

# NFL divisional round

The Divisional Round of the playoffs was a round that favored the underdogs. Here's a recap of the mayhem that occurred:

## **Saints vs. Vikings:**

The Minnesota Vikings defeated the New Orleans Saints 29-24 in a heartbreaking fashion.

Minnesota had a 96.1 percent chance of winning at the half due to the fact that they were up 17-0. However, at the beginning of the fourth quarter, all of that started to change as the Saints made an incredible comeback effort.

With 25 seconds left in the game, New Orleans' kicker Will Lutz made a 43 yard field goal to push the Saints ahead of the Vikings with a score of 24-23. At this moment, New Orleans had secured the victory, so they thought. Minnesota quarterback Case Keenum made a last-ditch-effort on the final play of the game with a deep pass to receiver Stefon Diggs.

All New Orleans' defense had to do was tackle Diggs in-bounds and the clock would have run out, resulting in a victory for the Saints. However, things just can't be that simple.

Diggs caught the ball in mid-air and the Saints' rookie safety Marcus Williams totally missed Diggs, leaving a wide-open path for Minnesota to score and put the final nail in the Saints' coffin as time expired.

What was Williams thinking? Who knows? Maybe he just totally missed the tackle, maybe he was trying to avoid interfering with the pass or maybe he was paid to miss the tackle (just kidding). All I know is the Saints messed up big time and the Vikings are moving on to the Conference Championship.

In my eyes, the Vikings are the strongest team left in the playoffs. I believe they have the best chance at taking home

the Lombardi trophy this year. However, the playoffs hardly turn out as expected.

### **Falcons vs. Eagles:**

The Philadelphia Eagles defeated the Atlanta Falcons 15-10 in a game that came down to the very end.

The Eagles were considered by many as the underdogs coming into this matchup. However, the Eagles fought hard and managed to take down the Super Bowl LI runner-up despite their two turnovers. Philadelphia beat Atlanta in pretty much every stat; the Eagles had more time of possession, more total yards, more yards per attempt and so on.

The Falcons, despite the fact that the Eagles' defense prevented them from doing much, still had a chance at the very end to pull out the win. Unfortunately for Atlanta, the potential game-winning pass slipped right through receiver Julio Jones' hands and with it, their season.

All in all, this game was a nail-biter. Despite my predictions last week that the Falcons would pull out the win, I believe the better team won. Now, the Eagles led by backup quarterback Nick Foles have one more game to win in order to make it to the Super Bowl. The only question that remains is will the Eagles continue playing strong, or will they collapse under pressure against a strong Minnesota team? We can only wait and see.

### **Titans vs. Patriots:**

The New England Patriots dominated the Tennessee Titans 35-14.

At the end of the first quarter, Tennessee took an early 7-0 lead over the Patriots of New England. The Titans' confidence skyrocketed and they felt as if they actually had the ability to take down last year's champs. Then, that's when the Patriots decided to stop giving Tennessee false hope and

instead show them who was really in charge.

It all went downhill from that moment on. Tennessee didn't score again until the end of the fourth quarter. The Patriots absolutely obliterated the Titans' hopes and dreams.

New England is the Super Bowl favorites once again this year. I mean, how could you not be when you have Tom Brady on your team? However, I'm a little skeptical of New England. I don't think that things will turn out how they're supposed to. In fact...well...you'll just have to read my predictions at the end.

### **Jaguars vs. Steelers:**

The Jacksonville Jaguars came into this game as the underdogs and yet still managed to, unexpectedly, take down the Pittsburgh Steelers 45-42.

The Jaguars rookie running back from LSU, Leonard Fournette, dominated the Steelers. Fournette managed to gain 109 rushing yards and three touchdowns along with 10 receiving yards with a total of 27 touches. If Jacksonville's defense would have played like they usually do along with Fournette performing like he did, I wouldn't be surprised if the Jaguars won by two or more touchdowns.

Pittsburgh seemed to underestimate the Jaguars coming into this game; they were already thinking about the Conference Championship against the Patriots. But, if we're all being honest, who wasn't underestimating the Jaguars? Who wasn't already looking forward to the rematch between the Patriots and Steelers in the Conference Championship? Who ever thought in their wildest dreams that the Jaguars would be in the AFC Conference Championship after a season that consisted of 3 wins and 13 losses? No one did! That, folks, is what makes football great. Anyone can defy the odds and accomplish their goals, unless you're the Cleveland Browns. In that case, just stop trying.

## Conference Championship Predictions:

### AFC:

#### 1. Jaguars vs. Patriots:

The Patriots have Tom Brady. The Patriots won the Super Bowl last season. The Patriots are projected to win. That is exactly why they will lose. Yes, the Patriots will lose to the Jaguars with a final score of 31-28.

### NFC:

#### 1. Vikings vs. Eagles:

While both teams have solid defenses, Minnesota's is better. While both teams have solid offenses, due to the absence of Carson Wentz, Minnesota's is better. Therefore, Minnesota will win with a final score of 23-13.

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## NFL wildcard round

The NFL Wild Card Round was full of triumph and heartbreak which basically means that it lived up to the immense hype. Some teams lived to see another day while others will spend the rest of January on their couches. Here's a recap of the each game that took place this past weekend:

### Titans vs. Chiefs:

The Tennessee Titans pulled off a crazy upset victory versus the Kansas City Chiefs, coming back from an 18-point deficit to win 22-21.

The Titans, by all means, were the underdogs coming into this game. They were barely able to make the playoffs in the first

place, so why should we have expected them to do much? However, thanks to some late-game heroics in the form of a receiving touchdown from Tennessee quarterback Marcus Mariota to Tennessee quarterback Marcus Mariota (yes, you read that correctly), the Titans were able to hang on and advance to the divisional round.

Kansas City is expected to part ways with starting quarterback Alex Smith this upcoming offseason and let their rookie quarterback Patrick Mahomes II take the reins. Mahomes, in my opinion last year, was the third best quarterback in his draft class only behind Houston Texans quarterback Deshaun Watson and Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jerod Evans. However, I believe that he has proved himself thus far and has the potential to surpass these expectations.

During his debut, Mahomes made some amazing throws while also making some rookie mistakes. The main thing that he needs to keep working on is his touch on his passes. Mahomes is known for his elite arm strength, and sometimes, that arm strength can cause him to throw some unnecessary passes which can result in interceptions. However, Mahomes looked promising in his debut versus the Denver Broncos, and he'll definitely give Chiefs' fans something to look forward to next season.

### **Falcons vs. Rams:**

Despite the Atlanta Falcons' appearance in the Super Bowl last year, they, like the Titans, came into this game with the underdog title. However, Atlanta managed to go on the road and defeat the Los Angeles Rams, 26-13. The Falcons don't appear to be the same team that they were last year but seem to be gaining some steam. The Rams, on the other hand, seemed to have an elite, all-around team only to show their youth and inexperience on Saturday night.

During this matchup, the one thing that stuck out the most to me was how little the Rams used Todd Gurley. Gurley, an MVP

candidate this season, only had 14 rushing attempts. This was a big red flag and a big factor in the Rams' loss. Stats show that in all five of the Rams' losses, Gurley was only allowed to run the ball 16 or less times. When the best player on your offense, and arguably even on your whole team, is limited in his touches and you decide to let your young, second-year quarterback pass the ball 45 times in the playoffs, that's a major problem.

The Falcons, on the other hand, were more efficient in the red zone and in goal-to-go situations which ultimately got them the win. The Falcons had a 50 percent red zone efficiency and a 66 percent goal-to-go efficiency compared to the Rams' 25 percent red zone efficiency and a zero percent goal to go efficiency.

Even though the Rams still seem to have the better overall team, the Falcons played better and managed to pull off the win which will keep their Super Bowl hopes alive for another week.

### **Bills vs. Jaguars:**

The Jacksonville Jaguars defeated the Buffalo Bills with a score of 10-3. While the Jaguars were expected to win, the game wasn't expected to be as sluggish and slow as it was.

Jaguars' quarterback Blake Bortles did awful. Bortles only completed slightly under half of his passes for 87 yards and one touchdown. However, Bortles did run 10 times for 88 yards. Jaguars' running back Leonard Fournette didn't do much either. Fournette ran 21 times yet got 31 less yards than Bortles.

The Buffalo Bills couldn't even score a touchdown. Although, this is most likely due to Jacksonville's elite defense.

Overall, this game was extremely boring to watch and there's really not much to say about it. All I know for certain is that if the Jaguars' offense continues to play this awfully,

they will definitely lose their next game.

### **Panthers vs. Saints:**

The New Orleans Saints defeated the Carolina Panthers with a final score of 31-26.

Basically the whole game, the Saints were up by two scores. It looked as if the Saints were going to take the win pretty easily. However, in the last several minutes of the game, the Panthers made a comeback effort. Unfortunately for Carolina, their efforts came up short.

After a failed fourth down conversion by the Saints, it all came down to the last drive of the game. The Panthers started at their own 31 yard line and had just a little under two minutes to drive down the field, get a touchdown and win the game. After a few passes and a few penalties, the Panthers had 11 seconds left with the ball on the Saints' 21 yard line. Panthers' quarterback Cam Newton dropped back to pass in a desperate attempt to get a first down or maybe even score. However, he could not get a pass off before the Saints' defense blitzed in, sacked Newton and won the game.

Overall, it was a really exciting game and if the Saints keep on playing this way, they will be hard to stop.

### **Divisional Round Predictions:**

#### **AFC:**

1. Tennessee Titans vs. New England Patriots
2. Jacksonville Jaguars vs. Pittsburgh Steelers

- This week, I believe that the Patriots will defeat the Titans with a final score of 31-14. I also predict that the Steelers will defeat the Jaguars 24-17.

#### **NFC:**

1. Atlanta Falcons vs. Philadelphia Eagles

2. New Orleans Saints vs. Minnesota Vikings

- Even though I don't want to say this, I predict the Falcons will defeat the Eagles with a final score of 23-14 (my gut just says that the Falcons will win). I also predict that the Saints will defeat the Vikings with a final score of 17-16.
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# All things must come to an end

With it being the last week of the regular season in the NFL, week 17, there aren't too many big things going on. The playoffs are pretty much set and teams who aren't in the running for a playoff spot don't really have much to fight for except their dignity. With that being said, here's a recap of some important things that went down:

## **Titans Earn a Spot In the Playoffs:**

The Tennessee Titans defeated the Jacksonville Jaguars in a make-or-break game for the Titans' season.

If the Titans would have lost, they would be watching the playoffs from their couch. However, thanks to a horrible performance by the Jaguars' offense, the Titans live to see another day.

The Jaguars offense was held to just one touchdown and one field goal, making their final score a disappointing 10 points. During their 26 minutes and 33 seconds worth of offense, the Jaguars somehow managed to lose two of four fumbles and throw two interceptions which shows how

inefficiently their offense was playing. With Jacksonville's quarterback Blake Bortles only completing a little under half of his passes and their star rookie running back Leonard Fournette only running for 69 yards on 19 carries, the Jaguar offense just couldn't get things rolling.

What's funny in my eyes is that the Titans' offense really didn't do much better; they just managed to do "less-horrible" than the Jaguars. The Titan defense is what pushed Tennessee over the top to get the win.

Free safety Kevin Byard helped out tremendously by racking up two interceptions and was a part of a total of six tackles. Titans' linebacker Avery Williamson played a big role in the defense as well; he made five tackles and assisted in six other tackles.

In all honesty, I don't believe the Titans are really a threat in the playoffs. I truly am a fan of the team that they've built, but they just don't have what it takes to defeat the competition that is to come. I really hope that I'm wrong in saying that, but as of now I don't believe there's any hope for the Titans of Tennessee.

### **Playoff Picture/Wildcard Games:**

The wildcard games of the playoffs are set! Here's how it's looking:

#### **AFC:**

1. Tennessee Titans vs. Kansas City Chiefs
2. Jacksonville Jaguars vs. Buffalo Bills

- I predict that the Chiefs will defeat the Titans by about 10 points with a final score of 13-23 and that the Jaguars will defeat the Bills by at least two touchdowns with a final score of 31-17.

#### **NFC:**

1. Carolina Panthers vs. New Orleans Saints

2. Los Angeles Rams vs. Atlanta Falcons

- I predict that the Saints will defeat the Panthers by less than 10 points with a final score of 20-14 and that the Rams will defeat the Falcons by at least 10 points with a final score of 24-10.

### **Jon Gruden Is Back as the Head Coach of the Raiders:**

Former head coach Jon Gruden is back in the game!

The Oakland Raiders are preparing to sign Gruden to a 10-year 100 million dollar contract which is believed to be the richest coaching contract in NFL history. Gruden has previously spent time as the head coach of the Oakland Raiders and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and even won Super Bowl XXXVII with Tampa Bay (ironically against the Raiders) back in the 2002-2003 season.

Since Gruden stopped coaching for a while, he has spent nine NFL seasons as a color commentator for the ESPN's Monday Night Football broadcasts.

I personally believe that Gruden is exactly what Oakland needs to be that lethal team that they were supposed to be this season. The Raiders have all the pieces they need to be successful along with a top ten pick in this year's draft where they will most likely be looking to draft an inside linebacker or offensive lineman. I am a fan of Gruden and I am a fan of the team Oakland has so I'm excited to see where this thing goes.