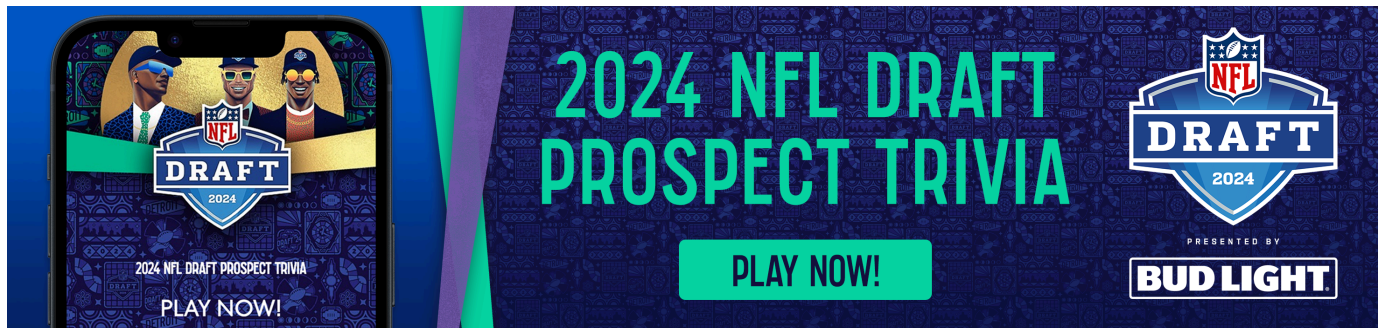


[NFL Shop](#)[Watch Games](#)[News Home](#)[Podcasts](#)[Injuries](#)[Transactions](#)[NFL Writers](#)[Series](#)

Power Rankings

Presented By

NFL Power Rankings, Week 17: Red-hot Ravens jump 49ers to claim No. 1 spot; broken Chiefs fall to No. 9

Published: Dec 26, 2023 at 12:44 PM



Eric Edholm

Lead Draft Writer

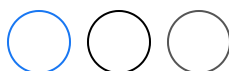




'Twas two weeks before the playoffs, from the top on down,
Not a team was comfy, not even in Motown.
Division titles shall be hung, in both Detroit and San Fran,
But in Cincy, Indy and NOLA, they're rethinking the plan.

The same might be true in Kansas City, too,
And they're crying in Denver, feeling all sorts of blue.
They're joined by the Jaguars, quite down but not out,
While Dallas dropped another game, not nearly as stout.

With Pittsburgh and Houston, time will tell,
And the Vikings and Falcons, still in it as well.
Yet the clock is ticking, the margins have shrunk,
To find who's a gem, and who is junk.



The Bills and Packers survived, with sweet relief,
The Dolphins and Seahawks both share the same belief.
'Tis the season for miracles, both big and small,
The Browns, Bucs and Rams currently stand playoff tall.

Power rankings will change, each week a new mix,
Every shocking result, our Sundays turn into tricks.
Stakes have ne'er been bigger, few can deny,
Postseason spots simply vanish in the blink of an eye.

In Week 16's final contest, we were left with two,
The Ravens and Niners, only the highest value.
Or so we thought, as disappointment bore,
Brock's interceptions adding up to four.

Purdy's picks weren't pretty, each one a ghastly sight,
The Niners clawed to make it closer, but never looked quite right.
Twelve times now, any way anyhow, the Ravens got it done,
Merry Christmas, Baltimore! You are now No. 1.

RELATED LINKS

[The First Read: Buy/sell on 18 playoff contenders; plus, Week 17's most intriguing game, MVP rankings](#)

[2024 NFL Draft order: Shake-up in top five; Vikings, Bengals biggest climbers](#)

[NFL playoff picture: Biggest winners and losers from Week 16's Saturday/Sunday games](#)

[2023 NFL season, Week 16: What We Learned from Christmas tripleheader](#)

[2023 NFL season, Week 16: What We Learned from Sunday's games](#)

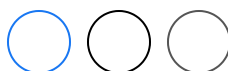
[2023 NFL season, Week 16: What We Learned from Saturday's doubleheader](#)

NOTE: Up/down arrows reflect movement from the [Week 16 Power Rankings](#).

Rank

1

Baltimore Ravens

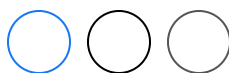


A million things happened afterward, but I thought the Ravens showed a lot of early poise following a pretty shaky start against the 49ers. Kicking off the [Brock Purdy](#) pick party [in the end zone](#) was a strong response, but the defense bent a few times early and the offense opened with a three-and-out and then an unfortunate, [ref-induced safety](#). From there on, though, it was a Baltimore onslaught that ended with [a 33-19 road win](#). The Ravens have passed a number of mental-toughness tests this season, and we saw them check the box on two more Monday night: stemming the tide early in a hostile environment and then making a tremendous goal-line stand in the final few minutes to shut the door on any miracle-comeback possibility for the Niners. [Lamar Jackson](#) played such a cool, composed game, even if the Ravens might've taken their foot off the gas a bit early. It certainly tilted the MVP debate [in Jackson's favor](#) on a night when his biggest competition threw four picks and was [knocked out of the game](#). But do not overlook the reason for Purdy's nightmare outing: a swarming, relentless Baltimore defense.

Rank	San Francisco 49ers
2	11-4
1 ▼	

Even though the 49ers saved face a bit late in [the 33-19 loss](#) to the Ravens, it's impossible to overlook how tough a night [Brock Purdy](#) and several elements of the offense had. On [the first interception](#), Purdy forced it in the end zone -- bad decision. [The second one](#) was a terrific defensive play by [Brandon Stephens](#) (and [Marlon Humphrey](#)). [No. 3](#) was all on Purdy, even if it was a fluky play because he saw two flags fly in front of his face before the throw. Purdy's arm was hit on [the fourth one](#), but by that point, the Ravens had landed enough haymakers to make the debate a pretty moot one. It was just a lump of coal all around. San Francisco's offensive line got manhandled after a certain point. The tackling was atrocious for a stretch. It just was *not* the game I expected from this team at this point in the season. But the Niners have stumbled before and risen again, and I believe they'll be in the thick of the Super Bowl race, especially with [the NFC's top seed](#) still very much in play.

Rank	Miami Dolphins
3	11-4



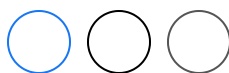
The Dolphins did what we've been begging them to do all season long: beat a quality team. The [22-20 win](#) over Dallas came in Miami, but the fact is the Fins went toe-to-toe with a good squad and prospered in a tense, playoff-like environment. They needed every [Jason Sanders](#) bomb to get it done, but the key play might have been the third-and-2 conversion with just under two minutes remaining in the game. Running the football has been the Dolphins' sneaky superpower this season when they've had their full offensive personnel on the field, and though they did not spring a lot of big runs Sunday, they finished off the important ones. This now sets up a potential division-clinching game [against the Ravens](#), which just so happens to be another terrific playoff table setter. Miami has responded beautifully after Week 14's [shocking loss](#) to Tennessee.

Rank	Philadelphia Eagles
4	11-4
1 ▲	

The Cowboys [lost](#) and the Eagles [won](#), ending their three-game slide, so the bottom line is that it was a productive weekend. The division title moved closer to landing in Philadelphia, with two winnable games remaining ([vs. Cardinals](#), [at Giants](#)). But Monday's victory over the Giants was fairly unimpressive on the whole. The Eagles nearly coughed up a 20-3 lead to a team that benched its quarterback midgame because the offense was struggling. Philly's [special teams turnover](#) was a bit fluky, and while [Dallas Goedert](#) fell down on [Jalen Hurts](#)' pick-six, Hurts was lucky he didn't throw an interception on the play just before it, too. The Eagles outgained the Giants by nearly 200 yards, but all the mistakes made it a close game that came down to [the final play](#). They'll want to knock those off as much as possible before the playoffs, one could safely assume.

Rank	Detroit Lions
5	11-4
2 ▲	

You just knew the Lions' [first NFC North title](#) -- which will give them their first home playoff game in 30 years -- wouldn't come easily. They had to fight and scrap for every drive in [the thrilling win](#) over the Vikings, benefiting greatly from four [Nick Mullens](#)



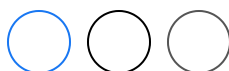
defensive stops, even if their down-to-down consistency was lacking and they had few answers for [Justin Jefferson](#). Could they stand to tighten up on defense? Uh-huh. Will they take the game-changing turnovers, even while allowing chunks of yards? Absolutely. It also helps that the offense has multiple playmakers capable of being showcased in any given game. Rookie RB [Jahmyr Gibbs](#) atoned for [his early fumble](#) with 100 scrimmage yards and two touchdowns, as he and WR [Amon-Ra St. Brown](#) took over in the second half. A special season in Detroit will be extended by at least one game in January.

Rank	Dallas Cowboys
6	10-5
3 ▼	

They already clinched a playoff spot [somewhat anticlimactically](#), but a division title might not be in the cards after [Sunday's loss](#) in Miami. If that's the case, the Cowboys will have to find a way to pull off three straight postseason road wins to finally make that elusive return to the Super Bowl. They're good enough to get there at their best, and the 'Boys *did* rip off five straight wins in impressive fashion not that long ago. But converting third downs consistently has proven to be problematic in most of Dallas' five road losses, and the offense went just 1-for-3 in the red zone at Miami, with the opening-drive [first-and-goal fumble](#) giving the Dolphins a huge early momentum swing. The offense did atone late with the epic, 17-play, go-ahead TD drive, but the defense couldn't finish it off after playing well most of the second half.

Rank	Buffalo Bills
7	9-6
1 ▲	

I hedged a bit last week, placing the Bills [in the No. 8 spot](#) -- and boy, did I hear about it. Some readers wanted them at No. 2! I wasn't about to do that, and [Saturday's struggle](#) against the Chargers was a reminder of how *off* they've been at various times this season. It might not be the start of a trend, but it's not exactly the kind of performance that boosts confidence in the big picture. Second-year back [James Cook](#) went from [season-saving hero](#) to [fumble-prone concern](#) in the span of a week. Buffalo's



And when he needed to be, [Josh Allen](#) was money. But it's like I tell my kids all the time: It doesn't have to be that difficult. That said, the Bills are never boring! With the playoffs still hanging in the balance, expect a few more plot twists before it's all said and done.

Rank

8

1 ▲

Cleveland Browns

10-5

What's prettier than a [Joe Flacco](#) deep ball? Sure, he got picked twice on those in Sunday's first half, but neither hurt very much, as the miracle Browns drove for three first-half touchdowns and stuffed their fans' stockings with two more to start the second half in [a 36-22 win](#) at Houston. Granted, the Texans were fielding a battered lineup against them, but seeing Flacco and [Amari Cooper](#) (who racked up an incredible 265 yards receiving and two TDs) hook up time and time again was good enough for me to think Cleveland could be a real problem in the playoffs. The [Dustin Hopkins](#) injury is one to watch, though, as he has been so money for the Browns all season. But even with the questions, this team has a big-play operation on offense and one of the five best defenses -- if not *the* best -- in the league. That's what makes Cleveland dangerous, even if it has to open the playoffs on the road.

Rank

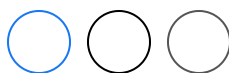
9

3 ▼

Kansas City Chiefs

9-6

This looks like a broken team in some ways. How else do you explain losing to an opponent whose quarterback had ZERO completions on 10 pass attempts *after the first quarter*? The defense did its job [against the Raiders](#), but the offense flunked yet another test. Dropped passes, turnovers and ill-timed penalties have turned one of the league's most dangerous offenses over the past five seasons into one of the league's most mistake-prone and disappointing units. [Patrick Mahomes](#) is averaging 6.9 yards per attempt (fewer than [Deshaun Watson](#)) and has been forced to use his legs more often, just to get anything started offensively. The Chiefs have only provided a few truly explosive offensive performances the entire season, and those were back in September and October. It's hard to imagine that magic suddenly reappearing just in time for the



Rank

10

5 ▲

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

8-7

It's hard to believe that the same team that lost six of seven through the end of November now has a pretty clear-cut path to the NFC South crown: Tampa just needs to win one of the final two division games remaining. This would be the Bucs' third straight division title, and it would be the least likely of the trio. [Baker Mayfield](#) was viewed by some as a bridge QB who, though perhaps able to keep the team competitive in the wake of Tom Brady's retirement, was at a career crossroads. Consider the road crossed. Mayfield has been terrific over the past two weeks, and he's putting together one of his stronger seasons all told, if not his best. [Sunday](#) also was a great day for the Bucs' defense, which has had its share of ups and downs, with the [big-play factor](#) keeping that unit thriving. This is suddenly a team you must respect.

Rank

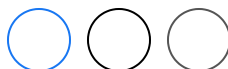
11

5 ▲

Los Angeles Rams

8-7

I'll admit it: I left the Rams for dead at 2-4. Since the Week 10 bye, though, they've



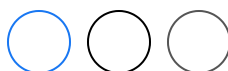
[Matthew Stafford](#) is reminding everyone how good he still can be. [Puka Nacua](#) is out there rewriting the rookie receiving books, while [Demarcus Robinson](#) has come up surprisingly huge. [Cooper Kupp](#) is still Cooper Kupp. And [Kyren Williams](#) has been the engine of it all. The second-year back's return to the lineup, even with a two-fumble first half [against Washington](#) in Week 15, has given Los Angeles' offense a huge jolt in the ground game *and* the aerial attack. And did I mention that Sean McVay has been coaching his tail off most of this season? It would be a shame to see the Rams lose a big game -- maybe even a postseason game -- because of the kicking woes, as they now lead the league with 11 field-goal misses. But the fact we're even talking about them as [a possible playoff team](#) is pretty remarkable in its own right.

Rank	Houston Texans
12	8-7
1 ▼	

The storybook season isn't dead yet, but it's clear the Texans need [C.J. Stroud](#) (concussion) back on the field to keep it alive. [Case Keenum](#) struggled in the [loss to the Browns](#), and whatever cosmetic stats [Davis Mills](#) racked up in garbage time shouldn't have too much stock put into them. Neither QB was able to complete a pass longer than 18 yards, and through three quarters on Sunday, they combined to complete 12 of 18 throws for 67 yards with two picks and three sacks. Of the two, Mills might be the better option, but Stroud is the only signal-caller who gives the Texans a real chance to (a) get into the playoffs and (b) possibly win a postseason game. The pass defense is a worry, while the ground attack has wavered game to game. If Stroud can't return to rescue this team, the season will still be a success, but it sure would be more memorable with the rookie leading one last rush for the playoffs.

Rank	Jacksonville Jaguars
13	8-7
3 ▼	

It feels like Jacksonville's season is cratering as I type, with the Jaguars losers of four straight and playing their worst football of the season. The Buccaneers took [Sunday's](#)



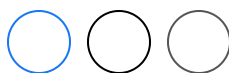
they do hit the tourney, though, the forecast will still be shaky, even if they start at home. The Jags are 2-5 in games in Jacksonville, losing the past two against playoff-caliber foes. [Trevor Lawrence](#) just hasn't had the Year 3 many of us expected -- and now he's [dealing with a sprained shoulder](#) -- but it's hardly all on the quarterback. The Jags have kicking woes, defensive concerns and are not very healthy at wide receiver. Doug Pederson should be commended for his work in turning this franchise around, but it has gone off the rails lately.

Rank	Cincinnati Bengals
14	8-7
2 ▼	

[Jake Browning](#)'s worst game came at a pretty tough time, as did [Ja'Marr Chase](#)'s injury. Even if the [34-11 defeat](#) at Pittsburgh wasn't the final stake in Cincinnati's heart, it inflicted a ton of damage to its already-fleeting playoff chances. But there's also a bigger picture to consider for this Bengals season, which has to start with their 0-5 division record. It's been over two decades since Cincinnati went winless in the North, even before Marvin Lewis' time as coach. [Joe Burrow](#) started three of those five losses, by the way. The Bengals have changed the arc of the franchise, winning the past two AFC North titles under Zac Taylor, but Saturday's blowout loss revealed a worrisome weakness. They were absolutely dominated on both lines of scrimmage, getting out-toughed by a team with even lower playoff odds and one that was starting its third QB of the season.

Rank	Indianapolis Colts
15	8-7
2 ▼	

After building up so much goodwill with the 5-1 stretch that started in November, the Colts fell flat in [the 29-10 loss](#) to the Falcons. Like in Week 14's [34-14 loss](#) at Cincinnati, Indianapolis was exposed on the road by a competitive team starting its backup quarterback. [Gardner Minshew](#) (a replacement QB himself) and Indy's offense struggled after the [opening-drive TD](#), punting on their next four drives. In the fourth quarter, the Colts sandwiched two turnovers on downs around [a back-breaking interception](#). But the defense came up small, too, seeing its 19-game takeaway streak

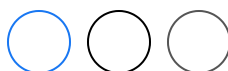


them in the previous six games. The Colts have well surpassed many folks' preseason expectations in Year 1 under Shane Steichen, but the feel-good season might be petering out at the very end.

Rank	Seattle Seahawks
16	8-7
1 ▲	

[Geno Smith](#) had a high bar to clear in his return to the lineup, following [Drew Lock](#)'s thrilling game-winning drive against the Eagles [in Week 15](#), and it was a slow burn for Smith on Sunday. But he got cooking late, with the second of two fourth-quarter TD drives giving Seattle [a victory](#) it *had* to have. For now, the Seahawks just want to give Smith a runway [into the playoffs](#) if possible, and the next two games ([vs. Pittsburgh](#), [at Arizona](#)) line up pretty well for him. Whether or not Smith will remain the starter in 2024 is a potential discussion that should be tabled for now. Seattle might not be the most disciplined team in the league, and the level of consistency week to week is a bit too shaky for my taste, but any club with playmakers like the Seahawks have can be a playoff threat.

Rank	Pittsburgh Steelers
17	



They're 8-7 with two games left following [the shocking domination of the Bengals](#) and still have a remote chance to get into the postseason. We should never doubt a Mike Tomlin-led team, even if the coach has been as questioned by Steelers fans as I can ever remember this season. [Back-to-back](#) home [losses](#) to teams that arrived at Acrisure Stadium with a 2-10 record can do that, even to the most credentialed coaches in this league. But Tomlin stymied the fans' chants to fire him for at least one game and gave himself a chance to keep his career streak of .500-or-better seasons alive for another year. [Mason Rudolph](#) also changed the QB narrative locally with his strong performance in place of [Mitch Trubisky](#), and now Tomlin says the former third-stringer is in line to be [Pittsburgh's starter again](#) for this week's game [at Seattle](#). Are the Steelers a good team? Not sure. But fascinating? For sure.

Rank

18**Minnesota Vikings**

7-8

—

The Vikings aren't done, but it's getting late. They deserve a ton of credit for keeping the season alive -- and even extending the team's midseason win streak to five games - - after [Kirk Cousins](#) was lost for the season. [Justin Jefferson](#) was sidelined for that entire hot stretch, so it really is a credit to Kevin O'Connell's and Brian Flores' coaching jobs, getting the most out of their respective units to remain in the playoff race. In Sunday's [six-point loss](#) to Detroit, Jefferson put on a show, reminding everyone just how rare he is, whether via his [incredible diving TD catch](#) or [his improbable conversion](#) in the waning minutes on 3rd-and-27. But that show was also a reminder of what could have been had this team kept its core healthy for more of the season. A 2-0 finish [against the Packers](#) and [Lions](#) can get the Vikings in the postseason, but they must prepare themselves for the possibility that their largely-inspiring campaign might come up just short.

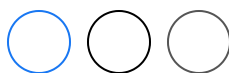
Rank

19**Green Bay Packers**

7-8

—

It's one thing for [Baker Mayfield](#) to have one of his best days against the Packers'



rookie season -- to register the first big game of his NFL career against coordinator Joe Barry's unit. Barry has become the latest in that position to earn the fans' wrath, following in a time-honored tradition carried on by Mike Pettine, Dom Capers and Bob Sanders. The Packers ultimately [got it done](#), and it was encouraging to see what a (relatively) healthy [Aaron Jones can do](#) for the offense. Green Bay has also had some nice contributions from the likes of [Tucker Kraft](#) and [Bo Melton](#). If the Packers can win two more, [they're probably in](#), but that feels like a big ask at this moment. Their playoff odds might have crept up with the narrow victory over Carolina, but my faith in them did not.

Rank

20

2 ▲

Atlanta Falcons

7-8

Like the old *Monty Python* skit, they're [not dead yet](#). The Falcons have plenty of heavy lifting left, with remaining road games [at Chicago](#) and [New Orleans](#), and they might need a little help, with the Bucs also [winning in Week 16](#). But [Taylor Heinicke](#) helped save the season for now. After a few dangerous passes in the first half, he settled in and ended up providing the stability the passing game -- and the offense as a whole -- had been craving for weeks. The backs also were a big part of the success, naturally, as [Bijan Robinson](#), [Tyler Allgeier](#) and [Cordarrelle Patterson](#) were productive as a three-headed monster, both running the ball and in the passing game. It was truly a three-phase victory, with the defense and special teams also coming up big, and it felt like a reminder of all the missed opportunities Atlanta has squandered during a mostly-frustrating season. Arthur Smith and the Falcons might have their backs against the wall, but there's still a chance to salvage this thing and perhaps even earn a home playoff game with some positive turns.

Rank

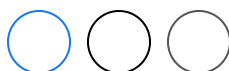
21

2 ▲

Las Vegas Raiders

7-8

Has Antonio Pierce done enough to convince Mark Davis to give him the full-time head-coaching job? Monday's [stunning win over the Chiefs](#) surely went toward that end.



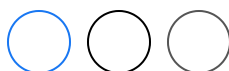
but the past two games have been impressive: a [63-21 shellacking of the Chargers](#) and a win at Arrowhead, just the second for the Raiders in the past decade. But don't forget that Davis' last interim coach, Rich Bisaccia, went 7-5 after [Jon Gruden's resignation](#) in 2021 and led the Raiders into the postseason -- then gave way to Josh McDaniels. Pierce sits at 4-3 with two games to play, but he's coaxed some quality play out of his team. The final two contests could be critical for his future there.

Rank	Denver Broncos
22	7-8
8 ▼	

Things just didn't look right for Denver from the start on Sunday night, even though the Broncos [scored first](#) and the Patriots weren't doing much offensively. But the third quarter was an utter disaster for the home team, as New England logged two offensive touchdowns before notching a shocking [special teams scoop-and-score](#) ... while the Broncos netted negative yards. Credit Sean Payton's team for the frantic fourth-quarter comeback, hitting the inside straight with two TDs and two two-point conversions (without [Courtland Sutton](#), who was sidelined in the first quarter [by a concussion](#)). [Russell Wilson](#) made plays, with anonymous pass catchers like [Lucas Krull](#) and [Brandon Johnson](#) stepping up. It could have been a fantastic finish and a huge boost to Denver's playoff chances, but the defense couldn't get one more stop. Payton's first season with the Broncos has been an interesting one, and he's done some really good things, but [this three-point loss](#) will sting all offseason, I suspect.

Rank	New Orleans Saints
23	7-8
2 ▼	

They're getting extra time to prepare for the suddenly-hot Buccaneers, but can the Saints turn this season around? Both [Tampa Bay](#) and [Atlanta](#) won in Week 16, pushing New Orleans into third place in the NFC South. This past Thursday's [loss to the Rams](#) was a wicked setback, as [Alvin Kamara](#) was completely contained and some of New Orleans' biggest bugaboos this season (tackling on defense, finishing drives on offense) were exposed once again. The Bucs [dominated the Saints](#) in New Orleans in the first meeting back in Week 4 -- and Tampa Bay is arguably a much better team now than it was then, currently riding a four-game win streak. It might be up to [Derek Carr](#) and the



there. But right now, coming from third place to win the division feels like a steep climb -- as does leapfrogging four NFC teams for [a wild-card spot](#).

Rank

24

Chicago Bears

6-9

—

They've played a very respectable brand of ball following the 0-4 start, going 6-5 since. But we're still left to wonder what might have been had the Bears been a better fourth-quarter operation. Their play in the final 15 minutes recently cost them potentially huge road victories [at Detroit](#) and [Cleveland](#) -- two teams with double-digit wins -- and opened the door for a possible shocker Sunday against Arizona. The Cardinals were able to cut the Bears' lead from 21-0 to 24-16, as [Justin Fields](#) threw [a bad fourth-quarter pick](#) to end a promising drive and Chicago's defense sagged too much late. The Bears ultimately [finished off](#) three-win Arizona, but they must know that these late-game struggles *cannot* continue if they want to join the heavyweights of the division.

Rank

25

New York Jets

6-9

1 ▲

Even with how the Jets performed early on [Sunday](#), building a 27-7 lead, it's hard to say they played anything approximating a great game one day after it was reported that both head coach Robert Saleh and general manager Joe Douglas [would be back next season](#). [Breece Hall](#) was [terrific](#), bouncing back after a few duds, and the special teams made some big plays early. But how can a defense that completely flustered [Sam Howell](#) look so helpless against [Jacoby Brissett](#)? Even if Brissett repeated his effort from the week before [against the Rams](#), outplaying Howell in garbage time, the Jets can't call themselves a top-tier defense and allow things like this to happen. All of this is advanced prep for next season at this point. But Saleh and Douglas still must be judged on what happens now, even if this season is kaput.

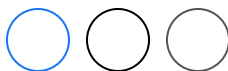
Rank

26

Tennessee Titans

5-10

1 ▼



[Will Levis'](#) [high ankle sprain](#) opened a door for [Ryan Tannehill](#) to make a last gasp.

There was nothing egregiously bad, but Tannehill just didn't have it in a rusty performance [vs. the Seahawks](#). In the big picture, this could be his final ride with the franchise. Levis is the future, or at least part of it, and Tannehill's contract is not secured [beyond 2023](#). And he's not the only one whose Titans future remains up in the air. This is a team with several players headed for free agency. You know some name players won't be back. Salary-cap space isn't the issue. This is a 5-10 outfit in what looks like a middling division -- at best -- so the Titans might want to swab the decks and spend the money elsewhere. [Derrick Henry](#) rebounded Sunday with a good performance, but he's in the [same contractual boat](#) as Tannehill. What about [DeAndre Hopkins](#)? There might be more to play for in the final two games than meets the eye.

Rank

27**Los Angeles Chargers**

5-10

—

There still can be interesting developments in lost seasons, and the reduced role of [Derwin James](#) in Saturday's [tight loss to Buffalo](#) certainly opened my eyes. In essence, he was a nickel corner in the game, taking only a few snaps at safety and playing just 40 of the 52 defensive snaps. James has been an impact player for the Chargers since entering the NFL as a first-round pick in 2018, rarely coming off the field when healthy. But interim coach Giff Smith apparently has a different vision of James' role down the stretch, which could raise questions about his future with the franchise, seeing how he carries a salary-cap hit just south of \$20 million in 2024. Now, Smith probably won't be the Chargers' head coach next season, and a new front office is set to take over, so it's impossible to project future personnel decisions. Even still, I'll be keeping an eye on James once the new regime settles in.

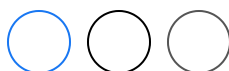
Rank

28**New York Giants**

5-10

—

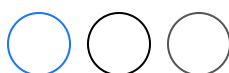
I'll be fascinated to see how Brian Daboll handles the quarterback position for the final two games. Not that long ago, it would have been sacrilegious to suggest anyone but



behind 20-3 with DeVito playing and then outscored the Eagles 22-13 with Taylor out there. Granted, six of those second-half points came on [a defensive score](#), but DeVito wasn't getting it done early. It raises the question as to whether DeVito has somewhat fallen out of favor. I'm not sure that's the case, but the bloom might be off that rose for now. DeVito's ceiling might be as a backup, but how Daboll handles these final games could tell us a lot on that matter.

Rank	New England Patriots
29	4-11
1 ▲	

Something tells me Bill Belichick isn't as obsessed with the Patriots' draft position as some fans are. The [thrilling win at Denver](#) reinforced the idea that the injury-battered Pats have not quit one bit on their embattled coach, as the team now has been blown out twice this season and played in 13 games that were *at least* pretty close. They've only won four of those contests, which is a problem, of course, but [Bailey Zappe](#) has lit a little fire under this team, and the defense is playing pretty darned well, especially considering everything the unit has lost to injury. After missing [a 47-yard field goal](#) and [an extra point](#), [Chad Ryland](#) atoned with his [56-yard game-winner](#) -- although he's still in the red after massive misses [against the Colts](#) and [Giants](#). This isn't a good New England team, but it's a few plays away from having six or seven wins. What the future holds for Belichick is likely only known by him and owner Robert Kraft, but there's an argument to be made that the Pats aren't as far from contending again as some might believe.



Rank

30

1 ▼

Arizona Cardinals

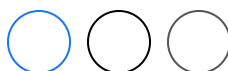
3-12

Many Cardinals fans are already thinking about next season, but even so, they must be concerned about [Kyler Murray](#)'s uneven play in his abbreviated 2023 campaign. Seeing Arizona's defense struggle isn't the most shocking thing, given that unit's lack of talent and depth following significant attrition this past offseason. But with Murray, there are reasons why it's much more worrisome. The offensive personnel's in better shape, and there are young pieces Arizona plans to build around. Also, first-year coordinator Drew Petzing has displayed some creativity in the face of adversity. Murray, to be fair, *has* had his moments. But the passing game has stagnated, even if Murray's numbers in [Sunday's loss at Chicago](#) looked decent. He's been great in fourth quarters (67.6 percent completions, 486 yards, three TDs), but pretty darned ordinary in the first three quarters (59.4 percent, 819 yards, three TDs). I'll feel better if he finishes strong [against Philadelphia](#) and [Seattle](#).

Rank

31**Washington Commanders**

4-11



The [Sam Howell](#) discussion has turned a little dark in recent weeks, as he's been upstaged in each of the past two games by [Jacoby Brissett](#) in relief. Had that happened earlier in the season, prior to Howell showing some real promise, it might not have been so bad. But there has been a clear regression over the past two weeks, in terms of both Howell's play (17-of-48 passing, 158 yards, one TD, three picks in that span) and the offense's performance with him on the field. Meanwhile, Brissett has led TD drives on five of his past six chances. Is it worth giving the journeyman a couple late-season starts? It might not have any bearing on what happens next season, but it could give Howell a little mental break and allow him to see the game from a different perspective, with a 2024 reboot being the biggest focus.

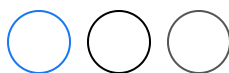
Rank

32**Carolina Panthers**

2-13

The Panthers have been more competitive of late, and that trend helped set the table for [Bryce Young](#)'s [career day](#) in a [loss to the Packers](#). The bottom line is that Young *really* needed that kind of game before the end of the season, otherwise we wouldn't have a whole lot to point to from his rookie year. Sunday's effort was encouraging, even if it came against an embattled Green Bay defense. Young missed some throws, but he made a number of impressive plays and finally was able to attack vertically with success after struggling to threaten downfield for most of the season, going 6-for-6 for 102 yards and a touchdown on post patterns, per Next Gen Stats.

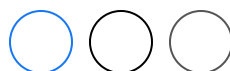
Related Content



TEAMS

AFC NORTH

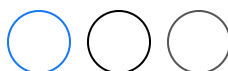
AFC EAST



AFC SOUTH

AFC WEST

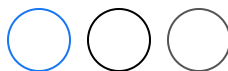
NFC NORTH



NFC EAST

NFC SOUTH

NFC WEST



[GENERAL & MEDIA INFO](#)[INITIATIVES](#)[PLAYER SERVICES](#)[MORE NFL SITES](#)

[Download Apps](#)

© 2024 NFL Enterprises LLC. NFL and the NFL shield design are registered trademarks of the National Football League. The team names, logos and uniform designs are registered trademarks of the teams indicated. All other NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League. NFL footage © NFL Productions LLC.

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)[TERMS OF SERVICE](#)[SUBSCRIPTION TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#)[AD CHOICES](#)[YOUR PRIVACY CHOICES](#)[COOKIE SETTINGS](#)