

THIS YEAR’S MATCHUP

AMONG THE MOST UNLIKELY AT START OF SEASON

SUPER BOWL

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AP Pro Football Writer

Mike Vrabel and Sam Darnold are bringing the unlikelyst of Super Bowl matchups to Levi’s Stadium in Santa Clara, California, a showdown that drew 4,800-to-1 odds at the start of the season.

Those preseason odds seemed about right when both the New England Patriots (80-to-1) and Seattle Seahawks (60-to-1) lost their season openers too.

But the longshots wouldn’t be stopped short on their way to Super Bowl 60.

Vrabel, who was fired by the Tennessee Titans in 2023, replaced Jerod Mayo as head coach in New England after his one-year stint produced a second straight 4-13 season. Vrabel quickly turned around the Patriots (17-3), who dispatched the Chargers, Texans and Broncos — three top-5 defenses — in the playoffs on their way to their 12th Super Bowl appearance.

Vrabel, who won three Super Bowls as a playmaking linebacker for New England, could become the first person in NFL history to also win as a head coach for the same franchise.

“I won’t win it. It’ll be the players that’ll win the game,” Vrabel said. “I promise you, it won’t be me that’ll win it, and I promise you that I’ll do everything I can, and our staff, to have them ready for the game.”

Vrabel tied George Seifert of the San Francisco 49ers in 1989 with 17 victories, including playoffs, in his first season with a team.

Patriots signal-caller Drake Maye became the first member of the vaunted 2024 quarterback draft class to reach the big game — despite taking 15 sacks so far in the playoffs. With the Broncos’ Bo Nix, his pre-draft training partner, watching from a suite just days after undergoing ankle surgery, Maye scrambled for 57 yards in the snow in Denver, allowing the Patriots to convert on second-and-10, third-and-9 and third-and-15 on their way to a 10-7 win over the Broncos in the AFC championship.

One of Vrabel’s first moves after becoming Patriots head coach was to bring back Josh McDaniels for his third stint as New England’s offensive coordinator, this time to tutor Maye, the third overall pick of the 2024 NFL draft out of North Carolina.

“He does a great job of mixing it up,



Seattle Seahawks vs.

New England Patriots

KICKOFF: SUNDAY, FEB. 8, AT 6:30 P.M. EST

doing what we do best,” Maye said. “I think we still haven’t played our best football yet in these playoffs. I’m looking forward to seeing that and hopefully having that click and win the Super Bowl. That would be pretty cool.

“I think just having him and knowing what the game is like, he’s great at having a feel for that. I think he’s the best offensive coordinator in the league. I got full trust in him.”

Led by quarterback Sam Darnold, who previously played for the Minnesota Vikings, San Francisco 49ers, Carolina Panthers and New York Jets, the Seahawks (16-3) rolled past the Niners and edged the Los Angeles Rams in the playoffs on their way to their fourth Super Bowl appearance and first in 11 years.

Seahawks coach Mike Macdonald has a chance to become the first head coach to win a Super Bowl as his team’s primary defensive play caller. The last coach with primarily defensive roots to lift the Lombardi Trophy was

Bill Belichick after the 2018 season.

The Seahawks jumped at the chance to acquire Darnold after the Vikings let him leave following a 14-3 season that ended with back-to-back blowouts at the hands of the Lions and Rams last year. The Vikings decided to go with J.J. McCarthy and Minnesota stumbled to a 9-8 record while Darnold, who replaced Geno Smith in Seattle, was joining Tom Brady as the only quarterbacks with back-to-back 14-win seasons.

Darnold is the first QB in NFL history to do so with two different teams and his performances in these playoffs, especially the NFC championship, show he’s finally shaking that label of not being a big-game quarterback.

“I mean, 300-something yards, three touchdowns, no picks,” Macdonald said after Seattle’s 31-27 win over the Rams to get to the Super Bowl. “Every time they went and scored he came back, made some big-time throws on third down, two-minute drive, four-minute drive. ... Just really happy for him. He deserves it. Just been a rock for us the whole year.”

This Super Bowl is a rematch of Super Bowl 49, when the Seahawks were on the cusp of winning only to see Malcolm Butler intercept Russell Wilson’s pass at the goal line in the waning seconds, preserving New England’s 28-24 win and denying the Seahawks consecutive Super Bowl titles.

The Patriots have won a half dozen Lombardi Trophies, all with Brady, now the lead NFL analyst for Fox Sports and a limited partner of the Las Vegas Raiders, and Pro Football Hall of Fame finalist Belichick, now head coach at the University of North Carolina.

“This city is used to winning,” Patriots cornerback Christian Gonzalez said. “So getting us back to where we want to be is big.”

Seattle is seeking its second championship parade to go with the one from its 43-8 demolition of Denver in Super Bowl 48.

“We don’t have a bunch of superstars and all that,” Macdonald said. “Just a really good football team that is tough and connected and didn’t blink.”

These upstart Patriots have already accomplished something that their predecessors couldn’t do in four tries: win a playoff game in Denver.

“It’s a new team, it’s a new era,” Maye said. “I respect and appreciate what the Patriots dynasty did, and unfortunately, they didn’t come out with some wins here, but we changed that narrative and look forward to bringing our best football to Santa Clara. That’ll be pretty special.”

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THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

PENGUINS SUMMARY										
Pittsburgh 5, Buffalo 2										
Pittsburgh	2	1	2	—	5					
Buffalo	1	0	1	—	2					
First Period—1. Buffalo, Zucker 15 (McLeod, Byram), 1:46. 2. Pittsburgh, A.Hayes 1 (McGroarty, Solovyov), 9:18. 3. Pittsburgh, A.Hayes 2 (Wotherpoon, Mantha), 18:47.										
Second Period—4. Pittsburgh, Kindel 13, 7:44.										
Third Period—5. Buffalo, Thompson 30 (Dahlin, Quinn), 1:55 (pp). 6. Pittsburgh, Novak 11 (Malkin, Chinakhov), 15:33. 7. Pittsburgh, Kindel 14 (Dewar), 19:46 (en).										
Shots on Goal—Pittsburgh 10-7-15—32. Buffalo 9-9-12—30.										
Power-play opportunities—Pittsburgh 0 of 3; Buffalo 1 of 5.										
Goalies—Pittsburgh, Silovs 11-7-8 (29 shots-27 saves). Buffalo, Lyon 14-8-3 (31-27).										
A—19,070 (19,070). T—2-37.										
Referees—Jake Brenk, Michael Sullivan. Linesmen—Andrew Smith, James Tobias.										

NHL STANDINGS										
EASTERN CONFERENCE										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
a-Tampa Bay	55	37	14	4	78	199	140			
m-Carolina	57	36	15	6	78	197	163			
a-Montreal	57	32	17	8	72	199	187			
a-Detroit	58	33	19	6	72	174	175			
m-Pittsburgh	56	29	15	12	70	192	169			
Buffalo	57	32	19	6	70	195	176			
Boston	57	32	20	5	69	195	182			
m-N.Y. Islanders	58	32	21	5	69	169	162			
Columbus	56	29	20	7	65	179	177			
Washington	59	29	23	7	65	189	177			
Ottawa	57	28	22	7	63	191	184			
Toronto	57	27	21	9	63	188	194			
Philadelphia	56	25	20	11	61	167	180			
Florida	57	29	25	3	61	174	191			
New Jersey	57	28	27	2	58	146	175			
N.Y. Rangers	57	22	29	6	50	151	180			
WESTERN CONFERENCE										
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA			
c-Colorado	55	37	9	9	83	212	138			
c-Minnesota	58	34	14	10	78	196	169			
c-Dallas	57	34	14	9	77	193	160			
p-Vegas	56	26	16	14	66	187	178			
Utah	57	30	23	4	64	183	157			
p-Edmonton	58	28	22	8	64	198	194			
p-Seattle	56	27	20	9	63	162	165			
Anaheim	56	30	23	3	63	185	195			
Los Angeles	55	23	18	14	60	145	157			
Nashville	57	26	24	7	59	169	198			
San Jose	55	27	24	4	58	171	193			
Chicago	57	22	26	9	53	154	185			
Winnipeg	56	22	26	8	52	160	175			
Calgary	56	23	27	6	52	142	169			
St. Louis	57	20	28	9	49	147	203			
Vancouver	57	18	33	6	42	149	210			
NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.										
(a, c, m, p)-top three in their division										
Wednesday’s Games										
Columbus 4, Chicago 0										
Montreal 5, Winnipeg 1										
Florida 5, Boston 4, SO										
Minnesota 6, Nashville 5, OT										
Utah 4, Detroit 1										
Colorado 4, San Jose 2										
Dallas 5, St. Louis 4										
Calgary 4, Edmonton 3										
Vegas 5, Vancouver 2										
Seattle 4, Los Angeles 2										
Thursday’s Games										
Carolina 2, N.Y. Rangers 0										
N.Y. Islanders 3, New Jersey 1										
Ottawa 2, Philadelphia 1, OT										
Pittsburgh 5, Buffalo 2										
Washington 4, Nashville 2										
Tampa Bay 6, Florida 1										
Los Angeles at Vegas, late										

SCHOLASTIC BASKETBALL BOXSCORES

VARSITY BOYS

UNION (22)

Fleming 0 2-4 2, Bish 1 0-0 2, Renwick 3 0-0 7, Gallagher 2 0-2 4, Reyes 1 1-1 3, Kindel 2 0-0 4. Totals: 9 3-7 22.

KEYSTONE (53)

Carnahan 1 0-0 2, D. Corcetti 6 0-3 13, E. Corcetti 1 1-2 3, Himes 1 0-0 2, Nellis 4 1-4 10, Spence 4 0-0 8, Hoffman 4 0-0 8, Slangenhaupt 1 0-0 2, Irwin 2 0-0 5. Totals: 24 2-9 53.

Score by Quarters

Union	10	5	2	5	—	22
Keystone	11	15	22	5	—	53

3-point goals — Union (Renwick), Keystone (D. Corcetti, Nellis, Irwin).

CLARION-LIMESTONE (46)

Parker 2 0-0 6, Beggs 2 0-0 5, Kemmer 0 1-2 1, Love 1 0-0 2, Rinker 0 0-0 0, Miles 0 0-0 0, Craig 10 5-7 27, Bracken 2 1-1 5. Totals: 17 7-10 46.

CRANBERRY (54)

Marchinke 2 2-4 6, Findlay 3 2-2 8, Baker 2 1-2 5, Morrow 3 0-0 7, Sanchez 4 2-2 10, Zerbe 7 0-0 16, Melat 0 0-0 0, McCloskey 1 0-0 2, Knapp 0 0-2 0. Totals: 22 7-12 54.

FRANKLIN (37)

Cullins 6 1-2 15, Blum 1 6-8 8, Hanna 1 0-0 3, Ma. Shingledecker 1 0-0 2, Emick 0 0-0 0, M. Shingledecker 0-0 2, Sanchez 1 2-4 4, Boal 1 1-4 3. Totals: 12 10-16 37.

Score by Quarters

Conneaut	9	10	15	14	—	37
Franklin	6	1	18	2	—	37

3-point goals — Conneaut (Perrye), Franklin (Cullins 2, Hanna).

ROCKY GROVE (31)

Kennedy 4 1-2 11, Phillips 2 1-2 5, Douglas 1 0-0 2, Ritchey 0 0-0 0, Babbitt 0 0-0 0, Morrison 0 0-0 0, Fox 0 0-0 0. Totals: 13 2-4 31.

SAEGERTOWN (44)

Rockwell 0 0-0 0, Newman 6 2-2 15, Manning 2 1-1 5, McGill 2 0-0 4, Orosz 5 0-0 10, Collins 1 4-5 6, Oberlander 2 0-0 4. Totals: 18 7-8 44.

Score by Quarters

Rocky Grove	9	13	7	2	—	31
Saegertown	2	8	4	10	—	44

3-point goals — RG (Kennedy 2, Morrison), Saegertown (Rockwell).

JAMESTOWN (41)

A. Riley 3 3-4 10, I. Riley 2 1-4 5, Thomas 0 2-2 2, Cad-