets healthy fast.

PLAYER TO WATCH: CB JUSTIN WALLEY

Walley, a third-round pick in 2025, had a shot at starting a year ago, but he tore his ACL before the season started. Well, the 23-year-old has looked awesome since returning to action. Walley had a pick-six on Tua Tagovailoa in a joint practice with the Falcons, and it sounds like he's been making plays for weeks. As long as he can stay healthy, there's a real chance he thrives in 2026. Walley and Cam Taylor-Britt will be two crucial pieces for this defense — especially with Ward not at 100%.



ODDS TO WIN...

60-1

SUPER BOWL

29-1

AFC

+380

AFC SOUTH

JACKSONVILLE

Jaguars

The Jaguars have been one of the most interesting teams to monitor. After what felt like a wasted rookie season for Travis Hunter, Jacksonville now has a clear plan for the highly talented 23-year-old. He's operating opposite Montaric Brown as a starting corner, and it seems like head coach Liam Coen will occasionally get him on the field as a wideout. But he's a defensive player first, and it should help him to have some clarity.

Jacksonville looks to be much better on the defensive side of the ball this year, and there's some buzz about the offense too. Parker Washington has carried over his momentum from the end of last season, looking like a potential No. 1 option in the passing game. And while the Jags did let Travis Etienne Jr. go to the Saints, it doesn't seem like people are worried about the running game. Bhayshul Tuten has been ripping off big gains, looking ready to run with his increase in opportunity.

PLAYER TO WATCH: CB JARRIAN JONES

While Hunter looks like a starter for Jacksonville, Jones is going to be on the field a bunch. Last year, he had a 74.5 Pro Football Focus grade in coverage, and he also had three picks. Reports also suggested he was shutting down wide receivers all throughout camp, so it's going to be hard for coordinator Anthony Campanile to keep him off the field. With his ability to play all over the field, and slow down the run, you can expect some big moments in 2026.



ODDS TO WIN...

30-1

SUPER BOWL

15-1

AFC

+245

AFC SOUTH

TENNESSEE

Titans

It isn't hard to get excited about the possibility of Robert Saleh and Brian Daboll turning the Titans around. Tennessee is playing in a winnable division, the team has an easy schedule, and the roster is pretty talented considering last year's 3-14 record.

On offense, the hope is that Cam Ward, last year's No. 1 pick, can trend toward performing like a top-15 quarterback, and the presence of some new weapons, including No. 4 pick Carnell Tate, should help. Then, on defense, Tennessee is leaning on Saleh's sharp defensive mind to make things work with an improved depth chart.

Even with some positives heading into 2026, it'll take a lot for the Titans to really turn things around. And one thing that could hold them down is the offensive line. Tennessee made Peter Skoronski the league's highest-paid guard, inking him to a four-year, \$100 million extension. He's the last of their concerns. But right guard looks to be a huge potential weakness, and the 49ers pass rush teed off on Ward in a joint practice in mid-August.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR ELIC AYOMANOR

While Tennessee has a bunch of new toys for Ward to play with, Ayomanor isn't going anywhere. He has been a target monster in practices and preseason, and it seems like he's someone who will have a ton of success as an over-the-middle option this season. Saleh has been extremely impressed with Ayomanor, and Ward seems to value his ability to come down with tough catches. There's a real chance he's the best receiver on this team, even with an improved wide receiver room.



ODDS TO WIN...

130-1

SUPER BOWL

55-1

AFC

+800

AFC SOUTH

DENVER

Broncos

The most important thing for Denver heading into 2026 is that Bo Nix is healthy, as his fractured right ankle put a halt to the team's 2025 season. Well, Nix looked good throughout camp, and he looked sharp in preseason action. That means this offense is all systems go, and things could even be ramped up with Jaylen Waddle in the mix. The former Miami receiver won over star corner Pat Surtain II by burning him on a double move in practice, and his outrageous speed should add a nice dynamic opposite the bigger Courtland Sutton.

Defensively, the Broncos also project to be tremendous at all three levels, which is to be expected after having added talent to a unit that was eighth in EPA per play allowed (-0.058) in 2025.

If there's anything to worry about for Denver, it's the center position. If you're going to be weak anywhere along the line, this probably isn't the worst spot. But Luke Wattenberg was banged up throughout camp — and wasn't all that good last season.

PLAYER TO WATCH: CB RILEY MOSS

Moss is dealing with a rib injury, but he blew the coaching staff away before going down. Moss' athleticism is a major asset opposite Surtain, and there's a real chance he complements the four-time Pro Bowler to make up one of the best defensive back duos in football. NFL teams love a big, physical press corner, and Moss is that. He's also good playing downhill and stopping the run — or even getting after the quarterback. As long as his injury isn't worse than it seems, Moss is in for a big season.



ODDS TO WIN...

20-1

SUPER BOWL

+970

AFC

+225

AFC WEST

KANSAS CITY

Chiefs

We didn't see Patrick Mahomes in the preseason, but he has been a full participant in practice after having suffered a torn ACL last year. By all accounts, the three-time Super Bowl MVP is healthy and feeling great heading into Week 1. The Chiefs also added star running back Kenneth Walker III to the backfield, giving Mahomes a high-level rushing threat for the first time in a decade. If the offensive line can perform at a league-average level this season, Kansas City could get back to looking like a top-five offensive team.

The Chiefs have also revamped their offense a bit, as several defensive players noted that they're seeing different pre-snap looks from Kansas City's offense in practice. The Chiefs are working hard to be less predictable.

It also sounds like Kansas City has a winner in first-round pick Peter Woods. The rookie injured his ankle in camp, but not before his teammates praised him as a force along the defensive line.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR CYRUS ALLEN

The Chiefs drafted Allen in the fifth round of the 2026 NFL Draft, and it seems like they could get a strong return on that modest investment. Allen, who had 13 touchdowns for Cincinnati in his final season in college, appears to have earned the trust of Mahomes. That could go a long way in this offense, as the Chiefs constantly have guys in and out of the lineup. They also lack reliable pass-catching options to begin with. Rashee Rice is great when he's on the field, but he's coming off a cleanup on his knee. And there isn't much preventing Allen from leaping guys like Xavier Worthy and Tyquan Thornton on the depth chart.



ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+770

AFC

+160

AFC WEST

LAS VEGAS

Raiders

The Raiders had one of the league's biggest scares before the season, as Ashton Jeanty suffered a nasty-looking sprained ankle and players were on the field praying for him. Fortunately, Jeanty's injury seems more like a week-to-week issue than anything season-altering. Also, if Jeanty does miss a decent chunk of time, rookie Mike Washington Jr. should be ready to rock. He has looked explosive throughout the preseason, showing the world why Las Vegas used a fourth-round pick on him.

The Raiders' training camp also featured Kirk Cousins nudging ahead of No. 1 pick Fernando Mendoza for the starting quarterback job. The veteran showed good command of Klint Kubiak's offense. However, Mendoza also impressed the coaching staff, and he should be ready to step in once his number is called.

It's also worth noting that Brock Bowers was doing Brock Bowers things in camp. It shouldn't come as a surprise that a superstar looked good in practices, but it sounds like he has taken things to another level. It also seems like Kubiak is going to do everything in his power to get him a boatload of touches in 2026.

PLAYER TO WATCH: CB HEZEKIAH MASSES

Teams don't necessarily expect to find themselves relying on fifth-round rookies, but Masses can help Las Vegas in 2026. He has real scheme versatility, he's pretty long, and he's known for having great feel for when to be aggressive. Masses displayed all of that for the Raiders in camp. Don't be surprised if Masses ends up rotating in as a defensive back this year, and there's a chance he earns an even bigger role down the road. Masses should also be a key special teams player.



ODDS TO WIN...

150-1

SUPER BOWL

76-1

AFC

20-1

AFC WEST

LOS ANGELES

Chargers

The vibes are supposed to be good in Los Angeles right now. Joe Alt and Rashawn Slater are back after their injuries derailed the 2025 season, and Mike McDaniel is in at offensive coordinator to take Justin Herbert and Co. to another level. However, Tyler Biadasz, a Pro Bowl center, is out for the season after having suffered a torn ACL in a joint practice. That means Jake Slaughter, the team's second-round pick, will have to start. Slaughter seems like he'll be a good player, but it's hard to be a rookie center in the NFL. The Chargers are also rolling with Kayode Awosika at left guard, and that's a spot that could be shaky.

Things should ultimately be fine up front as long as Slater and Alt stay healthy, but it's definitely a bummer that Los Angeles is already playing musical chairs along the line.

The good news is that the Chargers defense could be a top-five unit in the league, and Herbert seems to love operating McDaniel's play-action offense. That said, if the injuries stop piling up, this is a team with big-time upside.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR BRENNEN THOMPSON

Thompson is an undersized wide receiver, but he's an absolute burner. The fourth-round pick made some big plays as a deep threat for Herbert, and it's pretty obvious McDaniel wants him on the field quite a bit. As the running game picks up steam, Los Angeles' play-action shots down the field will become more dangerous. That's where Thompson can earn his keep. This is a guy who ran a 4.26 in the 40-yard dash at the combine, and this offense can take advantage of wheels like that.



ODDS TO WIN...

17-1

SUPER BOWL

+830

AFC

+190

AFC WEST

DALLAS

Cowboys

As usual, Dak Prescott didn't see any game action in the preseason, but there was a pretty intriguing QB2 battle between Joe Milton and Sam Howell. On offense, the daily exercise was looking at the depth options, as the starters were pretty much entrenched at their respective positions. Tyler Guyton taking the left tackle job and running with it was a welcome sight to see for a team that was pretty set across the rest of the line.

The defense under new DC Christian Parker is what everybody was primarily focused on. The signing of Von Miller gave the 35-year-old Parker another pass-rushing weapon, good for a guy who has spent almost the entirety of his coaching career working with defensive backs. Considering the Cowboys gave up the most points, second-most yards per play, and had the league's worst third-down defense, the work done in joint practices and some solid preseason data points have bred some optimism for "America's Team".

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB JAVONTE WILLIAMS

Williams ran for a career-best 1,201 yards and only lost one fumble last season in 252 carries. While Malik Davis and Jaydon Blue showed mild flashes last season, Williams had 199 more totes than anybody else. George Pickens was said to have an awesome camp and CeeDee Lamb had over 1,000 yards despite missing three games last season. Williams has to stay healthy for the Cowboys to achieve the level of balance that they want. Even with 4,527 passing yards to rank second in the league, OC Klayton Adams had close to a 50/50 split on rushing plays and dropbacks if we take Prescott's 53 rushes out of the equation.



ODDS TO WIN...

25-1

SUPER BOWL

13-1

NFC

+205

NFC EAST

NEW YORK

Giants

For a team with a lot of young cornerstones, hiring John Harbaugh to be the top adult in the room made a ton of sense. You could see and hear how Harbaugh had to adjust to not having a veteran-rich roster like he had in Baltimore, as he spent a lot of time talking about Jaxson Dart, Cam Skattebo, and the maturation process for those guys. Wily vet FB Patrick Ricard called this camp the toughest of his career, and this is a guy who played for Harbaugh for nine seasons in Baltimore. It is a different era with very different expectations for this organization.

You can tell that Harbaugh wanted to find more adults to be in the room, given the tryout for Odell Beckham Jr. and the signing of Najee Harris. It should come as no surprise that Isaiah Likely featured prominently, given his history with Harbaugh, as did Darnell Mooney, who had 140 targets in OC Matt Nagy's last season as the Bears head coach. Most of the reporting focus was on the offense, as the defense seemed to be the better unit throughout, including the joint practices with the Dolphins.

PLAYER TO WATCH: QB JAXSON DART

You really hope the messaging is clear and consistent for Dart. Nagy and Harbaugh may have a bit of an oil-and-water dynamic to them, as we know Harbaugh and senior offensive analyst Greg Roman have strong thoughts on running the football. Nagy prefers the pass a bit more. Add in QB coach Brian Callahan, and you have a lot of guys who have held some premier positions around the league all trying to come together to agree on a game plan. For a young QB whose college career was highlighted by his big arm and the big hits he absorbed, he needs structure from a lot of cooks in the kitchen.



ODDS TO WIN...

70-1

SUPER BOWL

35-1

NFC

+600

NFC EAST

PHILADELPHIA

Eagles

The installation of new OC Sean Mannion's offense grabbed most of the training camp headlines for the Eagles. Jalen Hurts didn't play any exhibition games, as he got all his work in during practice. It is hard to fully evaluate how things went for QB1, given that first-round pick Makai Lemon missed ample time and so did WR1 DeVonta Smith, who is now the unquestioned top guy with A.J. Brown in New England. The 34-year-old Mannion is only in his third season as an NFL staff member, so his ascent has been very quick. As the fourth OC in four years for the Eagles, it seems concerning that most of the practice reports called out inconsistency from Hurts and the others.

Fortunately, even though the offense had some hiccups, Vic Fangio's defense looked in top form more often than not. Jonathan Greenard may not be ready for Week 1, but Jalyx Hunt was the star of camp after leading the team in sacks last season with 6.5. This is also an outrageously talented secondary and a pretty healthy group entering the season. You wonder if the numerous days with multiple interceptions for Hurts were a telltale sign of how good this defense is or if we need to hover over the panic button with the offense.

PLAYER TO WATCH: TE DALLAS GOEDERT

Over 25 regular-season games, Tucker Kraft had 114 targets while Mannion was on the Packers coaching staff. Goedert has gotten a lot of work when healthy for the Eagles and he's sure to be a safety net with Brown's 121 targets and 78 catches out the window. While many are expecting regression for Goedert, who caught 11 TDs last season after having 24 over his first seven seasons, I think Mannion will highlight him in this offense.



ODDS TO WIN...

16-1

SUPER BOWL

+820

NFC

+120

NFC EAST

WASHINGTON

Commanders

Take a glass of water and let the sink run until it gets about halfway up. Is that glass half-empty or half-full? That age-old idiom could be used to describe how training camp and the preseason went for the Commanders. Growing pains were to be expected with new OC David Blough and new DC Daronte Jones, who was working under Brian Flores in Minnesota. Both guys are first-time coordinators in the NFL. With Stefon Diggs and Antonio Williams, the wide receiver room is much more athletic, and the addition of Sonny Styles will aid the back seven of a team that allowed 451 points last season.

However, Laremy Tunsil and Jer'Zhan Newton suffered season-ending injuries and threw both lines into a state of flux. Fortunately, Washington is installing a 3-4 under Jones, so Newton's absence, while detrimental, can be covered up to some degree. That does not appear to be the case on the offensive line, where Nick Allegretti missed a ton of time and Tunsil's loss at left tackle forced the signing of D.J. Humphries. Where there were reasons for optimism – and still are – reasons for pessimism also crept in throughout August.

PLAYERS TO WATCH: RB JACORY CROSKEY-MERRITT & RACHAAD WHITE

JCM burst on the scene out of nowhere last season as a seventh-round pick who was fourth among rookie running backs in yards with 805 and the three ahead of him had 55, 5, and 91 more carries than he did. He also had just nine catches for 68 yards. That will be White's primary role in this offense, but Blough will have to keep it from being super obvious. White has had 40+ catches in every season, but has averaged under four yards per carry for his career.



ODDS TO WIN...

60-1

SUPER BOWL

30-1

NFC

+500

NFC EAST

CHICAGO

Bears

Staying healthy was the main goal for the Bears in the preseason. The installation of Ben Johnson's offense took place last season and helped Chicago to the postseason for the first time since 2020 and the Divisional Round for the first time since 2010. With starting roles few and far between, backups and third-stringers spent a lot of time under the microscope. Even though OC Declan Doyle left for the Ravens, pass game coordinator Press Taylor was elevated, so there weren't a whole lot of things to learn.

Who will be protecting Caleb Williams' blind side is currently the biggest question mark on the roster and one of the two significant queries. If Ozzy Trapilo's rapid recovery from a ruptured patellar tendon stays on the track it's on, he'll be in that role sooner rather than later. That would leave one concern, which is in the secondary with some key injuries and suspensions to open the season. Given that the Bears thrived on turnovers last season (33) to hide how they gave up six yards per play and five yards per carry, they better hope to get healthy fast and stay that way.

PLAYER TO WATCH: TE COLSTON LOVELAND

Accuracy issues plagued Williams last season, as he only threw seven interceptions, but had a 58.1% completion rate. He only connected with Rome Odunze on 48.9% of his targets and with D.J. Moore on 58.8% of his. Where he did find a ton of success was with Loveland and Luther Burden III. After a slow start and one inactive game, Loveland had 47 grabs on 64 targets over his final 10 regular-season games, including six touchdowns. He was the star of the Wild Card win over the Packers with eight catches for 137 yards. Expect the 10th overall pick from last season to be even better this season.



ODDS TO WIN...

24-1

SUPER BOWL

13-1

NFC

+305

NFC NORTH

DETROIT

Lions

Dan Campbell had no reason to deviate from his preseason ideology of not playing the starters. The Lions started 4-1 last season, scoring 13, 52, 38, 34, and 37 points in those games. Incredibly, by the middle of the season, OC John Morton had been stripped of the play-calling duties. While the Lions only scored 13 points in that loss to the Packers to open the season, Jared Goff was 31-of-39, though he was sacked four times. He posted a 14/2 TD/INT ratio over his first six games. The status quo was just fine for Campbell in the preseason.

Could this season be the inverse of last season for the Lions? They started well and ended poorly. They'll be without center Cade Mays to begin the season, released CB Terrion Arnold over the summer, and DBs Kerby Joseph and Brian Branch are hurt. Sam LaPorta may not be ready for Week 1. The Lions have a lot of walking wounded either on the cusp of playing or playing while trying to get to full speed. Fortunately, the schedule is pretty soft early in the season.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB ISIAH PACHECO

Jahmyr Gibbs is a stud and he's poised for another monster season. However, Gibbs, who has had 234, 302, and 320 touches in his first three seasons, looks to be shouldering a much greater load this season without his complement. David Montgomery had 235, 221, and 182 touches over his three seasons in Detroit and most of those were tough runs in short-yardage situations. The 230-pound Montgomery was perfect to spell Gibbs, but he's no longer there and somebody will have to pick up some of those totes. With Pacheco and Sione Vaki both hurt late in the preseason, you wonder who can do it and if Gibbs, who was already seventh in the NFL in touches, can withstand 100+ more.



ODDS TO WIN...

19-1

SUPER BOWL

+930

NFC

+170

NFC NORTH

GREEN BAY

Packers

There wasn't a whole lot to say about the majority of the preseason for Green Bay, but on the eve of the team's final exhibition game, details about Josh Jacobs' arrest came out and they were not good, to say the least. Jacobs was charged with two Class A misdemeanors and he was placed on the commissioner's exempt list while the NFL completes its own investigation to decide whether or not a suspension is warranted. Other than that, the health of Tucker Kraft was under the microscope with his return from a torn ACL.

On the defensive side of things, new DC Jonathan Gannon had a ball-hawking group more often than not, as the defense picked up quite a few interceptions over the course of camp. Former DC Jeff Hafley is preparing for a very, very long year with the Dolphins and Gannon is looking for a rebound after getting fired by the Cardinals. Green Bay only had 14 takeaways last season and tried to get more out of the pass rush by acquiring Micah Parsons, but he tore his ACL and he'll be out until at least mid-October.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB MARSHAWN LLOYD

Lloyd had six carries for 15 yards in 2024 and did not see a snap in 2025. Depending on the punishment for Jacobs, assuming there is one, the Packers may be scouring the wire for some help at running back. Lloyd, who ran for 5.6 yards per carry in college, including 7.1 YPC at USC in his final season, has dealt with numerous injuries and is a huge unknown. Emanuel Wilson had 125 carries in relief of Jacobs, who had 234 last season. Jacobs was also second in receptions, though 17 players had at least one catch and five had 30+. Lloyd had 24 catches over three college seasons.



ODDS TO WIN...

18-1

SUPER BOWL

+900

NFC

+225

NFC NORTH

MINNESOTA

Vikings

Kevin O'Connell didn't waste much time deciding who his QB1 is, and it will be Kyler Murray. Murray gets a fresh start in the same place where Sam Darnold got a fresh start and that seemed to work out pretty well for him. He's going to be armed with a great group of skill guys and a strong offensive line, so he's set up for more success than he was able to have with the Cardinals.

Frankly, the biggest worries are in the secondary due to injuries and a lack of depth. Harrison Smith is still deciding what he wants to do, and Jamal Adams was lost for the season, as it seemed like Minnesota was done waiting on the veteran to make his choice and Adams was signed to be that vet. Unfortunately, that was short-lived. Flores will find productive players on defense. It's the offense that only had 4.9 yards per play and turned the ball over 30 times that needs a spark, and the hope is that the spark is Murray.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB JORDAN MASON

Aaron Jones missed five games last season, but accounted for only three total touchdowns over 132 carries and 28 catches. Mason had six rushing touchdowns, but was sparingly used as a receiver. Jones will turn 32 in December and followed up a career-best 1,138 yards in 2024 with less than half of that in 2025. Mason's career-low 4.8 YPC was still higher than four of the last five seasons for Jones. How the carries are distributed will be interesting to see, especially with Murray in his first year of the system.



ODDS TO WIN...

50-1

SUPER BOWL

24-1

NFC

+510

NFC NORTH

ATLANTA

Falcons

It was not the training camp that Kevin Stefanski had hoped for, as Michael Penix Jr. was too banged up to get a lot of reps and Tua Tagovailoa wasn't good enough to seize his opportunity to be the starting quarterback. In fact, Jack Strand probably looked better than Tua and Cooper Rush. On the plus side, the skill-position guys stayed healthy. The return of Jawaan Taylor as the starting right tackle was also huge when he was activated from the PUP list, as that leaves pretty much all of last season's unit intact.

Most of the projected starters on defense have pretty clean bills of health. James Pearce Jr.'s eight-game suspension was expected and likely accounted for, but the news did drop a couple weeks before the team's preseason finale. Jalon Walker's torn ACL in concert with Pearce's suspension will make it much tougher for DC Jeff Ulbrich to aggressively get after the quarterback. I think we could see some more "bend but don't break" from the unit.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB BRIAN ROBINSON JR.

No, not a typo, nor the mistake that some people will make with B. Robinson in fantasy drafts. Obviously Bijan makes the offense go with nearly 2,300 yards from scrimmage last season, but Tyler Allgeier had a big role with 143 carries and eight touchdowns. There was nothing more frustrating for fantasy players than Allgeier stealing tuddies while having just 3.6 yards per carry. Brian wasn't used much by the 49ers last season, but he's only 27 and was a solid contributor as a runner and receiver for the Commanders. He'll have to spell Bijan and would be the feature back if something were to happen.



ODDS TO WIN...

130-1

SUPER BOWL

55-1

NFC

+400

NFC SOUTH

CAROLINA

Panthers

To say that training camp was not enjoyable for the reigning NFC South champs would be an understatement. Linebacker Nic Scourton went down for the season almost immediately, adding concern to a unit already without Tereshawn Wharton, and this was a team that seemingly had a thin margin for error to begin with, given that 8-9 with a -69 point differential doesn't often win divisions. Defensive depth was already a concern in the back seven, and the loss of Scourton, paired with underwhelming showings from guys on the roster bubble, didn't help.

Perhaps the most worrisome development of the preseason is that the offensive line struggled badly. Ikem Ekwonu is still on the PUP list and Taylor Moton was diagnosed with a blood clot in his lung in late June. Tackles Rasheed Walker and Monroe Freeling had all sorts of issues in the joint practices with the Texans, who, to be fair, have one of the league's best defenses. Bryce Young has solid backs and receivers, but he still needs time to get them the ball.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB CHUBA HUBBARD

After losing ground quickly to Rico Dowdle in the playing time battle, Hubbard finished with just 511 yards on the ground. This is a guy who ran for 1,195 yards in 2024 and 4.8 yards per carry. He rushed for just 3.8 per pop last season and only had one rushing TD in 134 attempts. With Dowdle gone, Hubbard has the chance to re-emerge, but the fact that he didn't really outshine 2024 second-round pick Jonathon Brooks seems concerning, given that Brooks has barely played thanks to two torn ACLs. Hubbard also had a hamstring issue in camp and didn't get any preseason totes.



ODDS TO WIN...

90-1

SUPER BOWL

38-1

NFC

+310

NFC SOUTH

NEW ORLEANS

Saints

Kellen Moore finished his first season on a real high note, as the Saints won four of their last five and really should have beaten the Falcons in Week 18 to finish 7-10. Instead, they finished 6-11, perhaps a blessing in disguise given that they were able to select WR Jordyn Tyson. Unfortunately, Tyson's injury was one of the biggest storylines of a training camp period that was primarily used to figure out who would be the backup behind Tyler Shough. Tyson was easily going to slot in as the WR2 behind Chris Olave, who had 156 targets in 16 games. TE Juwan Johnson was next with 102.

The team traded Rashid Shaheed, who was a distant third with 66 targets, and Devaughn Vele tied with Alvin Kamara for fourth with 39. In other words, Tyson's injury has the chance to be a significant setback for the offense. Kamara will also miss at least a month. Multiple depth options were banged up throughout August. For a team that was pretty set on the defensive side, and maybe an underrated group with second-year DC Brandon Staley, the hope was that the offense would rise up to balance things out, but too many guys have spent too much time in the trainer's room.

PLAYER TO WATCH: TE NOAH FANT

With a dearth of depth at wide receiver and in the running game, will we see some more double TE sets from Moore and OC Doug Nussmeier? Johnson is an elite pass-catcher at his position and Fant has had reliable hands when called upon. He had a career-best 82.9% Catch% with the Bengals last season, but also played a career-low 38% of the snaps on offense. He had at least 569 receiving yards in each of his first six seasons and I think he'll feature prominently for the Saints given their injuries.



ODDS TO WIN...

90-1

SUPER BOWL

37-1

NFC

+270

NFC SOUTH

TAMPA BAY

Buccaneers

Is it possible that the Buccaneers had the best training camp of the NFC South hopefuls? The Baker Mayfield drama still exists about his next contract, but has been placed on the back burner. Vita Vea ended his hold-in and the team avoided any major injuries on offense and defense. Rueben Bain suffered an AC sprain, but with ample time to heal and a lot of depth in the middle of the defense, it seems like a nothing burger. Emeka Egbuka and Jalen McMillan missed some reps with Mayfield and new OC Zac Robinson, but that, too, shouldn't be a big issue.

With that in mind, have the power dynamics shifted a bit in the division? Many seemed to be pulling for anybody but the Bucs, but their number of negative headlines in July and August was among the lowest in the league, let alone the fewest in the division. This roster boasts the most accomplished QB, best offensive line, top WR group, and a lot of imported talent in hopes of fixing a defense that allowed over 400 points.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB BUCKY IRVING

In retrospect, I'm not sure many of us considered the impact of Irving's injury last season. It wound up being a throwaway sophomore season for a guy who had over 1,500 yards from scrimmage as a rookie. Irving ran for 5.4 yards per carry during that 2024 campaign and injected life into a running game that badly needed it. Last season, he missed over two months and never really looked right, rushing for just 3.4 yards per carry after returning. He also had just 11 catches in six games. The Bucs went from second to 24th in yards per carry year over year. A healthy Irving makes a monumental difference.



ODDS TO WIN...

55-1

SUPER BOWL

22-1

NFC

+170

NFC SOUTH

ARIZONA

Cardinals

It seems that Mike LaFleur found out what FAFO means, as his overuse of Jeremiah Love led to the third-overall pick suffering a high-ankle sprain. It could happen to anyone at any time, but the court of public opinion was quick to condemn the first-year head coach after Love played 23 snaps and had 14 total touches against the Raiders in the second preseason game. At least with Tyler Allgeier, the position isn't in a dire spot if Love misses a week or two. But it was a pretty big moment early on and one that cast a shadow over the rest of the preseason.

The other injury that didn't get nearly as much run, but is arguably more significant, is that second-round pick Chase Bisontis suffered a torn MCL and will miss the season. We'll never know how long it would have taken him to start at guard over Isaiah Adams or maybe even move to right tackle and take over for Elijah Wilkinson, who graded below average as a pass blocker last season per PFF. At least the return of Josh Sweat, who had 12 sacks last season, was some good news late in camp.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR MARVIN HARRISON JR.

Harrison missed five games last season and had just 41 catches over the 12 games that he did play. In two seasons, Harrison has averaged 3.6 and 3.4 receptions per game. In his defense, the Cardinals have not had very good QB play in that span, but it seems unlikely that Jacoby Brissett and Gardner Minshew are going to provide much either. Harrison also only has 2.6 yards after catch per reception, so he hasn't been the explosive game-changer that they've been looking for. Going from a defensive mind in Jonathan Gannon to an offensive mind in LaFleur underscores how much they think activating Harrison's full potential matters.



ODDS TO WIN...

500-1

SUPER BOWL

200-1

NFC

100-1

NFC WEST

LOS ANGELES

Rams

The mad dash to get those Rams Super Bowl wagers locked in while Aaron Donald was practicing and considering a return have been validated, as our NFL 2.0 Betting Guide was just about done when it was announced that he signed and will play this season. Good news, given that blockbuster acquisition Myles Garrett missed a ton of practice time with a bum knee. Puka Nacua, who sat out some practices with a nagging groin, and a suspension is still possible because of a lawsuit filed back in March. The late addition of Tutu Atwell was downplayed by Sean McVay when asked if it was tied to Nacua's future.

Nacua isn't the only one facing uncertainty, as LT Alaric Jackson, who was suspended once in 2024 for violating the league's personal conduct policy, faces a potential suspension from a domestic violence incident back in June. The league should have those matters figured out by the start of the season and the Rams have accumulated the depth necessary to withstand any absences, but meeting expectations this high does get tougher and tougher as more things arise.

PLAYER TO WATCH: RB BLAKE CORUM

Corum started to take some of the load off of Kyren Williams last season. Williams went from an 87% snap share to a 68% snap share and had a full yard more per touch and 0.7 more yards per carry. Given that Corum ran for 5.1 yards per pop, his production paired with a fresher Williams really added to an offense that already had a dynamic passing attack. But Williams said he spent the offseason really focused on his body and training as a runner, not a pass-catcher. Could we see Corum pick up more targets after only having 14 last season?



ODDS TO WIN...

+550

SUPER BOWL

+295

NFC

-105

NFC WEST

SAN FRANCISCO

49ers

Whether or not the electrical substation has anything to do with it, the 49ers have dealt with a myriad of injuries already. Most of the starters and a handful of guys across the depth chart have a Q or had a Q next to their names throughout August. George Kittle came off the PUP list, so that was a breath of fresh air from a news standpoint, but Christian McCaffrey practiced very little while hoping for a new contract. Kyle Shanahan downplayed the notion that CMC was using that as a reason for sitting out with what was always termed 'tightness'. Ricky Pearsall had season-ending knee surgery.

With Evans, Christian Kirk, and others limited or outright unavailable, De'Zhaun Stribling made a bit of noise with the additional reps, but he, too, got dinged and missed some time with a shoulder issue. By comparison, the defense is fit as a fiddle, though Mykel Williams is still out while recovering from a torn ACL and Nick Bosa is not back to full speed from his. Stopgap signee Nate Hobbs also got hurt and it probably cost him a roster spot. And, yet, despite all the injuries, nobody had a worse training camp than owner Jed York.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR DE'ZHAUN STRIBLING

Stribling, who shined in the first two preseason games with 11 catches for 109 yards, may very well be the WR2 after just being drafted in the second round back in April. With Deebo Samuel back in the mix and Kirk around whenever he gets healthy, there shouldn't be a ton of pressure on Stribling to perform, but he had nearly 3,000 yards after five college seasons and six touchdowns in each of his last two seasons. The chance is there for him to excel right away.



ODDS TO WIN...

19-1

SUPER BOWL

+960

NFC

+305

NFC WEST

SEATTLE

Seahawks

Between the lines, it was a pretty tame preseason for the reigning Super Bowl champs. They were sold to the Khosla group for over \$9.6 billion. They also made waves, and not in a great way, by having interest in Terrion Arnold, who faces some very serious criminal charges that got him released by the Lions. Arnold is on the commissioner's exempt list, so who knows if he'll play a snap for the Seahawks, but they seemed content with the questionable PR move. Help in the secondary was attractive, though, with Nick Emmanwori in doubt for Week 1 and Bud Clark's broken ankle.

Zach Charbonnet is still recovering from the torn ACL he suffered in the playoffs, so the Seahawks opted not to put first-round pick Jadarrian Price in harm's way. He was dealing with a lower-body issue anyway, but bubble-wrapping him was the sensible thing to do. Similarly, neither Sam Darnold nor Jaxon Smith-Njigba played in the preseason. With a pretty set roster, the Seahawks were just analyzing their depth guys, a smart move given that they played a lot of extra football and had a long season last year.

PLAYER TO WATCH: WR RASHID SHAHEED

It was a little bit surprising to see the Seahawks not take a wide receiver earlier in the April draft, as they did take one in the sixth round out of Kansas, but that was it. Cooper Kupp was underwhelming, to say the least last season and Shaheed only had 26 targets and 15 grabs over nine games. JSN can't be covered, but he also probably needs some help after having 93 more targets and 67 more catches than anybody else. Shaheed had a much lower snap share in the regular season with Seattle than he did with New Orleans at just 47.7%. You wonder who WR2 will be here and if that can be him.



ODDS TO WIN...

11-1

SUPER BOWL

+600

NFC

+215

NFC WEST



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