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Exploratory Essay Draft

### Future NFC West Champions

The 2020-2021 NFL season was a unique one to say the least. At every level, teams were forced to change the way they played the game of football. Training camp and preseason games were removed to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading amongst the players. This is a critical piece to a teams preparation and it was clear which teams it affected. One of those teams that was not affected by this change, was the Los Angeles Rams. The LA Rams are undoubtedly one of the most well coached teams in the league, led by the offensive genius that is Sean McVay. Their coaching is only one of the many reasons the Rams had a successful season and why they will have an even more successful season in the coming year.

The Rams play in arguably the best division in football, the NFC West. The NFC west consists of the LA Rams, the Seattle Seahawks, the Arizona Cardinals, and the then reigning superbowl runner ups, San Francisco 49ers. The Seattle Seahawks, who finished 12-4 were led by Russel Wilson, who started the season on an absolute tear. Russ was easily the MVP favorite through the first 5 weeks though he would be later outplayed by Aaron Rodgers and Patrick Mahomes. The Arizona Cardinals finished 8-8 but their record heavily underestimates how star studded this team really was. Kyler Murray, Deandre Hopkins, Buddha Baker, Kenyan Drake, and Larry Fitzgerald are just a few of the names that made up what is one of the most talented rosters in the league.

The 49ers team who finished 6-10 were underwhelming but for good reason. A team coming off a Superbowl appearance would end up losing 22 players to injury. To give you some perspective, there are 53 players on an active roster in the NFL. Among those 22 players injured were the 49ers starting quarterback, tight end, wide receiver, offensive tackle, center, defensive tackle, both of their defensive ends, their cornerback, safety, and all 3 of their running backs, and the list goes on. A 6-10 record does not give this team justice as to how well they could've performed if they were healthy. In a division like this one, having any form of success would be considered a win. The LA Rams have done just that, finishing 3-3 in divisional games this year losing to the 49ers twice and the Seahawks once (who they later eliminated in the playoffs). Sean McVay in his career as the Rams coach is 16-8 in divisional games in the past 4 years and has never lost a game to the Cardinals, who they play twice a year. The Rams have shown they can succeed in this division and will continue to in coming years.

In 2020 the Rams finished 10-6 behind the best defense in the league led by none other than the 2 time NFL Defensive Player of The Year Aaron Donald, who won the award again this year for the 3rd time. The pairing of Aaron Donald and one of, if not the best cornerback in the league Jalen Ramsey led to a dominant defensive that would lead the league in multiple categories. Some of those categories include, points allowed per game at 18.5, yards per game allowed at 281, yards per play, first downs allowed, passing yards allowed, and passing touchdowns allowed. In comparison, the Kansas City Chiefs, who just appeared in the Superbowl, allowed 1,200 more yards this season. That stat ranks exactly middle of the pack at 16th in the league. That is only a few of the statistics that the Rams were among the best at. Opposing teams facing the Rams scored only 27.9% of the time when they had the ball, again a

league leading statistic. This is not subject to change as most of the key pieces that made up this defense are expected to return for the 2021-2022 NFL season.

There is no doubt about how good this Rams defense was, but they could not have done it alone. Though their offense was nothing special, they performed well enough to win games. With the likes of Malcolm Brown, Darrell Henderson, and rookie Cam Akers in the backfield, the Rams ability to run the ball opened up an efficient play action game that played to the strengths of quarterback Jared Goff and Sean McVay's offensive scheme. Cam Akers looks to be the future of what will continue to be a strong run game in LA. The passing game is where the Rams continue to struggle, more specifically, the quarterback position. With receivers Robert Woods, Cooper Kupp, and tight end Tyler Higbee to throw the ball to, Rams quarterback Jared Goff was top 10 in the league in only 2 stats, passes attempted and interception. Luckily for the Rams this problem was just recently addressed.

On January 31st, 2020 the problem in the Rams offense named Jared Goff was shipped off to Detroit along with 2 future first round picks and a 2021 3rd round pick in return for Lions Quarterback Matthew Stafford. To say this is an upgrade is an understatement. Matthew Stafford, whose career was going to waste in Detroit, now becomes a Superbowl contender in LA. In the 2020 Season Matthew Stafford led Jared Goff in 13 major categories even though he was sacked 15 more times. Even with significantly worse pass protection, Stafford was able to easily outperform Goff. Not to mention the horrendous coaching situation in Detroit. Lions ex-head coach Matt Patricia and General Manager Bob Quinn were both fired after back to back seasons under .500. Patricia would finish his career in Detroit with a 13-29-1 record. Sean McVay is 43-21 in his 4 years as the Rams head coach. Staffords career record as a quarterback does not accurately represent his skill as a quarterback. With a career record of 74-90-1 Stafford has over

45,000 passing yards, a 62.6% career completion percentage, as well as 282 career passing touchdowns to 144 interceptions. He also holds the records of fastest player to reach 40,000 career passing yards, most 4th quarter comebacks in a single season at 8, and was the first player in NFL history to complete a season with at least a 60% completion percentage in every game. Stafford is widely known as having some of the best arm talent in the NFL, pulling off difficult throws on a weekly basis. I expect him to bring this talent to LA and ball out on what will be the best team Stafford has been on, as well as what will be the best team in the NFC West next year.

The Rams have shown that they can perform at the highest level and I expect them to continue this success into next year. With Sean McVay now having the opportunity to coach one of the most talented quarterbacks in the league, I expect them to be NFC West champions and potentially superbowl favorites out of the NFC. Though there is a lot that is subject to change this offseason, something drastic is going to have to occur in the NFC West in order for the Rams not to succeed in the coming season.

## Bibliography

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Summary: The Rams will continue to have a successful season if they continue the good work

Feedback: I think your paper is written very well. It is neat and very organized. I learned a lot about the Rams. I do not know a lot about sports so your paper gave me an insight on the teams and how they have been doing. For topic exploration, I will give it a polished because you have a lot of small details and the paper is written nicely. You just have to work on your citation.

Overall the paper is very well written.