

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>

PLAYOFF RACES HEAT UP AS 23 TEAMS REMAIN IN CONTENTION FOR TRIP TO SUPER BOWL LII

-- Week 15 also features Saturday doubleheader on NFL Network (4:30 PM & 8:25 PM ET) --

With three weeks remaining in the regular season, the suspense continues to build as teams make their final playoff push. Twenty-three teams remain in contention for a trip to Super Bowl LII.

Two teams have secured a spot in the postseason and both have clinched the division title – Pittsburgh (11-2, AFC North) and Philadelphia (11-2, NFC East). So as we approach the final three weeks of the regular season, there are still 10 playoff berths up for grabs.

The Steelers will host the New England Patriots (10-3) at Heinz Field on Sunday afternoon (4:25 PM ET, CBS) in a showdown between the teams with the best records in the AFC. Pittsburgh will clinch a first-round bye with a win and the Steelers will also secure the AFC's No. 1 seed with a win combined with a Jacksonville loss. The Patriots will lock up the AFC East with a win or a Buffalo loss. New England will clinch a playoff berth with a Baltimore loss. The Jaguars (9-4), who lead the AFC South by one game over Tennessee (8-5), will secure a playoff berth with a win against Houston. There are also various scenarios for Jacksonville to advance to the postseason this week even if the Jaguars lose.

The Eagles will secure a first-round bye with a win and will claim home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs with a win combined with a Minnesota loss. By winning the NFC East, Philadelphia has completed a "worst-to-first" turnaround and at least one team has won its division the season after finishing in or tied for last place in 14 of the past 15 seasons. The Vikings (10-3) will lock up the NFC North with a victory or losses by both Detroit and Green Bay. There are also various scenarios for Minnesota to advance to the postseason this week even if the Vikings lose. The Los Angeles Rams (9-4) can clinch a playoff berth with a win combined with losses by Atlanta, Detroit, Green Bay and New Orleans.

Week 15 begins on Thursday when the Denver Broncos visit the Indianapolis Colts (8:25 PM ET, NBC/NFLN/Amazon Prime).

The action continues on Saturday with a doubleheader on NFL Network. In the first game, NFC North rivals Detroit and Chicago will meet at Ford Field (4:30 PM ET). At 7-6, the Lions remain in the hunt for a playoff spot. In the Saturday night contest (8:25 PM ET), first place in the AFC West will be on the line as the Kansas City Chiefs host the Los Angeles Chargers. Both teams enter Week 15 tied for the top spot in the division with 7-6 records. The Chiefs defeated Los Angeles 24-10 in Week 3 but the Chargers have won four consecutive games and are 7-2 in their past nine contests following an 0-4 start.

The week concludes with a pair of primetime contests with playoff implications. On Sunday night (8:30 PM ET, NBC), the Dallas Cowboys visit the Oakland Raiders. Dallas has won two games in a row and sits in the middle of a crowded NFC playoff race at 7-6 while the Raiders at 6-7 sit just one game behind the division-leading Chiefs and Chargers. On Monday night (8:30 PM ET, ESPN), the Tampa Bay Buccaneers host the Atlanta Falcons. Atlanta has won four of its past five games and, at 8-5, remains alive in the race for both the NFC South division title and a postseason berth. Some of the key games in Week 15:

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS (7-6) at KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (7-6) (Saturday, NFLN, 8:25 PM ET)
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- The Chargers have won four consecutive games, including last week's 30-13 win over Washington. Los Angeles, which started 0-4, has won seven of the team's past nine games to move into a tie with Kansas City for first place in the division.
- Chargers quarterback **PHILIP RIVERS** aims for his fourth consecutive 300-yard passing game. Rivers has 3,611 passing yards and is the third quarterback in NFL history to pass for at least 3,500 yards in 10 consecutive seasons. Wide receiver **KEENAN ALLEN** has recorded 100 receiving yards in each of his past four contests and has a career-high 83 catches and 1,143 receiving yards this season.

- The Chiefs improved to 7-6 with a 26-15 win over Oakland last week. With the victory, Kansas City enters Week 15 tied with the Chargers for the top spot in the AFC West, one game ahead of the Raiders. The Chiefs defeated the Chargers 24-10 in Week 3 as rookie running back **KAREEM HUNT** rushed for 172 yards and a touchdown.
- Kansas City quarterback **ALEX SMITH** ranks second in the NFL with a 104.4 passer rating. In the Week 3 meeting between the teams, Smith threw two touchdown passes and no interceptions for a 128.1 passer rating.

GREEN BAY PACKERS (7-6) at CAROLINA PANTHERS (9-4) (Sunday, FOX, 1:00 PM ET)

- The Packers have won two consecutive games, both in overtime. Last week, Green Bay rallied from a 14-point, second-half deficit to defeat Cleveland 27-21. The Packers have won back-to-back games in overtime for the first time in franchise history and are the second team in league annals to win consecutive games with an overtime touchdown.
- Against the Browns, Green Bay wide receiver **DAVANTE ADAMS** caught a touchdown pass with 17 seconds remaining in regulation to help send the game to overtime and then scored the game-winning touchdown on a 25-yard pass from quarterback **BRETT HUNDLEY**. Adams is the fourth player in NFL history – including the postseason – to score touchdowns in both the final minute of the fourth quarter and again in overtime.
- The Panthers have won five of their past six games, including last week's 31-24 win over Minnesota. Carolina improved to 9-4 and is tied with New Orleans for the top spot in the NFC South.
- Carolina running back **JONATHAN STEWART**, who scored the game-winning touchdown against the Vikings on a one-yard run with 1:47 remaining in the game, rushed for 103 yards and three touchdowns. Panthers quarterback **CAM NEWTON** set up the game-winning score with a 62-yard run, becoming the first quarterback in the Super Bowl era to have multiple 60+ yard rushes in a single season (69-yard run in Week 10).

LOS ANGELES RAMS (9-4) at SEATTLE SEAHAWKS (8-5) (Sunday, FOX, 4:05 PM ET)

- The Rams, who have won six of their past eight games, lead the NFC West by one game over Seattle. Los Angeles can clinch a playoff berth with a win combined with losses by Atlanta, Detroit, Green Bay and New Orleans
- Los Angeles running back **TODD GURLEY** leads the NFC with 1,637 scrimmage yards (1,035 rushing, 602 receiving) and tops the league with 13 touchdowns (10 rushing, three receiving). Gurley has gained more than 100 scrimmage yards in 10 games this season, the most in the NFL.
- The Seahawks have won seven of their past 10 games and defeated the Rams 16-10 in Week 5.
- Seattle quarterback **RUSSELL WILSON** has thrown 17 fourth-quarter touchdown passes in 2017, the most in a single season in league history. In the fourth quarter of last week's game at Jacksonville, Wilson threw a 74-yard touchdown pass to **TYLER LOCKETT** and a 61-yard TD to **PAUL RICHARDSON**, becoming the first player to throw two 60+ yard touchdown passes in the fourth quarter of a game since Pro Football Hall of Famer **KURT WARNER** in 2000 (September 24, 2000).

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (10-3) at PITTSBURGH STEELERS (11-2) (Sunday, CBS, 4:25 PM ET)

- The Patriots will clinch the AFC East for the ninth consecutive season with a win at Pittsburgh or a Buffalo loss earlier in the day. New England can lock up a playoff spot with a Baltimore loss.
- New England quarterback **TOM BRADY** has won 10 of his 12 career starts against the Steelers (including the postseason) and has a 115.1 passer rating with 29 touchdown passes and three interceptions.
- The Steelers have clinched the AFC North and have won eight consecutive games, including last week's 39-38 comeback win against Baltimore. Pittsburgh quarterback **BEN ROETHLISBERGER** passed for 506 yards and is the only player in NFL history to have three games with at least 500 passing yards. The Steelers will clinch a first-round bye with a win and Pittsburgh will also secure the AFC's No. 1 seed with a win combined with a Jacksonville loss.
- Pittsburgh running back **LE'VEON BELL** leads the NFL in rushing yards (1,105) and scrimmage yards (1,684) while wide receiver **ANTONIO BROWN** ranks first in receptions (99) and receiving yards (1,509). Brown needs one reception to become the first player in NFL history to have at least 100 receptions in five consecutive seasons.

DALLAS COWBOYS (7-6) at OAKLAND RAIDERS (6-7) (Sunday, NBC, 8:30 PM ET)

- The Cowboys have won two consecutive games, including last week's 30-10 victory at the New York Giants.
- Dallas running back **ROD SMITH** had an 81-yard touchdown catch and 15-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter against the Giants, becoming the first player in NFL history to record an 80+ yard touchdown reception and a rushing touchdown in the fourth quarter of a single game.
- The Raiders are seeking their third consecutive home victory and look to remain in the thick of the AFC playoff race by evening their record at 7-7.
- Oakland quarterback **DEREK CARR** has 2,942 passing yards and needs 58 yards to reach 3,000 passing yards for the fourth consecutive season. Carr needs two touchdown passes to reach 20 TDs for the fourth season in a row.

NFL WEEK 15 SCHEDULE
THURSDAY, SUNDAY & MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 16-18

(All times local)

Thursday, December 14

Denver at Indianapolis, 8:25 PM (NBC/NFLN/Amazon)

Saturday, December 16

Chicago at Detroit, 4:30 PM (NFLN)

Los Angeles Chargers at Kansas City, 7:25 PM (NFLN)

Sunday, December 17

Miami at Buffalo, 1:00 PM

Green Bay at Carolina, 1:00 PM

Baltimore at Cleveland, 1:00 PM

Houston at Jacksonville, 1:00 PM

Sunday, December 17 (cont'd)

Cincinnati at Minnesota, 12:00 PM

New York Jets at New Orleans, 12:00 PM

Philadelphia at New York Giants, 1:00 PM

Arizona at Washington, 1:00 PM

Los Angeles Rams at Seattle, 1:05 PM

New England at Pittsburgh, 4:25 PM

Tennessee at San Francisco, 1:25 PM

Dallas at Oakland, 5:30 PM (NBC)

Monday, December 18

Atlanta at Tampa Bay, 8:30 PM (ESPN)