

SPORTS

If the NFL regular season ended today...

Pittsburgh Steelers would be only one of Erie's three nearby NFL teams to make the playoffs

Four weeks remain in the 2008-2009 NFL season, and a series of shocking facts are starting to settle in amongst football fans nationwide. The Atlanta Falcons, Carolina Panthers, and Tampa Bay Buccaneers all figure to make a strong run to the playoffs, while the Dallas Cowboys, New England Patriots, and Green Bay Packers might miss out completely.

AFC North

Within the AFC North, the disparity between the top-two teams and bottom-two teams is ridiculous. The Ohio teams lie in ruins, while the Pittsburgh Steelers retain a one-game lead over the Baltimore Ravens. Though they face off later in the season, they also both face difficult end-season schedules. The winner will take an automatic spot, while the loser will figure to win a wild card spot.

If the season ended today: Pittsburgh takes the division, Baltimore gets a wild card.

-  **AFC South (#1)**
Tennessee Titans (11-1)
-  **AFC North (#2)**
Pittsburgh Steelers (9-3)
-  **AFC East (#3)**
New York Jets (8-4)
-  **AFC West (#4)**
Denver Broncos (7-5)
-  **Wild Cards**
Indianapolis Colts (8-4)
Baltimore Ravens (8-4)
- Close Behind:**
New England Patriots (7-5)
Miami Dolphins (7-5)
Buffalo Bills (6-6)

AFC East

Midseason, popular thought was lent towards the New York Jets, New England Patriots, and Buffalo Bills all making the playoffs. Now, with several inter-division games left to play (Miami at Buffalo, Buffalo at New York), the Jets seem the natural favorite to win the division. The Patriots and Miami will each need to squeak past the Colts and the loser of the Ravens-Steelers feud to grab a spot. Miami holds the tie-breaker, so if another team tanks, they might squeak in.

If the season ended today: New York takes the division, everyone else misses out.

By Connor Sattely
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AFC South

The Tennessee Titans didn't just stand up to their division rival the Indianapolis Colts - they completely outmatched them. They lead them three games with four left to play, and seem to be the clear favorite to win the division. The Colts, at 8-4, remain a possibility for a wildcard spot in the AFC. The Jacksonville Jaguars roll in as one of the most disappointing teams and will miss the playoffs with the late-season resurgent Houston Texans.

If the season ended today: Tennessee takes the division, Indianapolis gets a wild card.

AFC West

Easily the worst division in the AFC, this division faces stark disappointments, including one of the farthest-fallen teams in the NFL, the San Diego Chargers, at 4-8. The Denver Broncos lead them by three games and seem to be the favorite to win the division. The "rebuilding" Oakland Raiders and Kansas City Chiefs total up to a combined 5-19 record this year, and the Broncos seem the default to enter the playoffs from the division.

If the season ended today: Denver takes the division, everyone else misses out.

NFC East

The preseason favorite to send three teams to the playoffs, this star-studded division will now likely send only one: the New York Giants. The defending Super Bowl champions lead the Dallas Cowboys by three games. The Cowboys match up against the Atlanta Falcons for a wildcard spot and would miss out due to a lesser in-conference record. The Redskins remain in the running for a spot, but would need a lot of people to start losing very soon.

If the season ended today: New York takes the division and a first-round bye, everyone else misses out.

NFC North

Another supposedly tough division has featured a resurgent Chicago Bears team at 6-6 and the Minnesota Vikings leading the group at 7-5. Green Bay rolls in third at 5-7, and seems to be out of reach of a playoff spot at this point. Minnesota's victory over Chicago last week will likely propel them to a playoff spot; they face miserable Detroit next week, followed by moderately tough matches in Arizona and at home against Atlanta. Chicago has an easier schedule, facing Jacksonville, New Orleans, and Green Bay, but losing the tie-breaker to the Vikings might do them in.

If the season ended today: Minnesota takes the division, everyone else misses out.

NFC South

Easily the most heated race in the NFL at this point in the season, saying that this division is in a bottleneck is an understatement. Tampa Bay and Carolina will meet on Monday Night Football to possibly decide the division winner. Atlanta is still at 8-4 and improving rapidly behind newly acquired runningback Michael Turner. In week 15, they will take on Tampa Bay in a home game. If Tampa loses both of those division games, they could still grab a wild card, while Carolina could win the division. If they lose one, they could tie Carolina, leaving the MNF tiebreaker to decide the winner. If they win both, they will have the division.

If the season ended today: Tampa Bay takes the division and gets a first round bye. Carolina gets the first wild card and Atlanta grabs the sixth seed on the second wild card spot.

-  **NFC East (#1)**
New York Giants (11-1)
-  **NFC South (#2)**
Tampa Bay Bucs (9-3)
-  **NFC North (#3)**
Minnesota Vikings (7-5)
-  **NFC West (#4)**
Arizona Cardinals (7-5)
-  **Wild Cards**
Carolina Panthers (9-3)
Atlanta Falcons (8-4)
- Close Behind:**
Dallas Cowboys (8-4)
Washington Redskins (7-5)
Chicago Bears (6-6)

NFC West

Terrible play by the San Francisco 49ers, Seattle Seahawks, and St. Louis Rams have given them a combined record of 8-28 by week 12. The Arizona Cardinals will take the division, currently at 7-5, though they have two moderately difficult games against Minnesota and New England. If they win their game against St. Louis, they will take the division.

If the season ended today: Arizona takes the division, everyone else misses out.

"Off the Wall"

Every once in a while, former sports editor Connor Sattely shares his obviously ridiculous NFL views in his editorial column, "Off the Wall." Think he's wrong? Dispute his claims and your response will be featured in this space next issue.

Any day, any team can beat any team.

By Connor Sattely
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When I was starting out as a sports fan in 1995, following the miserable loss to the Cowboys in the Super Bowl, I asked my dad why our beloved Steelers had lost to those cheating, dirty, horrible Dallas chumps. He proceeded to tell me, at six years old, the sports advice I would remember from that day forth. Any given Sunday, any team can beat any team. Period.

More sports fans need to realize that. I don't think enough do, so I will say it again. Any team can beat any team. That means the Detroit Lions this year could beat the New York Giants or the Tennessee Titans if they played well enough.

Last year, the Giants had the league's 16th ranked offense and the 7th ranked defense. Defense won them the championship.

After the 2006 season, the Colts had the 21st ranked defense, and the 3rd ranked offense. Offense won them the championship.

After 2005, the Steelers had the 15th ranked offense and 4th ranked defense. Defense won them the championship.

Then, you start to look at teams like the Patriots in 2004 (7th offense and 9th defense) and come to the conclusion that sometimes balance wins championships, not offense or defense. Then you see that same team in 2001 with the 24th defense and 19th offense, and the truth becomes clear: as the common saying goes, "this is the playoffs."

Teams play at a different level once they get in the playoffs. Two of the last three Super Bowl victors were ranked last in their conference when they entered and stepped up their play as they ran the table. One of the best regular-season runs in the league's history ended with a loss last year to a team which was a 12-point underdog.


So, as we look at who can win the ring at the end of this season, where a playoff roster includes teams that won four games last year and holds a chance for a team that barely won one, keep in mind that even those teams have a chance at taking the cake. We're looking at the Giants and the Titans and saying "well, both of them have great defenses, they'll probably get there," when we should be saying "the best team, on that day, will win it."

So, cheers to you, Atlanta Falcons. Or to you, Baltimore Ravens, or whoever slips in as a wild card. You have just as much chance as those 1995 Dallas Cowboys, who took their 5th ranked offense and 9th ranked defense to a world championship. Good luck.


Submissions should be mailed to cis5060@psu.edu and should contain no less than 250 words. All submissions will be considered for publication.

Beat The Experts

NFL	Connor	Matt	Rachel	Ryan	Chris
Jacksonville @ Chicago	CHI	DEN	JAC	JAC	CHI
Minnesota @ Detroit	DET	GB	MIN	MIN	MIN
Houston @ Green Bay	HOU	WASH	G.B.	HOU	G.B.
Cleveland @ Tennessee	TEN	KC	TEN	TEN	CLE
Atlanta @ New Orleans	ATL	NYG	N.O.	ATL	N.O.
Philadelphia @ N.Y.G.	N.Y.G.	TB	N.Y.G.	N.Y.G.	PHI
Washington @ Baltimore	BALT	DET	BALT	BALT	BALT
Miami @ Buffalo	MIA	SEA	BUF	MIA	BUF
N.Y.J. @ San Francisco	N.Y.J.	PIT	N.Y.J.	N.Y.J.	N.Y.J.
New England @ Seattle	N.E.	JAC	N.E.	N.E.	N.E.
Dallas @ Pittsburgh	PIT	MIA	PIT	PIT	DAL
MNF Tie-Breaker	+2	+4	+7	+3	+8
Tampa Bay @ Carolina	T.B.	BUF	T.B.	T.B.	T.B.
Last week:	9-3	7-6	*11-1	8-4	9-3
* denotes winner					
NCAA	Connor	Matt	Rachel	Ryan	Chris
#1 Alabama vs. #4 Florida	Florida	PSU	*Bama	Florida	*Bama
#5 USC @ UCLA	USC	Florida	USC	USC	USC
Navy vs. Army	Navy	Navy	Army	Navy	Navy
South Florida @ West Virginia	WVU	Texas	WVU	WVU	WVU
#23 Pittsburgh @ Connecticut	Pitt	USC	Pitt	Pitt	Pitt
Last week:	4-1	*5-0	3-2	*5-0	*5-0
* denotes winner					
Season Totals:	122-54	103-73	119-57	110-66	102-74



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