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## **Power Rankings**

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## NFL Power Rankings, Week 3: New Orleans Saints crack top 10, while Cincinnati Bengals keep sliding

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Week 2 was a weird one, marked by two incredible road comebacks (<u>Commanders down 18</u>, <u>Giants down 21</u>), two teams winning in overtime to avoid 0-2 starts (well done, <u>Seahawks</u> and <u>Titans</u>), two Super Bowl contenders (<u>Bills</u> and <u>Chiefs</u>) righting their respective ships after Week 1 stinkers and one <u>Hail Mary pass</u> that worked ... but didn't earn a win (sorry, <u>Broncos</u>).

Yet much of the movement in this week's rankings came in the fat middle. My biggest chore this week: slotting the unexpected 2-0 and 0-2 teams. It's seldom easy to create an accurate NFL hierarchy at this time of year, yet I've tried to the best of my ability.

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**NOTE:** Up/down arrows reflect movement from the <u>Week 2 Power Rankings</u>.

Rank <b>1</b>	San Francisco 49ers
	2-0

Beating the Rams was a <u>gut-check win</u> in a lot of ways, even if a few big missed connections could have made it a larger margin of victory. Some will hone in on the <u>Brock Purdy</u> overthrows, but he came through with the touchdown drive before halftime and delivered some big throws on the fourth-quarter TD march. I'm not worried about him. But the health of the secondary is getting a little scary. The Niners were paper-thin by game's end, but credit goes to <u>Isaiah Oliver</u>, who was thrust into a major role because of injuries, and <u>Deommodore Lenoir</u>, who left the game for a bit before <u>making</u> a <u>pick late</u>. Both came up huge. In lieu of style points, San Francisco won with resolve, keeping Kyle Shanahan's bunch at No. 1.

Rank <b>2</b>	Kansas City Chiefs 1-1
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I heard some chirping about my decision to drop the Chiefs <u>only one spot</u> in these rankings after they <u>lost in Week 1</u>. My defense of that move started and ended with <u>Travis Kelce</u> and <u>Chris Jones</u>. They were back on the field in Week 2, and they each made their imprint on the gutsy <u>win at Jacksonville</u>. <u>Kelce scored</u> on what looked like a blowing-off-steam drive, and Jones had multiple huge plays: <u>a fourth-down sack</u>, another half sack and <u>a batted pass</u>, in addition to multiple pressures against the Jaguars' <u>Anton Harrison</u>. Having those two playing allowed <u>Patrick Mahomes</u> to have a merely mortal game, and the Chiefs secured a big win. They aren't going anywhere for





Even if the Eagles haven't fully hit their stride offensively, <u>D'Andre Swift's breakout</u> game in the <u>34-28 win</u> over the Vikings was a pleasant development, posing an interesting backfield challenge once <u>Kenneth Gainwell</u> is fully healthy. It stood out to me that the offensive line seemed out of sync in pass protection vs. Minnesota, almost forcing the run-heavy drive that seemed to light a fire under the offense. That unit should be fine. But the banged-up secondary will need every extra minute of rest before Monday's game <u>against the 2-0 Bucs</u>.

Rank	Dallas Cowboys
<b>4</b>	2-0
_	

The Cowboys have their best scoring margin through two games since the 1970 merger (a whopping +60 points), even better than in the Super Bowl seasons of 1971 and 1995. Defensively, they're pretty bonkers, forcing seven turnovers and allowing one touchdown in 120 minutes of football. The offense clearly can do more, only converting half its red-zone possessions into touchdowns. But for as many nits as we can pick on that side of the ball, the balance has been good. The physicality has been excellent. The efficiency has been very solid. It's hard to complain about what Mike McCarthy and Brian Schottenheimer have schemed up, even if the passing game has been a little safe with big leads.

Rank	Miami Dolphins
<b>5</b>	2-0
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They're 2-0, with nine home games remaining. Each of the first two contests required late gut checks. The <u>fourth-quarter interception</u> against <u>the Patriots</u> was regrettable, and there were a few underthrows. but <u>Tua Tagovailoa</u> played a pretty darned composed



routinely did that. Add in the Dolphins' terrific yards after first contact -- especially via Raheem Mostert and Jaylen Waddle -- and this offense looks tough to deal with. Mike McDaniel schemed up a really nice game against the Patriots, as did Vic Fangio defensively. The special-teams errors added a few items to the clean-up list, but Miami once more impressed against a conference opponent away from home.

Rank	Buffalo Bills
6	1-1
2 📥	

The win over the Raiders was exactly the kind of performance Bills fans wanted to see after the meltdown in Week 1. Josh Allen made his standard share of freewheeling plays (the TD pass to Khalil Shakir, my goodness), but he didn't play fast and loosely like he did against the Jets. Allen avoided the facepalm turnovers and mostly took the little gains the Raiders gave him, which allowed those moments of pure improvisational beauty -- later, the third-and-6 connection with Gabe Davis for 40 yards -- to arrive more organically. And even with inconsistent pressure, the defense was more than up to the challenge, holding Las Vegas to 10 points and forcing three turnovers. That is more like what I expected from Buffalo coming into the season.

Rank <b>7</b>	Baltimore Ravens 2-0
3 🛕	

The Ravens' defense came up with timely stops in Week 2, and extra credit goes to an undermanned cornerback group that held up extremely well against the Bengals' skill-position talent. It really was encouraging that the new offense found a way to finish off a big game with some old-school Ravens power. Todd Monken's attack fed multiple mouths, with nine players receiving three or more touches, and Baltimore's heavy sets ground down the Bengals' front. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. Running the ball as well as the Ravens did *without* J.K. Dobbins sent a clear message to the rest of the AFC: They're not stopping Baltimore's ground game anytime soon.





After all the feel-good stories in Week 1, the Lions were served a dish of Week 2 "humble pie," as Dan Campbell said, and I won't lull you to sleep with the narrative that the loss to the Seahawks will be good for them. I'm a believer that losses should be avoided at all costs, although I understand the sentiment. If the Lions watch the game tape and feel the same way I do -- that the loss to Seattle hit too close to home, vis-avis the Lions that started last season 1-6 -- then maybe it will serve its purpose. But as prepared as the Lions looked for the Chiefs in Week 1, they looked just that unprepared in key moments against Seattle. The fight was there, but crisp execution wasn't. And now it appears they'll have to regroup without C.J. Gardner-Johnson, who is out indefinitely with a potentially torn pectoral, per NFL Network Insiders Ian Rapoport and Mike Garafolo.





It's surprising that a team with <u>Trevor Lawrence</u>, <u>Calvin Ridley</u>, <u>Travis Etienne</u>, <u>Christian Kirk</u>, <u>Evan Engram</u> and <u>Zay Jones</u> can go 3-for-12 on third downs in back-to-back games. It might be reasonably excused against what looks like a <u>pretty good Chiefs</u> <u>defense</u>. But when you plop an 0-for-3 red-zone performance on top of it, well, you just can't have that. It's easy to look at <u>the new play-caller</u>, but I don't think Press Taylor is a fair scapegoat, even if the only memorable conversion was Lawrence ad-libbing on his <u>TD pass to Ridley</u> against the Colts in Week 1. The offensive line needs to pick it up these next two games without the suspended <u>Cam Robinson</u>.



The Saints went the first 118-plus minutes of the season without allowing a touchdown -- against the Panthers on Monday, they became the final NFL team to surrender one this season. That's a testament to how good their defense is, but it's been a lot more effort on offense. Depending on the severity of the Jamaal Williams injury, New Orleans could be a little shorthanded in Green Bay on Sunday, with Alvin Kamara still suspended for another game. Tony Jones Jr. gave the Saints a spark in short-yardage situations, but they might need more big pass plays like the ones they got from Chris Olave and Rashid Shaheed late in Week 2. You can see Derek Carr's frustration at times, but this passing game is still getting its timing down.



Sunday's <u>loss to the Cowboys</u> was an indication of the clear limitations of the Jets' <u>Aaron Rodgers</u>-less offense when facing a top-tier defense. The offensive line was manhandled, and the run game erased. <u>Zach Wilson</u> ended up leading the Jets in rushing with 36 yards. <u>Garrett Wilson</u> broke free for their <u>one big play of the game</u> offensively, but the rest was frustrating to watch. Meanwhile, I was really shocked to see the Cowboys' offense milling the Jets' defense into grist for four quarters. If the Jets can't keep tough games close, winning without Rodgers will be a massive chore.





You'll be reminded multiple times this week that last year's Bengals started 0-2, too, and it's fair to look back. Heck, the 2021 team was 1-1 to start, with an overtime win over a so-so Vikings team and still made the Super Bowl. However, my panic meter is not insanely low because there are some unpleasant realities this team absolutely must address. The two supposed bedrocks entering the season were supposed to be the passing game and the front seven on defense. Both have severely underachieved. Joe Burrow's calf injury gives the offense some cover, but what is the defense's excuse? Failing to get off the field on several third-and-short plays will be the lasting memory of Sunday's loss to the Ravens.

Rank 13	Cleveland Browns 1-1
_	

The <u>awful Nick Chubb injury</u> cloaks everything right now. You just can't replace Chubb, although <u>Jerome Ford</u> showed real heart Monday night. What worries me is that Chubb's absence puts more on <u>Deshaun Watson</u> and the pass protection. Two of Watson's three turnovers were <u>returned</u> for <u>touchdowns</u>, vaulting a stagnant Steelers offense to victory. Deshaun's interception might go down as a "drop," but the ball was not well-thrown. His <u>first fumble</u> was huge, until his defense <u>bailed him out</u>. No such luck on the second one. Some of his throws were wildly off-target. And what's up with 30 penalty yards from the quarterback? The whole situation just gives me the willies right now, even if this defense deserves a lot of credit.

Rank <b>14</b>	Atlanta Falcons 2-0
2 🔺	

That's two home victories against teams breaking in new quarterbacks in two weeks. But Atlanta has a newish QB, as well, and the Falcons have now won four straight



But Ridder found answers on Sunday, both as a runner (posting 39 rushing yards and a crucial fourth-down TD run) and thrower. There was some trust on two big passes in the fourth: the 45-yard flea flicker to Mack Hollins and the 24-yard dart to Drake London that set up the go-ahead field goal. There's room to grow, but Ridder made his biggest plays when his team needed them most.



Not only did the Seahawks avoid an 0-2 start, but they also turned in a <u>pretty</u> <u>impressive game</u> on the road against a Lions team coming off its biggest win in forever. This was a giant victory for Seattle. I was prepared to write that critical penalties were the Seahawks' undoing had they lost, but <u>Geno Smith</u> -- outside of that <u>wild sack</u> he took -- and the defense both came up big when they had to. They deserve kudos for defeating *that* offense <u>without Riq Woolen</u>. <u>Devon Witherspoon</u> had a few big plays (and a few tough moments) in his NFL debut. <u>Tre Brown</u> came out of nowhere to log a <u>career day</u>. <u>Week 1</u> isn't forgotten, but it's forgiven.



If you've watched either of the Chargers' two losses, you might have noticed they really haven't been a function of poor effort. It's a matter of straight-up execution mistakes. Time and time again. Almost always at the worst possible moments. And while the offense isn't completely off the hook (too many sacks and settling for short field goals), it's really the defense that has been the bigger problem. At least the pass rush woke up (five sacks <u>at Tennessee</u>), but that doesn't make up for the fact that the Bolts have been bombarded by deep passes. It's a maddening storyline that won't evaporate until the defense proves it can stop someone.

Rank <b>17</b>	Pittsburgh Steelers
2 🛦	• •



Pittsburgh's defense just rescued the team from an 0-2 start at home. But watching the passing game just labor for such long stretches, it makes you wonder why the timing is so off. Is it all on Kenny Pickett? Not sure, but he clearly misfired on passes where there were plays to be made. The touchdown to George Pickens is why I can't completely quit Pickett. He's tough and competitive, and I'm not sure how he stayed in the game after the hit he took on that throw. Yet, it's still not good enough. The Steelers are going to have to find a way to showcase Jaylen Warren and Najee Harris a bit more. And while we're at it, is Pat Freiermuth still on the roster?

Rank
18

**Green Bay Packers** 

1-1

It didn't exactly feel like the Packers blew Sunday's game <u>against the Falcons</u>, but they led by 12 points with 12 minutes left. And though it felt like <u>Jordan Love</u> getting the ball back with 57 seconds remaining and a chance to win it would be the real start of his legend in Green Bay, that wasn't meant to be. There were plenty of Packers deficiencies in the game (ahem, run defense), but for as well as Love played, he and the offense



third quarters. In the fourth quarter, Green Bay's offense totaled 7 net yards on 10 plays.

Rank	Washington Commanders
<b>19</b>	2-0
2 📥	

The Commanders are 2-0 for the first time in a dozen years. Coming back from down 18 on the road and going on a 32-6 scoring run are pretty positive signs; Sunday's win over Denver was far more impressive than the smaller comeback against the lesser Cardinals at home in Week 1. Washington has played better in the second halves of games than in the first. That pattern might work against Arizona and Denver, but will it stand up against the Bills in Week 3? What gives the Commanders a chance is the play of Sam Howell. Kid has some guts, doesn't he? After some empty series early, he was battered around, but Howell was dialed in down the stretch, confidently leading five scoring drives in the final 32 minutes.

Rank <b>20</b>	Tennessee Titans 1-1
2 🔺	

What they lacked in big or timely plays in the opener, the Titans made up for in Sunday's dramatic OT victory over the Chargers. It was a shorthanded effort, too. Tennessee was without two starting DBs and OG Peter Skoronski, this year's first-round pick, and the team had to replace Skoronski's replacement midgame. Perhaps this classic Mike Vrabel win is a sign of things to come. The Titans trailed by 11 points for 67 seconds of game time against the Chargers; otherwise, every Titans play this season has come in a one-score scenario. They have to win with guile and toughness and via special teams, and they came through in spades on Sunday. So did Ryan Tannehill, whose success should be huge for his confidence and the confidence of everyone else in the passing game. This team can make a run at the Jaguars.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers
2-0



Mike Evans is still dusting defensive backs. Shaquil Barrett remains a backfield wrecker. Baker Mayfield is out there slinging tough passes and barreling for first downs as a runner. Who are these guys? Well, the 2-0 Bucs are in some ways who they've been, even as the Tom Brady-led teams naturally kept their identity under his umbrella. But the way Mayfield is playing -- fearlessly and decisively -- makes me think this team should compete in the wide-open NFC South. Mayfield has always had the ability to make game-changing plays, but his negative ones seemed to sting a bit more in the past. Through two games, however, he's taken one sack (spinning out of several) and thrown zero interceptions. That's a winning formula.

Rank 22	Minnesota Vikings
	0-2
5 🕶	

In two games, the Vikings have handed off 26 times, netting a total of 69 yards, with a long run of 9 yards. According to Next Gen Stats, only 30.8 percent of those runs were deemed successful. They've only attempted four runs in 30 fourth-quarter plays. One, a 3-yard loss on first-and-goal from the 1. Another, a Kirk Cousins scramble. The other two were 6- and 7-yard gains from Alexander Mattison. Maybe Mattison's early fumble against the Eagles killed off any designs on running the ball. Or perhaps the Eagles' front did that by itself. But two weeks into the season, this Vikings team is flawed offensively: too dependent on throwing to Justin Jefferson, and not good enough on the ground.



Denver is one of two 0-2 teams to have lost both contests at home, along with New England. The Broncos' losses have been by 1 and 2 points. It feels like they were a few plays away from being 2-0, but you can't overlook the fact that the Broncos were up 21-3 Sunday with the ball on the Washington 40-yard line midway through the second quarter. From there, Washington put up 18 straight points (and it should have been more), as Denver's offense froze and the defense allowed scoring chances on six straight possessions. Russell Wilson's second-quarter fumble and third-quarter interception sandwiched a pair of three-and-outs. Sean Payton's postgame comments



seemed to center around Wilson and the offense. Where this thing goes is anyone's

ruess, but the road to the playoffs is longer now.

24

Los Angeles Ráms

2

Some Rams fans nudged me about <u>ranking this team 26th</u> last week, and you know what? I agree with them, even after a loss. I didn't trust what I saw in <u>Week 1's win</u> over the Seahawks, but Sunday's showing in <u>a loss to San Francisco</u> confirmed a few things:

1. Sean McVay can still coach.

1-1

- 2. Matthew Stafford still has it (even taking into account the second-half picks).
- 3. The Puka Nacua hype is for real.

Nacua's talent was never really in question. He was a four-star recruit who made big plays at Washington and BYU, and in the Senior Bowl. The question was his health. But if that holds up, adding him to the mix with Cooper Kupp (once he returns to the lineup) might be even *better* than cloning Kupp. The Rams are far from perfect, but I highly underestimated many aspects of this roster.

25	<b>New England Patriots</b>
	0-2
_	

The Patriots are 0-2 with a pair of home losses against two possible (likely?) playoff teams, but spinning a "they could be 2-0" narrative would seem odd to me. Is a team with a piecemeal offensive line and a penchant for falling into double-digit holes worthy of such respect? Sure, we're only two games into the season, but how has this been any different from the past few campaigns in New England? The Patriots came back from big deficits only to suffer close losses *last* season, too (against the Raiders in Week 15 and the Bengals in Week 16), and it was hard to cull major positives from either those games or this year's defeats. There has just been a dark cloud following this team for some time now. As in their games, the Pats face a steep climb back to contention.





Well, the first drive looked promising. Then the Raiders got smacked in the face repeatedly, being outscored 38-3 over the final 57-plus minutes in their loss to the Bills. Jimmy Garoppolo wasn't under a ton of pressure on Sunday, but when he was, bad things happened. Josh Jacobs somehow ran for -2 yards, as six of his nine rush attempts went for zero yards or fewer. That's not a good look for the offensive line or the offense as a whole. As great as Davante Adams might be, the rest of this Raiders offense didn't produce enough worthy plays while it was a close game (outside of Tre Tucker's 34-yard end around). Plus, losing the turnover battle 3-0 on the road rarely works out well. Back to the drawing board.

Rank <b>27</b>	Carolina Panthers 0-2
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By the time the Panthers were able to get <u>Jonathan Mingo</u> involved and <u>Bryce Young</u> finally settled down <u>against New Orleans</u>, it was too late. The 0-2 start isn't shocking, but it has to be disappointing, because Carolina was in both games in the fourth quarter. Frank Reich told us to have patience, and we certainly do, but that's now two touchdowns in 23 offensive drives. It's not all on Young, but his three turnovers in two games could have been avoided. There's a foundation here, and the defense played pretty well again. Still, Carolina is stuck in the mud a bit for now, until the passing game starts humming.

Rank <b>28</b>	New York Giants 1-1
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Through their first 90 minutes of football this season, the Giants were outscored 60-zip by their opponents, putting them in serious danger of occupying the 32nd slot on this list. Over the next 30 minutes <u>against Arizona</u>, the Giants outscored the Cardinals by 23. aiving them one of the biggest comeback wins in franchise history. Big Blue hadn't



lived; <u>Saquon Barkley</u> suffered an <u>ankle injury</u> after fueling the rally with two second-half scores. It's a game the Giants probably felt they had to have, given the short turnaround for Thursday's matchup <u>in San Francisco</u> -- after all, *0-3 starts* and *playoff berths* are rare dance partners.

Rank
29
Chicago Bears
0-2

That's now 12 straight losses for the Bears, if you're scoring at home, and 16 losses in their 19 games with Matt Eberflus and Justin Fields together. The coach and quarterback are certainly not the only issues with this team -- anyone being honest should realize this. The Bears expected to be better this season, but there's no clear evidence of that yet. They've allowed the second-most points and are near the bottom of the passing-efficiency metrics (6.5 yards per attempt, three INTs, sack rate of 13.2%). It's Year 2 for Eberflus and Year 3 for Fields. They can turn things around. But will they?

Rank Indianapolis Colts



You have to be encouraged by -- and concerned with -- Anthony Richardson through two games. He hasn't looked overwhelmed facing NFL defenses, he's thrown some really nice passes and he's been dangerous as a runner, scoring three TDs and averaging 5.8 yards per carry. But he's also left two straight games with injury. In Week 1, he left late with a knee injury, and in Week 2, he landed in the concussion protocol. Gardner Minshew did what a good backup should, helping pad the lead he inherited, but the Colts want Richardson be out there -- and they surely want him to protect himself better. If he can cut down on the injuries, Indy might really have something. For now, though, an impressive win is marred by a smidge of fear.

Rank	<b>Houston Texans</b>
31	0-2
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There's only so much silver lining a franchise can inlay after an 0-2 start, which was preceded by 11 victories over the previous three seasons. But it's hard not to give Houston credit for fighting back against the Colts with a group that entered the game missing both starting safeties, both starting tackles and two interior O-linemen (and replacement safety Eric Murray was hurt on Sunday). Probably the brightest part of the 31-20 loss was rookie QB C.J. Stroud, who gutted through a right shoulder injury throughout. He overcame an early fumble to throw for 384 yards and two TDs despite taking six sacks and at least nine hits. But can the Texans protect him? That's what has to keep DeMeco Ryans up at night.



The Cardinals did more offensively in the first half <u>against the Giants</u> than they did over four quarters in the <u>Week 1 loss</u> to the Commanders. That was the good news. The bad? Despite leading 20-0 at halftime and 28-7 midway through the third quarter, Arizona collapsed in the second half. The defense was asked to play a lot more after halftime because the offense went stagnant after a third-quarter TD\_going scoreless



Still, the run game improved, and <u>Joshua Dobbs</u> had some really nice moments. The Cardinals might be better than I realized in some respects, but they also blew a three-TD lead in the final 20 minutes.

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