

NFL DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF WEEKEND

The wildcards have been played, and resulted in a couple of surprises. The Vikes took out the heavily favored Saints in Nawlins, and the Titans took out the Pats in Foxborough. The latter less shocking given how well the Titans played closing out the regular season and how poorly the Pats did.

But now we head into the Divisional rounds. I found this from PFT kind of interesting:

In 1990, the NFL expanded the playoff field from 10 to 12 teams, resulting in four (not two) teams earning a bye. More often than not, the home team that has had a week off wins. But the road teams still have a chance to get lucky.

For the 29 postseasons since the change was made, the home teams have swept the divisional round eight times. That's 27.5 percent of the years utilizing the 12-team format. So in 72.5 percent of the years since the current formula was adopted, at least one road team has won in the divisional round.

Specifically, 13 times the home teams have gone 3-1 in the divisional round. Seven times, there has been a split. Once, in 2008, the visiting teams won three of the four games.

In the 10 seasons from 2005 through 2014, the road teams had a remarkably good stretch, winning 16 of 40 games (40 percent). Over the past four postseasons, however, the home teams have gone 13-3 collectively.

All four home teams are favored to win this weekend, as they usually are. In the 30th year of the current format, chances are at least one will lose. One

of these years, all four will.

Regardless, the home teams are more likely to feel the pressure. Some could be feeling a little rusty. And one lucky punch early in the contest could turn a potential blowout into a close game, and if the game stays close into the fourth quarter, anything can happen.

If there is an upset of a home team, which game or games will it be in?

The first game up today is Minnesota at San Francisco. Obviously the Niners have the top seed in addition to home field today. The Vikes looked extremely good against the Saints. Their defense is really solid, and Kirk Cousins playing very well. Dalvin Cook gives them a well balanced offense, and SF is likely to focus on Cook and make Cousins try to beat them. Can they do that? It may be easier said than done given that Minnesota's O-Line is good. There is certainly upset potential here, and there is history from the 1988 game where the Vikings bounced the heavily favored 13-3 Niners in SF in the Divisional round. It could happen again, but not betting on it.

The second Saturday game is Tennessee at Baltimore. The Titans are on a pretty solid roll ever since they switched from Mariotta to Ryan Tannehill at QB. They are a good team, especially when Derrick Henry gets untracked. But not predicting an upset of the Ravens today.

First up Sunday is Houston at the KC Chiefs. Up to six inches of snow is expected in KC today, although should be well over by tomorrow's kickoff. Ground crew gonna be busy, and there are heating coils under the field, so they should be good to go. Frankly, I have a hard time seeing the Houston offense keep up with Pat Mahomes and the Chiefs. And with Honey Badger Mathieu now on the Chiefs instead of the Texans, decent bet he has given some advice to KC as to how to defend Deshaun Watson.

The final game of the weekend is the Squawks at the Cheeser's. The Pack is my favorite team going back to childhood, and my trusty cheesehead that Phred gave me is out and ready to roll. The Packers' defense is sneaky good, with free agent pickups Preston Smith and Za'Darius Smith really anchoring the D-Line, with the always good secondary still there. Seattle is no longer really the Legion of Boom it once was, but they are still very solid. So the outcome probably turns on who has the better offense, and who plays better, Russell Wilson or Aaron Rodgers. The Frozen Tundra is going to be cold as ice, and the Packers have already put out a call for people to show up at 6 am Sunday to help shoveling out the stadium. This is the kind of game Beast Mode is made for, and Russ Wilson too. As much as I hate to say it, I fear this is the real upset special of the weekend, and I think the Squawks likely do just that.

Okay, rock and roll, and have a great weekend full of great football. Speaking of rock and roll, this weekend's music is a fantastic little piece, Slippin and Sliding, by John Lennon. People forget how good Lennon really was at rockers. Give it a listen, and crank it up.