

# Fitzgerald headlines Pro Football Hall of Fame class

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Drew Brees and Larry Fitzgerald headlined the 2026 Pro Football Hall of Fame class featuring five players but not six-time Super Bowl winning head coach Bill Belichick.

Brees and Fitzgerald both made it in their first year of eligibility in results announced at NFL Honors on Thursday night after prolific careers. Luke Kuechly and Adam Vinatieri made it in their second seasons of eligibility, while Roger Craig was the lone pick among seniors, coaches and contributors.

"One of the coolest moments was getting up on that stage with all the other Hall of Famers," Fitzgerald said. "That moment kind of crystallized it for me."

But the class is also noteworthy for Belichick's absence as at least 11 of the 50 voters opted against giving him a vote despite a career with 333 wins in the regular season and playoffs and the most Super Bowl titles of any head coach. A report last week that Belichick fell short in his first year of eligibility was met with widespread criticism of both the voters and the process for choosing Hall of Famers.

"His stats speak for themselves," said Vinatieri, who played six years for Belichick.

"I thought he'd have a real good chance to be up there as well. The people who voted made their votes and I think he'll be up here one day."

The man who hired Belichick in New England to set the stage for the Patriots dynasty also fell short, with owner Robert Kraft failing to get enough votes.

This is the second straight year with a smaller class after only four



**Adam Vinatieri (far left) stands with Luke Kuechly, Larry Fitzgerald, Roger Craig and Drew Brees after being announced for the Pro Football Hall of Fame Class of 2026 during football's NFL Honors award show in San Francisco on Thursday.**

people made it last year as new rule changes have made it harder to get into the Hall. There had been at least seven people inducted in the previous 12 classes before last year.

That contributed to the snub for Belichick and Kraft, who were grouped with Craig and two other players — Ken Anderson and L.C. Greenwood — who have been retired for at least 25 seasons. The voters picked three of the five candidates with the highest vote-getter and anyone else above 80% getting the honor.

Craig, who was in his 28th year of eligibility, was the only one of those five to make it. Craig was the first player ever to have 1,000 yards rushing and 1,000 yards receiving in the same season, which happened in 1985, and he led the NFL with 2,036

yards from scrimmage in 1988 when he helped San Francisco win the Super Bowl.

Craig also was part of the title-winning teams for the 49ers in the 1984 and 1989 seasons. His 410 yards from scrimmage in those Super Bowl wins are the third-most ever behind Hall of Famers Jerry Rice and Franco Harris.

The four modern-era candidates all overlapped for several years, waging many battles against each other.

"Very early on you realized there was something special and unique about these guys," Brees said.

Vinatieri was one of the most clutch kickers in NFL history, making the game-winning field goals in the first two Super Bowl victories during New England's dynasty with Belichick and Kraft in charge. He

joined Jan Stenerud and Morten Andersen as the only players in the Hall who were primarily kickers in their careers.

Vinatieri helped launch the run with one of the game's greatest kicks — a 45-yarder in the snow to force overtime in the "Tuck Rule" game against the Raiders in the 2001 divisional round. He made the game-winning kick in OT to win that game and then hit a 48-yarder on the final play of a 20-17 win in the Super Bowl against the Rams.

Vinatieri is the NFL's career leader in points (2,673) and made field goals (599) over a 24-year career with New England and Indianapolis. He also leads all players with 56 field goals and 238 points in the postseason.

Brees is second all time to Tom Brady with 80,358 yards passing and 571 touchdown passes. He spent the first five seasons of his career with the San Diego Chargers before signing as a free agent with the Saints in 2006, where his career took off as he helped lift a city still recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

Brees delivered to New Orleans its first Super Bowl title following the 2009 season, when he won MVP of the game after beating Peyton Manning and the Indianapolis Colts. Brees made the Pro Bowl 13 times in his career, won AP Offensive Player of the Year in 2008 and 2011, was an All-Pro in 2006 and was a second-team All-Pro four times.

Fitzgerald spent his entire career with the Arizona Cardinals after being drafted third overall in 2004. His 1,432 catches and 17,492 yards receiving in 17 seasons rank second all time to Jerry Rice.

Fitzgerald topped 1,000 yards receiving nine times — tied for the fourth-most ever — and helped the Cardinals reach their only Super Bowl following the 2008 season. Fitzgerald set single-season records that postseason with 546 yards receiving and seven TD catches, including a go-ahead 64-yard score with 2:37 to play in the Super Bowl before Pittsburgh rallied for a 27-23 win over Arizona.

Kuechly's career was brief but impactful. The first-round pick by Carolina in 2012 was an All-Pro five times, with seven Pro Bowl nods and a Defensive Rookie of the Year award. Over his eight-year career, Kuechly led all linebackers in the NFL in tackles (1,090), takeaways (26), interceptions (18) and passes defensed (66).

## Schwartz resigns from Browns after being passed over for head coach

CLEVELAND (AP) — Jim Schwartz has resigned as the Cleveland Browns' defensive coordinator after three seasons.

The team announced Friday that Schwartz handed in his letter of resignation a day earlier. Schwartz has led one of the league's top defenses over the past three seasons but was upset about being passed over for the head coach job, after many thought he was the favorite to replace Kevin

Stefanski.

The Browns hired Todd Monken as their head coach on Jan. 29. Monken said during his introductory news conference on Tuesday that he had spoken with Schwartz but didn't have an update on whether he would be back. Schwartz was under contract for one more season.

Monken also said there were no plans to change the defensive system if Schwartz decided to move on

"We're still going to let them attack; we're still going to let them play free. I can't see any other way. They're a big reason why I took this job, the defensive players," Monken said. "When I was preparing for the Cleveland Browns, I wasn't trying to chip Jim Schwartz, I was chipping Myles Garrett. And when I was sliding a protection to the outside backers or Grant Delpit that were blitzing off the edge, I was sliding the pro-

tection of the players. And when I was worried about throwing to the right against Denzel Ward or Tyson Campbell to the left, that's who I was worried about throwing at."

Cleveland led the league in total defense in 2023 and ranked fourth this season. Garrett had 23 sacks to break the NFL single-season record.

Garrett was named the AP NFL Defensive Player of the Year for

the second time in three seasons on Thursday night.

"We have really good players. And it starts there," owner Jimmy Haslam said on Tuesday. "It helps to have a great coordinator and a great staff. We also have a great staff. And I think Jim would tell you the four leaders of the D-line, linebackers, cornerbacks and safeties are all outstanding coaches. So, we're excited moving forward."

### THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

#### NHL STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	GP
Atlantic	55	37	14	4	78	199	140
Tampa Bay	57	32	17	8	72	199	187
Montreal	58	33	19	6	72	174	175
Buffalo	57	32	19	6	70	195	176
Boston	57	32	20	5	69	195	198
Ottawa	57	28	22	7	63	191	184
Toronto	57	27	21	9	63	188	194
Florida	57	29	25	3	61	174	191
Metropolitan	57	36	15	6	78	197	163
Pittsburgh	56	29	15	12	70	192	169
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
Philadelphia	56	25	20	11	61	167	180
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
Central	55	37	14	9	83	212	138
Colorado	58	34	14	10	78	196	169
Dallas	57	34	14	9	77	193	194
Utah	57	30	23	4	64	183	157
Nashville	57	26	24	3	57	159	185
Chicago	57	22	26	9	53	154	185
Winnipeg	56	22	26	8	52	160	175
St. Louis	57	20	28	9	49	147	203
Pacific	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	57	27	16	4	68	191	179
Edmonton	58	28	22	8	64	198	194
Seattle	56	27	20	9	63	162	165
Anaheim	56	30	23	3	63	185	195
Los Angeles	56	23	19	14	60	146	161
San Jose	55	27	24	4	58	171	193
Calgary	56	23	27	6	52	142	169
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.							

#### 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 2

Vegas 4, Los Angeles 1

#### Friday's Games

No games scheduled

#### Saturday's Games

No games scheduled

#### Sunday's Games

No games scheduled

#### Monday's Games

No games scheduled

#### Tuesday's Games

Franklin 2, N.Y. Rangers 0

Montreal 3, New Jersey 1

Union at Ridgeway 6 (p.m.)

North Clarion at Karns City 6 (p.m.)

Marion Center at Moniteau 6 (p.m.)

Clarion at Elk County Catholic 6 (p.m.)

Keystone at Brookville 6 (p.m.)

#### GIRLS BASKETBALL

Franklin at Titusville 6 (p.m.)

Meadowville at Oil City 6 (p.m.)

Commerce Perry at Rocky Grove 6 (p.m.)

North Clarion at Union/A-C Valley 6 (p.m.)

Keystone at Redbank Valley 6 (p.m.)

Cochranon at Saegertown 6 (p.m.)

Grove City at Slippery Rock 6 (p.m.)

Franklin at Oil City 6 (p.m.)

Slippery Rock at Titusville 6 (p.m.)

#### SCHOLASTIC SWIMMING

Franklin at Oil City 6 (p.m.)

Slippery Rock at Titusville 6 (p.m.)

#### BOYS BASKETBALL

Franklin at Oil City 6 (p.m.)

Rocky Grove at Jamestown 6 (p.m.)

Moniteau at West Shamokin 6 (p.m.)

Cambridge Springs at Cochranon 6 (p.m.)

Mercer at Grove City 6 (p.m.)

Corry at Titusville 6 (p.m.)

#### GIRLS BASKETBALL