

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

345 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10154

p. (212) 450-2000
f. (212) 681-7573

NFLCommunications.com



Joe.Lockhart@nfl.com
Executive Vice President of Communications

Brian.McCarthy@nfl.com
Vice President of Communications

Michael.Signora@nfl.com
Vice President of Football Communications

COMMUNICATIONS

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<http://twitter.com/nfl345>

NFL SEASON HEADS INTO SECOND HALF

November has arrived and the NFL season enters its second half. At the midpoint, there are nine teams with a .700 or better winning percentage, led by the 7-1 (.875) Philadelphia Eagles. Since 1990, when the current 12-team playoff format was adopted, nearly 97 percent (60 of 62, 96.8 percent) of the previous teams to start 7-1 or better advanced to the postseason.

Through the first eight weeks, 16 teams have a winning record. Two divisions – AFC East (New England 6-2, Buffalo 5-2, Miami 4-3) and NFC South (New Orleans 5-2, Carolina 5-3, Atlanta 4-3) – each have three teams with a winning record.

The first half of the season has seen thrilling comebacks and close finishes, but the excitement will only intensify as the playoff push begins. And there's still plenty of football to be played so don't count teams out yet.

Since 2000, 44 teams have reached the halfway point of their season with a .500 or below winning percentage and advanced to the playoffs, including at least one in each season. Last year, there were four such teams: Detroit (4-4), Green Bay (4-4), Miami (4-4) and Pittsburgh (4-4).

Of those 44 clubs, seven have advanced to the Conference Championship Game, including both the Packers and Steelers last season. The 2001 New England Patriots reached the midway point with a 4-4 record and went on to win Super Bowl XXXVI.

Week 9 begins on Thursday night with an AFC East matchup as the New York Jets host the Buffalo Bills (8:25 PM ET, NFLN). The week concludes with a pair of primetime contests as the Miami Dolphins host the Oakland Raiders on Sunday night (8:30 PM ET, NBC) and the Detroit Lions visit the Green Bay Packers in a key NFC North showdown on Monday night (8:30 PM ET, ESPN). Some of the other notable games in Week 9:

BUFFALO BILLS (5-2) at NEW YORK JETS (3-5) (Thursday, NFLN, 8:25 PM ET)

- The Bills improved to 5-2 with a 34-14 win over Oakland last week. Buffalo is aiming to close the first half of the season with a 6-2 record which would be the team's best start since 1993 (7-1).
- Buffalo leads the NFL with a +14 turnover differential and ties for the league lead with 17 takeaways. Safety **MICAH HYDE** ranks first in the NFL with five interceptions and has four interceptions in his past four games. Hyde's five interceptions are the most by a Bills player through the team's first seven games since **JAIRUS BYRD** (five) in 2009.
- Jets quarterback **JOSH MC COWN** ranks second in the NFL with a 70.5 completion percentage (179 of 254). McCown has posted a completion percentage of at least 60 percent and thrown multiple touchdown passes in four consecutive games and is the first player in franchise history to accomplish the feat.
- New York wide receiver **ROBBY ANDERSON** had six catches for a career-high 104 yards – his first 100-yard receiving game – and a touchdown in last week's contest against Atlanta.

ATLANTA FALCONS (4-3) at CAROLINA PANTHERS (5-3) (Sunday, FOX, 1:00 PM ET)

- Atlanta improved to 4-3 – including a 3-1 record on the road – with a 25-20 win at the New York Jets last week. Quarterback **MATT RYAN** threw two touchdown passes – including the go-ahead score to wide receiver **MOHAMED SANU** in the fourth quarter – in the victory over the Jets.
- Ryan has won his past three starts against the Panthers, completing 78 of 100 passes (78 percent) for 1,086 yards (362 yards per game) with seven touchdowns and one interception for a 131.1 passer rating. In last year's Week 4 matchup against Carolina (October 2, 2016), Ryan passed for 503 yards and wide receiver **JULIO JONES** had 300 receiving yards as the Falcons became the first team in NFL history to have a 500-yard passer and 300-yard receiver in the same game.
- The Panthers have reached the midpoint with a 5-3 record and look to begin the second half with a key division victory. Last week, Carolina notched a 17-3 win at Tampa Bay as the Panthers limited the Buccaneers to 279 total net yards.
- Carolina defensive end **JULIUS PEPPERS** had a sack and forced fumble against the Buccaneers and ranks fourth in the NFC this season with 7.5 sacks. Peppers has 151 career sacks and passed Pro Football Hall of Famer **CHRIS DOLEMAN** (150.5) for the fourth-most sacks since the individual sack became an official statistic in 1982.

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (2-6) at HOUSTON TEXANS (3-4) (Sunday, CBS, 1:00 PM ET)

- Indianapolis running back **FRANK GORE** had 101 scrimmage yards (82 rushing, 19 receiving) in last week's game at Cincinnati. Gore became the ninth player in NFL history to reach 17,000 career scrimmage yards (17,015) and the other eight players to accomplish the feat are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.
- Colts kicker **ADAM VINATIERI** scored 11 points last week and tied **GARY ANDERSON** for second on the NFL's all-time scoring list with 2,434 career points.
- Last week against Seattle, Houston rookie quarterback **DESHAUN WATSON** became the first player in NFL history with at least 400 passing yards (402), four touchdown passes (four) and 50 rushing yards (67) in a single game. Texans wide receivers **DE ANDRE HOPKINS** (224 yards, one touchdown) and **WILL FULLER V** (125 yards, two touchdowns) each had at least 100 receiving yards and a touchdown.
- Watson has thrown at least three touchdown passes in four consecutive games and is the first rookie in NFL history to accomplish the feat. His 16 touchdown passes in his past four games are the most in league annals by a rookie in any four-game span and his 16 touchdown passes in October are the most ever by a rookie in any calendar month. This season, Watson has 19 passing touchdowns, the most in league history by a player in his first seven career games.

CINCINNATI BENGALS (3-4) at JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS (4-3) (Sunday, CBS, 1:00 PM ET)

- The Bengals defeated Indianapolis 24-23 last week as quarterback **ANDY DALTON** threw two touchdown passes to lead the offense.
- With Cincinnati trailing by six (23-17) in the fourth quarter, defensive end **CARLOS DUNLAP** had a 16-yard interception-return touchdown to help put the Bengals ahead for good. It marked the second fourth-quarter game-winning interception-return touchdown in team history (**KEN RILEY**, October 23, 1983).
- The Jaguars, who had a bye last week, are coming off a 27-0 win at Indianapolis in Week 7. Led by defensive ends **YANNICK NGAKOUÉ** (2.5 sacks) and **CALAIS CAMPBELL** (two), the Jaguars recorded 10 sacks against the Colts. Jacksonville, which recorded 10 sacks in Week 1, became the first club in NFL history to record at least 10 sacks in two of a team's first seven games of a season.
- Campbell, who leads the AFC with 10 sacks in his first season with the Jaguars, has the most sacks by a player in his first seven games with a new team since the individual sack became an official statistic in 1982.

DENVER BRONCOS (3-4) at PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (7-1) (Sunday, CBS, 1:00 PM ET)

- Denver owns the league's top overall defense this season, allowing 261 yards per game. The Broncos rank second in the NFL – behind only Philadelphia (70.4) – allowing 72.9 rushing yards per game.
- Broncos linebacker **VON MILLER** has 24 sacks in 23 career games against NFC opponents (including Super Bowl 50). Since entering the league in 2011, Miller has 80.5 sacks, the most in the NFL during that span.
- The Eagles have reached the halfway point with the league's best record (7-1) following last week's 33-10 win over San Francisco. Quarterback **CARSON WENTZ** threw two touchdown passes and cornerback **JALEN MILLS** returned an interception 37 yards for his first career touchdown.
- Wentz ties for the NFL lead with 19 touchdown passes, the most by an Eagles quarterback through the team's first eight games of a season. The previous mark of 17 touchdown passes was shared by Pro Football Hall of Famer **NORM VAN BROCKLIN** (1960) and **NORM SNEAD** (1967).

KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (6-2) at DALLAS COWBOYS (4-3) (Sunday, CBS, 4:25 PM ET)

- The Chiefs improved to 6-2 with a 29-19 win on Monday night over the division-rival Denver Broncos. Rookie kicker **HARRISON BUTKER** converted all five field-goal attempts and is the first rookie in NFL history to have two games with at least five made field goals.
- Chiefs cornerback **MARCUS PETERS** opened the scoring against Denver by forcing a fumble and returning it 45 yards for a touchdown. Peters, who also added an interception in the opening period, is the first player to have both a fumble-return touchdown and an interception in the first quarter of a game since **ED REED** on December 7, 2008. Since entering the NFL in 2015, Peters has 21 takeaways, the most in the league over that span.
- The Cowboys have won two consecutive games, including last week's 33-19 win at Washington. Defensive tackle **TYRONE CRAWFORD** blocked a field goal – which was returned 86 yards by cornerback **ORLANDO SCANDRICK** to set up a touchdown – and also recorded a sack and forced fumble.
- Dallas defensive end **DEMARCUS LAWRENCE**, who leads the NFL with 10.5 sacks, has recorded a sack in all seven games this season. With a sack on Sunday against the Chiefs, Lawrence would join **EVERSON GRIFFEN** (2017), **DWIGHT FREENEY** (2009) and **ROBERT MATHIS** (2005) as the only players to record a sack in each of his team's first eight games of a season since the individual sack became an official statistic in 1982.

NFL WEEK 9 SCHEDULE
THURSDAY, SUNDAY & MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 5-6

(All times local)

Byes: Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles Chargers, Minnesota, New England, Pittsburgh

Thursday, November 2

Buffalo at New York Jets, 8:25 PM (NFLN)

Sunday, November 5

Atlanta at Carolina, 1:00 PM

Indianapolis at Houston, 12:00 PM

Cincinnati at Jacksonville, 1:00 PM

Tampa Bay at New Orleans, 12:00 PM

Los Angeles Rams at New York Giants, 1:00 PM

Denver at Philadelphia, 1:00 PM

Sunday, November 5 (cont'd)

Baltimore at Tennessee, 12:00 PM

Arizona at San Francisco, 1:05 PM

Washington at Seattle, 1:05 PM

Kansas City at Dallas, 3:25 PM

Oakland at Miami, 8:30 PM (NBC)

Monday, November 6

Detroit at Green Bay, 7:30 PM (ESPN)