

Broncos at Bills



Pro Football Network's **Broncos at Bills** Preview

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Table of Contents

[Table of Contents](#)

[Broncos Trends and Insights](#)

[Bills Trends and Insights](#)

[Focus Points](#)

[Josh Allen QB+ Grades by Postseason](#)

[PFN's QB+ Metric](#)

[Bo Nix](#)

[Josh Allen](#)

[PFN's OFF+ Metric](#)

[Broncos](#)

[Bills](#)

[PFN's OL+ Metric](#)

[Broncos](#)

[Bills](#)

[PFN's DEF+ Metric](#)

[Broncos](#)

[Bills](#)

[PFN Game Breakdown](#)

[Playoff Outlook from PFN's Playoff Predictor](#)

[PFN Power Ranking \(PR+\)](#)

[PFN's Metrics Explained](#)

[Quarterback+ the Best Way to Evaluate Your Signal-Caller](#)

[Offense+ Gives You A Better Look At the Game](#)

[OL+ Gives a New Way of Looking at Offensive Line Play](#)

[Defense+ Analyzes the Other Side of the Ball](#)

Pro Football Network's **Broncos at Bills** Preview

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Broncos Trends and Insights

- Bo Nix got this team to 10 wins. Their last double-digit win season came in 2015, a season that ended with a Super Bowl.
- Bo Nix made NFL history as the first QB with 3+ TD passes and 75% complete in four games as a rookie. He also matched the franchise record for such games in a season (Peyton Manning had four such games in both 2012 and 2013).
- Overall, rookie starting QBs are 12-15 in their playoff debuts. This could be the third straight season a rookie QB wins a playoff start (Stroud last year, Brock Purdy in 2022), which would be the longest streak in NFL history.
- If Denver is going to gain the edge, their emerging second-year receiver in Marvin Mims Jr. could be at the center of things. The Bills own a bottom-five blitz rate and a bottom-10 pressure rate this season (their pressure rate sits at 32.5%, lowest among playoff teams).
 - **Yards Per Route, QB Not Pressured**
 - CeeDee Lamb: 2.70
 - Malik Nabers: 2.66
 - Justin Jefferson: 2.64
 - **Marvin Mims Jr.: 2.62**
 - Drake London: 2.61
 - Tee Higgins: 2.54
- Since Week 11, the Broncos have been the third-highest-scoring team in the league (32.6 PPG).
- The Broncos beat the Chiefs on Sunday, their first win this season in a game in which they didn't force a turnover (lost the previous four).

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- Courtland Sutton has scored 18 times on 225 targets over the past two seasons (two seasons prior: four touchdowns on 207 targets).
- Betting: Over the past two months, the Broncos have two losses on normal-to-extended rest – an overtime loss to Joe Burrow and a two-point loss to Patrick Mahomes (GW 35-yard FGA was blocked at the buzzer).



Bills Trends and Insights

- The Bills have made the postseason in seven of eight seasons under Sean McDermott (he was hired with the franchise on a 17-year playoff drought).
- This is the sixth straight season in which Josh Allen is playing on Wild Card Weekend – he's completed at least 70% of his passes in three of his past four, with multiple TD tosses in each of those contests (one touchdown pass for every 13.5 attempts across those four contests).
- The first 30-30 team in NFL history (passing and rushing touchdowns). Balance is good until it's not – only twice in NFL history has a team with 30+ rush TDs won their conference (2022 Eagles and 1983 Commanders).
- Excluding Week 18, when most of the starters were very limited, if not out altogether, the Buffalo defensive trends on third down are concerning.
 - Weeks 6-13: 36.5%
 - Weeks 14-17: 57.1% converted
- Remove the outlier shootout game against the Rams in Week 14 and Amari Cooper has been targeted on just 15.4% of his routes as a member of the Bills (Weeks 1-6 with Cleveland: 22.8%).



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- Betting: The Bills went 5-3 ATS at home with overs going 6-2, a change of pace from their 4-5 ATS mark and 3-6 overs record a season ago.

Focus Points

- **When Bills Have the Ball: Do Broncos Keep Blitzing vs. Josh Allen?**
 - The Broncos lead the league in Defense+, with blitzing serving as a cornerstone of their identity. Vance Joseph's unit blitzes at the third-highest rate of any defense this season.
 - However, that could play into Josh Allen's strengths. Allen thrives under pressure, ranking second in EPA per dropback when blitzed (0.30), trailing only Lamar Jackson. By traditional stats, Allen has thrown 15 touchdowns to just two interceptions when facing the blitz this season.
 - The challenge for the Broncos is that their blitzing hasn't been particularly effective. Denver ranks 16th in pressure rate (41%) and 25th in success rate (50%) when sending extra pass rushers. In contrast, when the Broncos refrain from blitzing, they rank second in pressure rate (39%) and first in success rate (64%).
- **When Broncos Have the Ball: Bo Nix Much Better Playing From Ahead**
 - For the Broncos to pull off the upset, playing from ahead will be essential. Bo Nix has been an above-average quarterback this season when playing with a lead but significantly less effective when attempting to lead a comeback.
 - By EPA per dropback, Nix ranks 13th (0.14) when the Broncos are leading, but he drops to 29th (-0.01) when trailing.
 - According to QB+, Nix's score is 78.1 (C+) on plays when Denver has the lead. That would rank 15th this season, placing him between Justin Herbert and Geno Smith.
 - However, when Denver is trailing, Nix's QB+ score drops to 73.3 (C-), which ranks 21st. That performance is below what Aidan O'Connell has produced this season.



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● Josh Allen Hoping to Return to Historic Playoff Production

- Josh Allen has experienced some incredible playoff highs but also some recent lows. According to PFN's QB+ metric, which dates back to 2019, Allen delivered the single best postseason performance on record. He achieved a perfect 100 A+ score in 2021, throwing nine touchdowns and zero interceptions in just two games.
- However, in every other postseason of Allen's career, his performance has graded at a C-level or lower. Apart from 2021, he has never ranked higher than eighth in a single postseason by PFN's QB+ metric.

Josh Allen QB+ Grades by Postseason		
Season	Grade	Playoff Rank
2019	72.3 (C-)	8th
2020	70.5 (C-)	9th
2021	100.0 (A+)	1st
2022	73.1 (C)	11th
2023	79.2 (C+)	8th

- Despite some recent playoff struggles, Allen has still thrown 21 touchdowns to just four interceptions in his postseason career. Among the 51 quarterbacks to throw 10 or more playoff touchdowns, his TD-to-INT ratio is the second-best in history, trailing only Alex Smith.

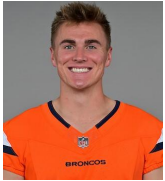


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PFN's QB+ Metric

For full context on the QB+ grades, [please click here](#).



Bo Nix

Season QB+ Grade: C (18th overall)

Bo Nix had a day against the Chiefs in Week 18. Sure, it was against the backups, but what a confidence boost for the rookie heading into the playoffs.

Nix finished with an impressive 0.76 EPA/DB, 66.7% third-down conversion rate, and 11.1 nYPA, with impressive numbers whether operating from a clean pocket (0.79 EPA/DB) or when pressured (0.60).

This was his first game graded above a B, and although it comes with a slight asterisk, it was still impressive to watch. It also lifted Nix up to 19th on the season QB+ and the second rookie overall behind Daniels.

Still, it shouldn't hide the fact that he is far from a finished product, and people shouldn't expect this level to be sustained into the playoffs.

Nix finishes the year 20th in EPA/DB (0.03), 18th in third-down conversion rate (38.7), and 26th in nYPA (6.3). He also ranked outside the top 20 in both EPA/DB from a clean pocket (0.19; 22nd) and when pressured (-0.36; 21st).

That's not to knock him, but just to put into context how far from the average his Week 18 performance was in terms of setting expectations in the playoffs.



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Josh Allen

Season QB+ Grade: A- (3rd overall)

While Allen got the start in Week 18, he played just one snap, completing his only pass of the game before leaving the field. Therefore, he did little to change his QB+ for the season, finishing as the QB3 overall behind Jackson and Goff. The question now becomes, should he win the MVP this season?

Despite some eye-catching performances on the field, the individual game numbers do not show much dominance from Allen. He has yet to grade above a B+ in any game this season, with his best outing being the 17th overall single-game performance this season. That was back in Week 3, with his highest single-game performances since then being 35th and 37th overall in Weeks 14 and 15, respectively.

The overall body of work sees him as one of three quarterbacks getting an A grade of some sort. Intriguingly, 2024 was only tied for his second-best career season, matching his 2022 numbers but falling short of his A+ performance back in 2020.

For the season, Allen is inside the top five for most of the statistics we look at in QB+. His 0.24 EPA/DB ranks third in the NFL, and he's fourth in both EPA/DB from a clean pocket (0.37) and third-best when pressured (-0.05). The only statistic of note where Allen is not in the top five is his third-down conversion percentage (sixth, 44.4%).

When assessing Allen's MVP credentials, there are a few things to look at. Firstly, he doesn't have Jackson's incredible season-long numbers, and he lacks the top-tier single-game performances.

Allen also has as many D+ or lower-graded performances as Jackson. Additionally, Goff has higher full-season numbers than Allen and a higher floor and ceiling when it comes to single-game performances.



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PFN's OFF+ Metric

For full context on the OFF+ grades, [please click here](#).

Broncos

Season OFF+ Grade: C (16th overall)

Bo Nix is an exciting watch, but is that best when it comes to succeeding at a high level?

Nix's athleticism helped the Denver Broncos average the second-lowest sack rate, but that coin has two sides. As he looks to create, things can spiral out of control in a hurry, thus resulting in Denver ranking 17th in EPA per dropback, although that number is heavily impacted by early-season struggles.

In addition, despite Nix's ability to create explosive plays, the Broncos had the third-worst third-down avoidance rate in the league. Some of that is due to an average rushing attack, though Denver ranks higher in rushing success rate (15th) than passing success rate (19th).

Nix has had impressive moments in the latter half of the season, and the arrow is pointing up after 2024 regardless of what happens in the franchise's first playoff game in nine years.

Bills

Season OFF+ Grade: B+ (4th overall)

After briefly reaching the A-grade level, the Buffalo Bills settled in at a B+ down the stretch. That doesn't change the fact that Josh Allen and this unit have as high of a ceiling as any offense remaining.

The Bills' offense ranked first in the league in points per drive and second in EPA per play before benching its starters in Week 18, with Allen's mitigation of negative plays being his greatest area of growth. In addition to his career-low 1.2% interception rate, Allen took sacks at the second-lowest rate of any QB this season (just behind Derek Carr). In fact, his 2.8% sack rate would have led the league each of the previous three seasons.

James Cook demonstrated great growth this season, tying the franchise single-season record with 16 rushing scores. Plus, the backup tandem of Ty Johnson and Ray Davis gives Buffalo's offense a level of balance that we didn't expect.



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Allen has a chance to win 2024 MVP honors and seemingly made history every week. The Bills may not be perfect, but they have every chance to give this franchise its first championship.

PFN's OL+ Metric

For full context on the OL+ grades, [please click here](#).

Broncos

Season OL+ Grade: A+ (1st overall)

The Denver Broncos' offensive line has been one of the driving forces behind their success in 2024. Very little was expected of the offense this season. Normally, when an offense outperforms expectations, it is either the quarterback playing exceptionally well or the offensive line.

Bo Nix has certainly performed well, ranking inside the top 20 of our QB+ rankings this season, but this offensive line's brilliant performances have helped make life easier. Their pressure rate (28.3%) and sack (4.0%) numbers are excellent across the board, despite Nix averaging the fifth-highest time to throw (3.03 seconds).

The Broncos rank top of ESPN's PBWR and RBWR and have plenty of individual players inside the top 10 of their categories. Mike McGlinchey and Garrett Bolles are both inside the top seven for OTs in PBWR. Meanwhile, Luke Wattenberg, Quinn Meinerz, and Ben Powers are all in the top five for PBWR on the interior, with Powers also atop the RBWR for iOL.

Bills

Season OL+ Grade: A- (4th overall)

The Buffalo Bills offensive line bounced back in Week 18 after a tough Week 17 outing. Facing a lackluster New England Patriots defense will do that, but the Bills also did not play many of their first-choice linemen in this game. Therefore, still managing to grade out a B-, even against a poor unit like the Patriots, demonstrates good strength in depth.

The Bills' offensive line has been superb across the board. They allow a pressure rate of just 31.9% (eighth) and lead the league in sack rate (2.6%). When facing the blitz, they allow just a 30.1% pressure rate (second) and a 2.7% sack rate (second). They are certainly helped by having a mobile quarterback who can move around the field, but they also rank inside the top 12 in time-to-throw.



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The PBWR metric from ESPN shows how good the Bills' line is at sustaining blocks. They rank fourth in that metric, which, when combined with the pressure and sack rate stats, makes them arguably the premier pass-blocking unit in the league.

The run game numbers are a bit mixed. The Bills are inside the top five in terms of RBYBC/rush (1.05), but they're just 17th in RBWR. However, their RBWR number is over 70%, so it's far from being a disaster for this offense.

The Bills trail only the Broncos, Ravens, Buccaneers in OL+.

PFN's DEF+ Metric

For full context on the DEF+ grades, [please click here](#).

Broncos

Season DEF+ Grade: A- (1st overall)

The Denver Broncos finished with a 90.9 (A-) overall grade, making them the only team this season to crack the A-grade range.

The issue with Week 18 is that it can produce some skewed results, so Denver dominating the JV Kansas City Chiefs grades out extremely well and boosts their overall season-long number. Nevertheless, the Broncos also led in Defense+ virtually the entire season, making them a worthy top finisher.

Denver ended up ranking first in EPA per dropback and first in EPA per rush on defense, making this one of the more well-rounded units in recent memory. And although this team blitzed at the third-highest rate of any defense, they also generated the second-highest pressure rate without blitzing.

The Broncos were ahead of schedule in 2024, a welcome surprise season for a team that had missed the playoffs eight straight seasons. Now that the drought is over, Denver can look to building a Super Bowl contender behind Bo Nix and this elite unit.

Bills

Season DEF+ Grade: C- (18th overall)



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After finishing as a top-seven defense in each of the last three seasons, the Buffalo Bills finished 18th this year. That's not the biggest surprise given that this was largely billed as a rebuilding season for this unit.

For the season, Buffalo had a strong run defense (sixth in EPA per rush) but a leaky pass defense (26th in EPA per dropback). Dominating the AFC East cellar-dwellers was a nice palette cleanser before potential playoff matchups against the likes of Lamar Jackson and Patrick Mahomes (if they escape the Broncos).

Buffalo's offense is operating at such a high level that the bar to clear for the defense is lower than it would be on nearly any other team. Buffalo has met that threshold against lesser competition but will be challenged in the playoffs to help the Josh Allen-Sean McDermott era reach its first Super Bowl.



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PFN Game Breakdown

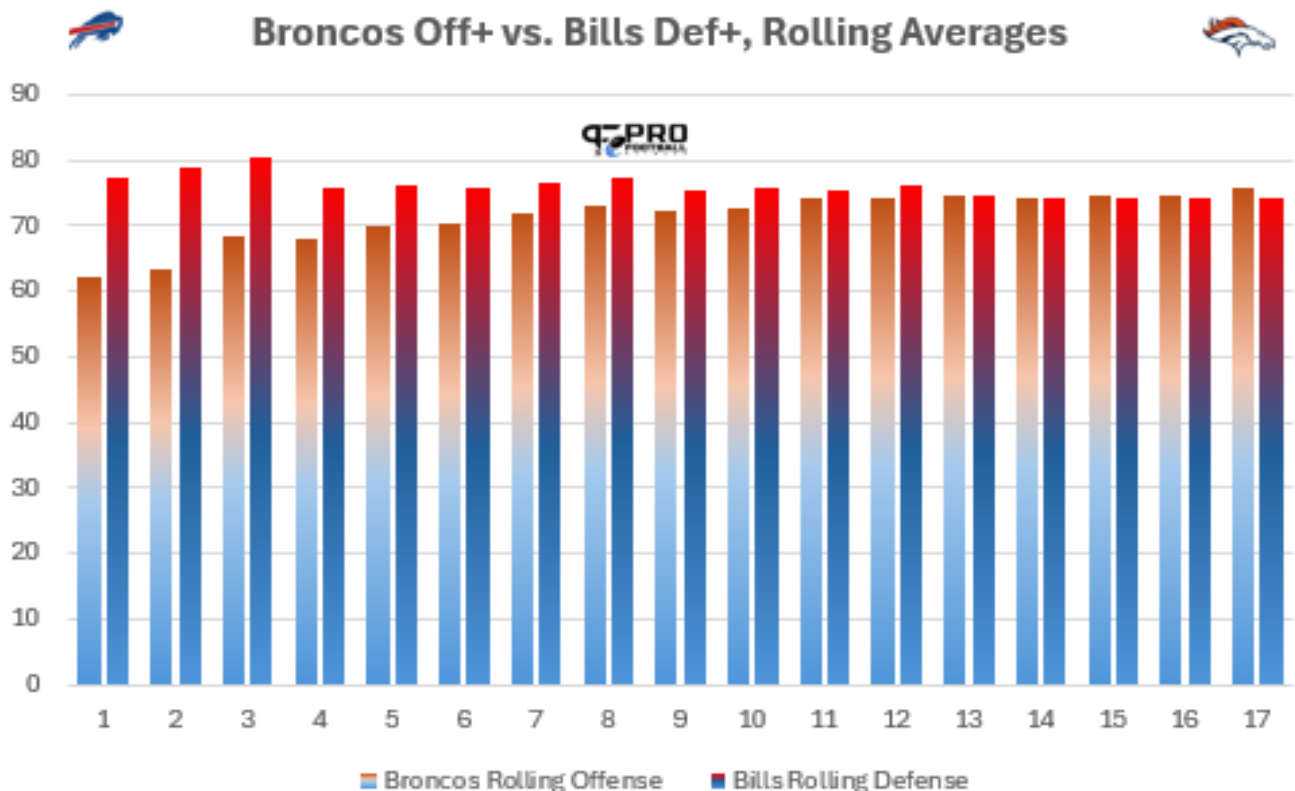
With 18 weeks of data points at our disposal and the power of our custom metrics, we can offer a sharper perspective on how these teams stack up. Our Offense+ metric incorporates timely data and success rates directly tied to winning outcomes, while Defense+ measures a team's ability to limit opponents in high-leverage situations. Both metrics prioritize efficiency, drawing from a wide range of predictive statistics.

With that framework in place, here's how the Broncos vs. Bills Wild Card Game looks through PFN's advanced analytics lens.

Let's take a look at how the Broncos offense matches up with the Bills defense.

Broncos OFF Score: 75.2 (16th)

Bills DEF+ Score: 72.9 (18th overall)



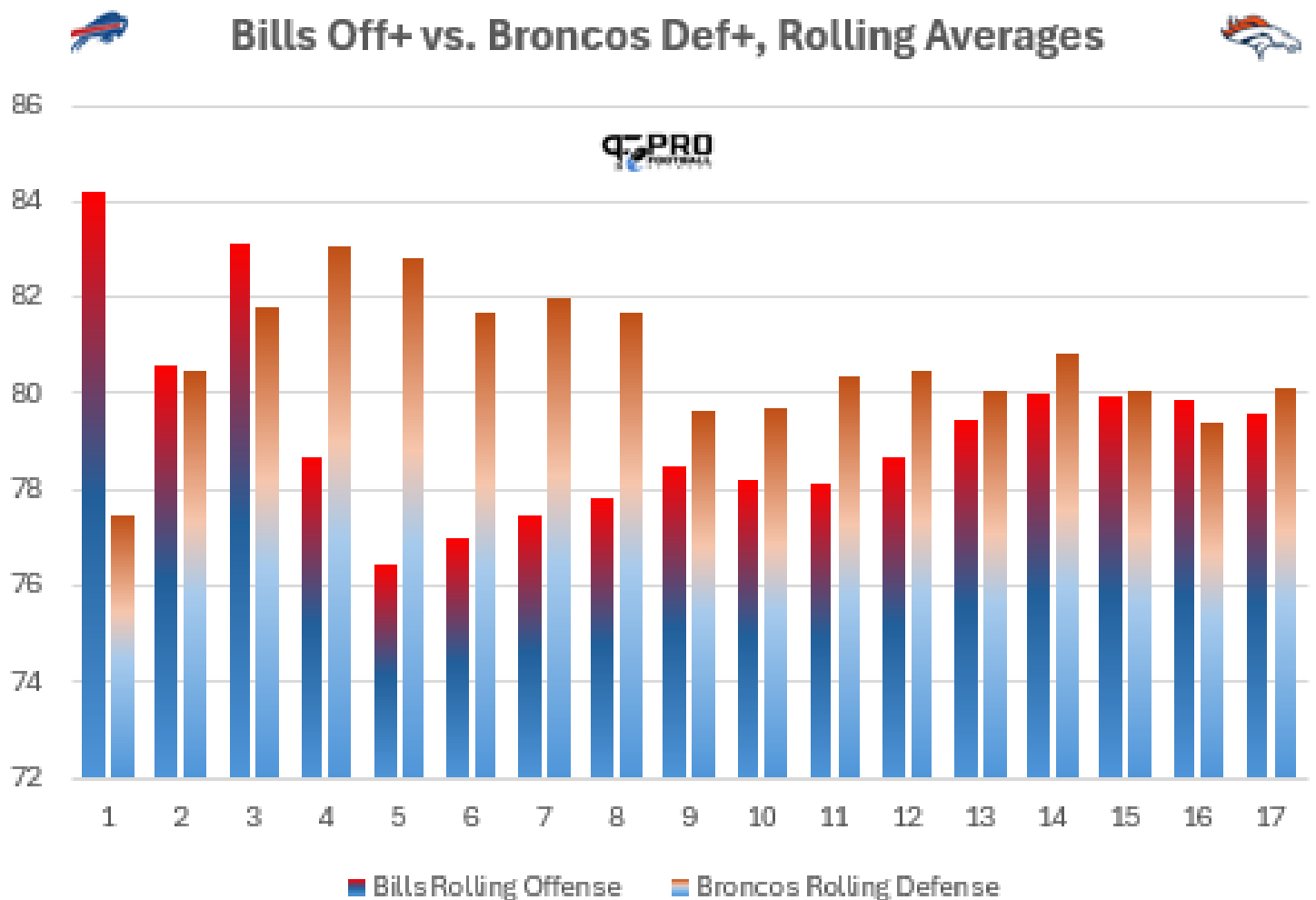
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Here's how the Bills offense stacks up against the Broncos defense.

Bills+ OFF+ Score: 88.3 (4th overall)

Broncos DEF+ Score: 90.7 (1st overall)





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Playoff Outlook from PFN's Playoff Predictor

Below is a look at the games this weekend, based on PFN's win probability model, which ran 10,000 simulations via the [PFN's Playoff Predictor](#):

AFC Wild Card

- (2) Bills: 63.2% chance of winning against (7) Broncos
- (3) Ravens: 71.5% chance of winning against (6) Steelers
- (4) Texans: 43.8% chance of winning against (5) Chargers

NFC Wild Card

- (2) Eagles: 59.0% chance of winning against (7) Packers
- (3) Buccaneers: 54.9% chance of winning against (6) Commanders
- (4) Rams: 43.8% chance of winning against (5) Vikings

Chance to Win Super Bowl

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| • Lions: 29.2% | • Packers: 4.4% |
| • Ravens: 11.1% | • Chargers: 4.1% |
| • Vikings: 9.2% | • Rams: 3.3% |
| • Chiefs: 8.1% | • Commanders: 3.3% |
| • Eagles: 8.1% | • Broncos: 3.0% |
| • Buccaneers: 7.4% | • Steelers: 1.8% |
| • Bills: 6.6% | • Texans: 0.4% |

*PFN's playoff chances, win probabilities, and odds for the number one draft pick are subject to change



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PFN Power Ranking (PR+)

The full context of PFN Power Rankings can be viewed [here](#).

1. Lions	12. Chargers	23. Colts
2. Vikings	13. Steelers	24. Cowboys
3. Ravens	14. Seahawks	25. Panthers
4. Eagles	15. Bengals	26. Raiders
5. Bills	16. Texans	27. Saints
6. Chiefs	17. Cardinals	28. Jaguars
7. Packers	18. 49ers	29. Browns
8. Buccaneers	19. Dolphins	30. Titans
9. Commanders	20. Falcons	31. Patriots
10. Rams	21. Bears	32. Giants
11. Broncos	22. Jets	

PFN's Metrics Explained

PFN's metrics aim to provide fans and analysts alike with an easy-to-digest single score and grade that encompasses a deep level of statistical analysis. All of our metrics are based on historical data going back five or more years (depending on the statistic) and are ranked relative to the entire database. These are then converted into a score for each statistic, which is then evaluated using a weighted average to produce a final "score" and "grade" for each metric.

In each metric, we have evaluated years of data to determine the most suitable statistics to include and which ones to give the most weight to within the metric. This has allowed us to build a suite of metrics that we can use to evaluate teams and players across games, seasons, or careers.

When it comes to our grades, we follow the standard U.S. education grading system where an A is anything 90 or above, a B is anything 80 or above, a C is anything 70 or above, a D is anything 60 or above, and an F being any score that falls below a 60. Within each of those grades, we also have tiers that are denoted by a plus, a minus, or a standard grade. To achieve a plus, a player must be at a seven or above (i.e., 97 = A+), while a minus is anything a three or below (i.e., 93 = A-).



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Quarterback+ the Best Way to Evaluate Your Signal-Caller

Quarterback+ utilizes EPA measurements in certain situations alongside other variables to evaluate a quarterback's performance over the course of a game or season. By using EPA, we are able to provide added context to the situation around a quarterback's performance that is lost in other widely available passer rating metrics, which just look at high-level box-score statistics. Using EPA also means that we integrate rushing yards off scrambles into our evaluations.

Additionally, we use net yards per attempt in our equation, as opposed to just standard yards per attempt, to account for the impact of sacks and their negative impact on the game. Our metric also includes an element that evaluates the quarterback's performance in key situations on third down.

Finally, what really sets QB+ apart from other metrics is that we use situation statistics to evaluate a quarterback's performance in crucial moments of the game. We have defined clutch situations by examining the most impactful moments and situations in games over the last 20+ years to determine which to include in our metric.

Offense+ Gives You A Better Look At the Game

There are several ways to evaluate an offense's performance. Most of the time, people quote a single statistic when stating who is the most efficient or best offense in the NFL. However, these do not give a full picture of the game. Offenses that play alongside bad defenses will often have a high number of points scored or lots of yards, but that does not necessarily make them the best offenses.

Therefore, our Offense+ metric uses several different statistics that cover multiple situations to create one score and grade that encompasses all these different elements into a ranking. By doing this, we present multiple levels of statistical analysis in easy-to-digest numbers that show you exactly where each offense ranks relative to one another across the pass-and-run game.

To produce the score and grade, we use statistics such as EPA, success rate, points per drive, and yards per play. We then evaluate situation statistics such as third-down avoidance, third-down conversion rate, and red-zone conversion rate. Finally, we look at outcome statistics, such as turnover rate, sack rate allowed, and pressure rate statistics, which allow us to give full context to the offenses' performances.



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We do not include top-level statistics such as total points and total yards, which can often be heavily influenced by the way a game plays out and not the team's performance. This allows us to use Offense+ not only as an evaluation tool but also as a predictive tool that examines how an offense may fare in future weeks.

OL+ Gives a New Way of Looking at Offensive Line Play

Our new offensive line metric (OL+) combines pressure and sack rate stats with time-to-throw data to build a profile of an offensive line's performance in various situations. We then sprinkle in ESPN's pass block (PBWR) and run block win rate (RBWR) stats to give a comprehensive overview of these units' performance.

In judging all 32 units, we'll look at their season-long performance, the data over the last four weeks, and the general trends from these respective units week by week. However, we are well aware that football is not played on a spreadsheet, so we've also watched these units throughout the season to observe their performances.

We also know that OL play is arguably more subjective than any other position on the football field. Therefore, we appreciate that how we rank these teams may not be how others rank them.

Defense+ Analyzes the Other Side of the Ball

We see a number of defensive statistics quoted to justify who has the best defense. However, most of the time, these statistics are single statistics that do not provide a full picture of defensive performance (e.g., total yards allowed or total points allowed). Therefore, we have created the Defense+ metric, which evaluates multiple statistics to create a single, easy-to-digest "score" and "grade."

By doing this, we present multiple levels of statistical analysis in a single number that demonstrates exactly where each defense ranks relative to one another in the pass-and-run game and, more generally, in their total performance.

To produce the score and grade, we use statistics such as EPA, success rate, points per drive, and yards per play. We then evaluate situation statistics such as third-down conversion rate and red-zone



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