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## **Power Rankings**

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## NFL Power Rankings, Week 5: 49ers reclaim No. 1 spot; Seahawks, Buccaneers crack top 10

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Week 4 didn't carry quite the same drama the <u>previous Sunday</u> did, but we learned a little more about the NFL's hierarchy.

After ascending to the top spot in <u>last week's Power Rankings</u>, the Dolphins were humbled, but I think they remain in what looks like an Elite Eight.

There are some potential contenders lurking below that line. But as it stands now, it's hard to question the credentials of most of our first quartile. The one-loss teams all have shown the ability to bounce back with impressive performances, and the Dolphins should be able to follow suit.

The rankings are settling in nicely, with a little more clarity as we head into Week 5.



NFL contenders or pretenders? Upstart Texans and frisky Rams legit; Jordan Love-led Packers ain't it

RB Index, Week 5: Top 15 running backs at the quarter mark of 2023 NFL season

The First Read: Biggest challenge facing each division leader at quarter mark of 2023 NFL season

2023 NFL season, Week 4: What We Learned from Seahawks' win over Giants on Monday night

2023 NFL fantasy football waiver wire, Week 5: QB C.J. Stroud, WR Romeo Doubs among top targets

2023 fantasy football flex rankings: Top 150 RB/WR/TE options in Week 5

**NOTE:** Up/down arrows reflect movement from the Week 4 Power Rankings.

San Francisco 49ers
4-0

I touched on this right after Sunday's <u>35-16 win</u> over Arizona, but I think it's worth repeating: <u>Brandon Aiyuk</u> has become such a dangerous element for this offense. Yes, yes, <u>Christian McCaffrey</u> scored four TDs -- he's amazing and all of that. But Aiyuk's speed spreads the defense wide and deep, and opponents still have to worry about CMC, <u>George Kittle</u> and <u>Deebo Samuel</u>. Aiyuk came back from injury on Sunday and had catches of 16, 11, 42, 25, 34 and 20 yards -- the first five coming on *first downs*. So right when you're gearing up for a handoff, Kyle Shanahan will call a shot play to Aiyuk. That's just wicked. Kittle and Deebo combined for one catch, but the offense mostly hummed right along. And after things tightened up in the third quarter, San Francisco ultimately won comfortably.

Xansas City Chiefs
3-1

<u>Patrick Mahomes</u> had one of the stranger outings of his career in <u>a 23-20 victory over</u> the <u>Jets</u>, perhaps switching bodies with <u>Zach Wilson</u> for the middle part of the Sunday night tilt. I didn't expect Mahomes to go full Mamba and unleash the legs quite that much, but that's what he does on off nights. And it's a big part of what makes him the best. Pat can beat you -- on the road, in the fourth quarter -- with his fourth-best pitch.



Rank <b>3</b>	Buffalo Bills 3-1
2 🔺	

The Bills turned an early shootout against the Dolphins into a boat race. The <u>four-touchdown margin of victory</u> was yet another reminder that when the Bills are on, they are as tough to stop as anyone out there. When the defense faltered early, the offense picked up the slack -- to the point where it wasn't clear whether <u>Josh Allen</u> or <u>Tua Tagovailoa</u> operated the most explosive group. By the end of the statement victory over Miami, it was fair to say Buffalo's defense had turned in an excellent effort. That's how good teams are built, knowing the heavy lifting won't always be evenly split. That <u>Week 1 loss to the Jets</u> suddenly feels like a distant memory, and over the next seven weeks, the Bills face one team that currently owns a winning record (Tampa Bay <u>in Week 8)</u>. Could this team be 10-1 when it visits Philadelphia in Week 12?

Rank <b>4</b>	Philadelphia Eagles 4-0
_	

The Eagles like to make things harder on themselves than needed, yet they keep winning, even if it took overtime vs. Washington on Sunday. The offense is returning to shades of 2022 form, adding the <u>D'Andre Swift</u> dimension and rekindling the <u>Jalen Hurts-to-A.J. Brown magic</u>. But self-inflicted errors almost cost Philadelphia the game. Among the teeth-gnashing penalties: <u>Zach Cunningham</u>'s defensive hold wiping out a stop; two bad personal fouls on <u>Terrell Edmunds</u>; <u>James Bradberry</u>'s DPI; Brown's post-TD taunting flag; even Hurts' intentional grounding briefly knocked Philly out of field-goal range in OT. This team has elite talent, but you can't be *that* fast and loose every week. Did you know the Eagles have allowed more TDs than they've scored?

Rank <b>5</b>	Dallas Cowboys				
3	3-1				



Will Week 3's <a href="head-scratching loss at Arizona">head-scratching loss at Arizona</a> end up being an aberration? One bounce-back win doesn't prove anything, but Dallas <a href="thoroughly demolished">thoroughly demolished</a> Bill Belichick and the Patriots in all phases. Even when the Cowboys slightly let their foot off the gas, they were head-and-shoulders better. That's reassuring. <a href="DaRon Bland's pick-six">DaRon Bland's pick-six</a> was such an important play in the game (after he missed a chance at one earlier) because it effectively ended the Patriots' chances before halftime and sent a message that this defense can indeed soldier on <a href="without Trevon Diggs">without Trevon Diggs</a>. Plus, even with some OL breakdowns, the offense proved to be efficient and occasionally dangerous against a good Pats defense.



A week after starting center <u>Connor Williams</u> (groin) was sidelined by injury, Miami lost Pro Bowl left tackle <u>Terron Armstead</u> (knee), and the Dolphins finally found themselves in a street race they couldn't win, ultimately taking their first defeat by the humbling final tally of <u>48-20</u>. The offensive harmony of the first three games fizzled out amid steady Buffalo pressure and a unit pressing too much down multiple scores. Scoring points won't be problematic most games. The Dolphins also won't face Bills-caliber teams every week. But they badly must find ways to beat their AFC East rivals, having now lost 10 of the past 11 in the series, with no wins in Buffalo for seven years. Miami almost feels like that pre-dynasty squad that can beat *almost* any team out there, but not yet the one it needs to beat the most.



It's a new era in Motown. The Lions <u>smashed the Packers</u> at Lambeau Field last Thursday, then found out Friday that 2022 first-rounder <u>Jameson Williams</u> would be <u>returning early from suspension</u>. They officially became division favorites before the Williams news, and they're potentially adding exactly what they need in the speedy wide receiver. But Williams also returns with much to prove, given his lofty draft status, limited production and a nagging penchant for being unavailable. One thing to



expectations must be adjusted. But now the runway for him to be reacclimated is longer -- and begins right when Detroit embarks on a reasonable slice of the schedule, even with competitive road games <u>at Tampa</u> and <u>Baltimore</u> on tap this month.

Rank <b>8</b>	Baltimore Ravens 3-1
_	

Don't forget these guys. With a 3-1 record that includes two big <u>divisional</u> road <u>wins</u>, the Ravens are in great shape again following the shocking <u>home loss to Indianapolis</u>. The Ravens weren't about to let another backup QB beat them, with the <u>Roquan Smith-led</u> defense taking the wheel against the <u>Deshaun Watson-less</u> Browns. That unit allowed 166 yards on 65 plays, made 10 tackles for losses and forced three turnovers, absolutely stifling a Cleveland team that was supposed to have the league's best defense itself. <u>Lamar Jackson</u> and Co. were efficient against that good Browns D, and believe it or not, Jackson logged his first career game with multiple TD passes *and* runs. But the biggest offensive development was the reintroduction of tight end <u>Mark Andrews</u> (5/80/2) as the go-to guy after a slow start to the season.

Rank <b>9</b>	Seattle Seahawks 3-1
3 🔺	

This probably wasn't how <u>Geno Smith</u> and <u>Jamal Adams</u> envisioned their New York homecomings. Adams, the former Jet, was making his presence felt early <u>but left</u> with a concussion after nine snaps. Smith, the former Jet and Giant, left with a knee injury in the second quarter but <u>returned after halftime</u> to help finish off <u>the win</u>, albeit in an uneven second half. <u>Drew Lock</u> made a few plays in relief, leading the offense on a TD drive. It's not often a team can win on the road using four different battery combinations (two QBs and two centers), but that's what happened. It's easier when your defense can rack up 11 sacks, <u>a 97-yard pick-six</u>, another <u>INT</u> and <u>a fumble recovery</u> taken inside the opponent's 10-yard line. It wasn't pretty, but it was a gutsy win.



Rank 10

**Tampa Bay Buccaneers** 

3-1

The Bucs were more aggressive offensively in their win over the Saints, with Baker Mayfield providing some good (first-down passes downfield, scrambling for first downs) and some bad (a goal-line pick). The run game remains a work in progress, but the overall results were positive, given Tampa was without the injured Mike Evans for much of the day. Defensively, the Bucs swarmed Alvin Kamara (24 touches, 84 yards), got to Derek Carr enough and caused two turnovers. A big forced fumble from Antoine Winfield Jr. set up Trey Palmer's touchdown, bailing out Mayfield just before halftime. Great team ball. Winfield also batted away a would-be TD to Chris Olave. The Bucs' 11 penalties were rough -- those were part of the reason they didn't put the Saints away sooner.



**Cleveland Browns** 

2-2

It's hard to not too much stock into a toom looing with a healton OD getting his first real



home, as even the Browns' vaunted defense couldn't stop the runaway train. The Ravens led 14-3 four minutes before halftime, and the game essentially was over. Could <u>Deshaun Watson</u> have done anything to change the result? That's a tough question. He played well <u>in Week 3</u>, but before that? Meh. The funny thing is that the Browns clearly need Watson to win, but his play is also often ripe for deserved criticism. That cloaks the entire operation while Cleveland tries to regroup on bye and gear up for <u>hosting the 49ers</u> in Week 6.

Rank	<b>Jacksonville Jaguars</b>			
12	2-2			
1 🔺				

The Jaguars might have sleepwalked through September, but the <u>London performance</u> was more on the level of what we expected coming into the season. The offense was efficient, if unsexy, against a solid Atlanta defense. <u>Trevor Lawrence</u> played one of his cleaner games this season, and the offensive line was not a net negative. You'd like to see Jacksonville convert in the red zone, but that was a winning performance on offense. It was even better on defense, which only really bent on the Falcons' third quarter TD drive. The secondary stood tall, and <u>Josh Allen</u> is suddenly having one of his best seasons to date. Every AFC South team stands at 2-2. The Jaguars might be lucky their slow start didn't hinder them more.



The <u>win over the Raiders</u> was arguably the Chargers' most complete performance, even if it came down to a <u>wild sequence of events</u> and included a <u>failed fourth-and-short conversion attempt</u> late in the game in their own territory. Points for creativity, boys. It's also interesting that the defense has allowed fewer points with each game (although the Vikings *did* rack up 475 yards on them <u>in Week 3</u>). <u>Khalil Mack</u> did a <u>lot of the damage</u>, working against a rookie QB in his first start, but it's progress nonetheless. Sunday was also arguably the Chargers' worst offensive performance, with <u>Justin Herbert</u>'s <u>finger injury</u> surely playing a part. After a <u>couple</u> epic <u>losses</u>, the Chargers have settled in comfortably entering their Week 5 bye.





## **Green Bay Packers**

2-2

Matt LaFleur <u>all but questioned the Packers' toughness</u> after last Thursday's <u>home loss to the Lions</u>. The offensive and defensive lines both got whipped. It has been a roller-coaster ride in <u>Jordan Love</u>'s first four games as The Guy. Meanwhile, LaFleur got <u>Aaron Jones</u> back ... and then barely used the star back. It was such a disheartening loss --not just because of how it happened, of course, but also against whom it came. The Packers have now fallen behind the Lions in the NFC North race and will need to fix a lot of things during a softer part of the schedule before <u>the rematch in Detroit</u> on Thanksgiving. The trench issue looms, but this offense can and will become a more dangerous group over the course of the season. Bank on it.



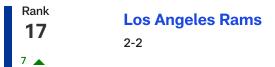
Just like that, football fever is back in Houston, with <u>two stunningly</u> impressive <u>wins</u> following <u>a pair</u> of <u>double-digit losses</u>. DeMeco Ryans appears to have his team believing after the Texans' first home victory since 2021. And why not? Rookie CB <u>C.J. Stroud looks poised</u> -- making 151 straight throws without a pick to start his career -- and dangerous, despite multiple starters on the offensive line (most notably <u>Laremy Tunsil</u>) being out. Houston controlled the clock with a stout run game and zero turnovers, freshening the defense to turn in its best performance of Ryans' early tenure. You'd like to see the Texans avoid getting bogged down so much offensively in and near the red zone, but it's hard to nitpick much after they beat Pittsburgh the way they did.



An improved defensive performance and <u>a resurgent Derrick Henry</u> were exactly what



overwhelmed Cincinnati on both lines of scrimmage and thoroughly dominated. Tennessee got away with three fumbles (recovering all of them) and <u>a meaningless late pick</u> from <u>Ryan Tannehill</u>, and there were a few miscues in pass protection, so there's plenty to work on. But the Henry-<u>Tyjae Spears</u> backfield looks very promising again, and the AFC South remains wide open. Mike Vrabel can win with this group.



Early on <u>against the Colts</u>, the Rams really leaned on them with the run game -- not for many chunk plays, but for consistent short and medium pickups. I suspect that took a physical toll on Indianapolis and factored into the Colts coming up just short in their comeback attempt. Basically, this is my way to avoid focusing on <u>Puka Nacua</u> for the fourth straight week, but I really like that Sean McVay has added a power-running dimension to his team that it seldom had before. But yeah, Nacua <u>remains a revelation</u>, and <u>Cooper Kupp</u> is <u>coming back</u>. As long as <u>Matthew Stafford</u> remains upright, this is a dangerous and intriguing team.



That's now seven straight games where the offense has scored 20 or fewer points. This one comes with an asterisk in that it involved <u>Derek Carr</u> playing at less than full strength. Carr missed some throws, for sure, but how many came as a result of <u>his sore shoulder</u>? That's hard to tell. The Saints were struggling offensively before Carr got hurt. The defense is pretty terrific, but how long can it hold teams down without some help? The Saints have only five touchdowns in four games; only one team, Cincinnati with four, has fewer. One of those TDs was a <u>Rashid Shaheed punt return</u>, so they're averaging one offensive touchdown per game. Somehow, some way, it must be fixed.

Rank <b>19</b>	New York Jets				
17	1-3				



By the end of the disappointing loss on Sunday night, the Jets looked fighting mad that they'd let a golden opportunity slip through their fingers. Zach Wilson played some of the best football of his pro career for a minute and was far more good than bad overall. The defense picked off Patrick Mahomes two times. The offensive attack was diverse and aggressive. But in the end, there were too many loose ends. The missed field goal on fourth-and-1. The controversial flag on Sauce Gardner. Wilson's fumble, followed by Mahomes playing keep-away. This team can still have a decent season, but it's also at risk of running off the rails at 1-3.

Rank
20
Cincinnati Bengals
1-3

You're free to be worried now. I am. We were anesthetized to believe that middling home showings in <u>Weeks 2</u> and <u>3</u> were evidence this team was pulling out of its slump, which led to me putting them at -- *gulp!* -- No. 11 last week. But no, things aren't good, not after <u>a beatdown</u> from a Titans team that looked rather ordinary previously. Sunday brought everything back to the starting line -- and at 1-3, Cincy actually has given every division rival at least a one-game head start. Do you currently trust any element of this Bengals operation, including and starting with a beat-up <u>Joe Burrow</u>? The 2022 Bengals averaged almost three TDs per game. This year, they have three offensive TDs in four games.





The goodwill stockpiled after a 2-0 start has diminished as the offense has gone cold. <u>Desmond Ridder</u>'s ball security and accuracy are concerns. <u>Drake London</u> doesn't get the ball until the Falcons are trailing. <u>Kyle Pitts</u> hardly *ever* gets the ball. The league's fourth-most expensive offensive line, <u>per Over the Cap</u>, has been whipped repeatedly by good pass rushes. <u>Bijan Robinson</u> is the one consistent producer, and it often requires him to do something special to make chunk plays. The whole offensive operation needs a post-London scrubbing, from top to bottom. Right now, Atlanta is asking too much from a respectable defense to make up for the offensive shortcomings.



The theme here should be resiliency. We saw <u>Sam Howell</u> take his lumps -- big ones -- in the nine-sack, four-pick outing <u>in Week 3</u>, but he came back on Sunday and was great, albeit in an overtime loss <u>to the Eagles</u>. Howell got the Commanders out to a strong start and then rallied them back with two clutch fourth-quarter TD drives. I'm just as hopeful that CB <u>Emmanuel Forbes</u> can have a similar rebirth, because Sunday was a rough one for the rookie. The Eagles went after Forbes right away and didn't stop. Forbes allowed 197 yards on nine catches, including the double-move <u>28-yard TD</u> by <u>A.J. Brown</u>, per Next Gen Stats. Those were tough assignments, and I still believe in the intriguing first-round pick -- and the overall fight of this team.



Dyed-in-the-wool Steelers fans have heard statements from Mike Tomlin similar to the



temptation to start their top two 2023 draft picks and replace Najee Harris with Jaylen Warren; might they even make a change at offensive coordinator? These are all well-worn themes among observers in Steeltown by now. The injury Kenny Pickett suffered Sunday isn't considered serious, but the Steelers should at least consider sitting him Sunday against the Ravens if he's not fairly healthy. Even when Cam Heyward and Diontae Johnson return from injury, they won't be able to fix the whole ship by themselves.



Just when it looked like <u>Mac Jones</u> was trending in the right direction, he endured a nightmare <u>at Dallas</u>. Whether it was carrying the ball <u>at his side</u> or throwing multiple times <u>against the grain</u>, Jones was just way too casual with ball security. He looked rattled in the face of adversity. This was everything Jones was sold as *not* being coming out of Alabama, but it's become his NFL hallmark. Right now, he's trying to do more than his capacities allow for a Patriots offense riddled with shortcomings. No obvious playmakers. No bedrock offensive line. A run game with a defined ceiling. The offensive issues are snowballing before the weather turns cold in New England.



This team is still learning how to turn in a complete performance, but <u>a win is a win</u>. <u>Kirk Cousins</u> had his worst outing of the season, throwing two picks, both in the red zone, including <u>a 99-yard pick-six</u>. But the run game woke up and the defense made enough plays. <u>Harrison Smith</u> had a great day, recording three sacks, including the <u>game-clincher</u>, and his forced fumble was run back by <u>D.J. Wonnum</u> for the <u>go-ahead touchdown</u>. Wonnum was everywhere, too, with a sack and a near pick-six. After falling behind 10-0 early, the Vikings notched a hard-fought road victory. Baby steps.





Colts fans really let me have it last week, some of them making excellent points against my "unfair" ranking of this team at No. 28. I trusted my eyes watching them, and felt the Week 3 shocker at Baltimore came with fortunate turns. Through one half of Sunday's overtime loss to the Rams, I felt a little smug. Then the scrappy Colts threatened to make me devour my words. Anthony Richardson looked like a capital-P Playmaker in the second half. Zack Moss ran hard. The defense -- especially Dayo Odeyingbo -- suddenly was great. And how about Andrew Ogletree! The grit isn't lacking, and the roster isn't bad. But most weeks, Indianapolis won't be able to fall behind 23-0, fail to get Michael Pittman Jr. involved until late, and still expect to compete.

27
Arizona Cardinals
1-3

There's a lot of fight and creativity in this team, but the defense has now been pushed around a little for three straight weeks. The clutch stops in the Week 3 win over Dallas might have masked some of the issues that were impossible to ignore against San Francisco in Week 4. The Cardinals' game plan seemed smart: trying to shorten the game and take whatever risks presented themselves. But when the defense allows five TDs in six possessions (not counting the pre-halftime kneeldown), it ends up being futile in the end. The run defense was shoddy, the pressure was nonexistent (except for Dennis Gardeck, who needs to play more) and the coverage wasn't great. This defense needs to rediscover its Week 1 form badly.

Rank
28
Denver Broncos
1-3

Overcoming a 21-point deficit deserves serious credit, even if the rally came against a Bears team mired in a 14-game losing streak. It might not be perfect, but Russell Wilson is playing some strong ball. Ten different Denver players caught passes Sunday, and some young guns -- Marvin Mims and Jaleel McLaughlin -- are stating cases for expanded roles. The defense allowed 112 points in an eight-quarter span from halftime



Three of the Broncos' next four games are at home, but in that span, they'll face presumably angry Jets and Packers teams and the Chiefs twice.

Rank **29** 

Las Vegas Raiders

1-3



<u>Jimmy Garoppolo</u> gives the Raiders the best chance to win, but <u>Aidan O'Connell</u> -even with some rough moments -- should get another shot if Garoppolo <u>can't go again</u>
in Week 5. O'Connell needs to speed up his clock considerably, and his three turnovers
in <u>Sunday's loss</u> to the Chargers were killers. Two lost fumbles led to 14 L.A. points,
and Las Vegas didn't get the ball back after <u>the late-game pick</u>. But O'Connell wasn't
lost out there, either; he made a few <u>big throws</u>, more than I think <u>Brian Hoyer</u> would
give them. Given Garoppolo's injury history, the kid needs to be ready. The Raiders
aren't great, but they are fairly competitive.

Rank

**New York Giants** 

1-3



Throwing the ball has become laborious. Handing it off without Saquon Barkley doesn't do much. So the Giants' offense has become overly reliant on Daniel Jones making something happen with his legs. He laid everything out there as the Giants clung to hope against the Seahawks, driving to the Seattle 5-yard line while down 14-3. That's when Jones threw a back-breaking pick-six, followed by apparent tension between Jones and Brian Daboll on the sideline. The hell-on-wheels defense did all it could to hold the Seahawks down, minus a few busted plays. But Jones was sacked 10 times and fumbled twice, and it's hard to imagine the other units compensating for that. This offense is just in dire shape right now.



I had to check the stats twice. The Panthers possessed the ball for 38:29 <u>against the Vikings</u>, gaining 20 first downs. Yet they only totaled 232 yards (on 68 plays!) and didn't score an offensive touchdown. The defense battled all game, but a familiar script keeps playing out. <u>Bryce Young</u> nipped away but couldn't finish drives and once again <u>coughed up a critical turnover</u> that led to points for the other side. When you look at <u>Carolina's schedule</u>, it's hard to see where the first victory will come. If the Panthers can keep it close in the next two road games (<u>at Detroit</u>, <u>at Miami</u>) before the Week 7 bye, it will be an encouraging development.

Rank 32	Chicago Bears 0-4
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While I was sharpening my sardonic swords for whomever (the Bears or Broncos) ended up in this space, delivering any Bears barbs now would feel like piling on during what's become a nightmare season. Blowing a 21-point lead to Denver hurts, but the suffering is becoming numbing. Unless you're Matt Eberflus, who is feeling heat while presiding over a franchise-record losing streak. If there was a silver lining, it was that Justin Fields really had the kind of game (335 yards and four TDs passing) everyone in Chicago was hoping for this season, save for the two late turnovers. DJ Moore logging his best effort of the season helped, but it came on a day the Bears told fellow WR Chase Claypool to



<u>stay home</u>. And they lost to a Broncos defense that has been steamrolled by others. But at least Fields showed something.

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