Opening—

In honor of the first day of the 2020-2021 NFL Season we decided to take a look at the leading players in interceptions and sacks. Football is a game where the outcome is easily changed with one big play. The biggest plays that influence the game are typically an interception or a sack. Interceptions happen when a member of the opposing team gains control of the ball mid-throw from the quarterback of the offensive team. This play can have many outcomes: loss of yards, turnovers, and even a touchdown. During Superbowl 49 the Seattle Seahawks were in the endzone for the winning score. Russell Wilson threw to a receiver for a touchdown, but the ball was intercepted by Malcom Butler from the New England Patriots. This single play lost the Seahawks the game and the Patriots won yet another Superbowl.

Interceptions—

The data sets that we gathered from Kaggle.com had every player from 1989 to present. In this data we were able to find the top ten players by numbers of interceptions. We found Janoris Jenkins to be the leading interceptor leading to touchdowns in the league with 14. In his rookie season, he had 3 interceptions to touchdowns and 4 total interceptions. Terence Newman is tied for the lead in interceptions with Asante Samuel. They both have 50 total interceptions. Newman had 5 interceptions and 77 solo tackles in the 2010 season alone. In 2006 Samuel had 10 interceptions.

Eight out of the top ten interception leaders play in the cornerback position. This is to be expected because the cornerback is typically responsible for covering wide receivers and downfield plays. Alec Ogletree is an unexpected leader for interceptions due to his position as an inside linebacker. This position normally covers plays up the middle such as dives, draws, and off tackle runs.

Sacks—

We gathered data from Kaggle.com to gather the leading players in sacks from 1989-present. We discovered that Terrell Suggs has the most sacks out of any position with 197 sacks. The player with the second most sacks is our very own Carolina Panther, Julius Peppers with 152 sacks who is a native to the state of North Carolina. A sack can change the momentum of any offensive drive. Sacking the quarterback can lead to a loss of yards, fumble or even a safety or touchdown.

Nine out of ten top sack leaders play in the linebacker position. This statistic is not surprising due to the fact many times linebackers are utilized in blitzing scenarios. Offensive lineman may not account for the extra man attempting to tackle the quarterback. The two defensive ends, Cameron Jordan and Everson Griffen, truly excelled at the defensive end position. As a defensive end, an offensive lineman is almost always expected to block the defensive end. The ability of each of these players to crest into the top ten is a true testament to their abilities.

Conclusion—

The offense is typically viewed as the scorers on any football team, but games can be won or lost by the defense alone. Superbowl 50 between the Carolina Panthers and Denver Broncos was a game of defenses. Both teams played poorly in the offense and the better defensive team won the Superbowl.

The Carolina Panthers lost a total of 68 yards and were sacked 7 times by the Denver Broncos defense. The Denver Broncos only lost 37 yards caused by 5 sacks. The Broncos won the game with a total score of 24 points. 14 of the 24 points were scored by the defense. Those defensive touchdowns caused the Broncos to win the game and pull away from what was a tie.

Von Miller, a linebacker for the Broncos, won most valuable player of this game. He was 1 of 9 defensive players that have won the MVP title out of 54 Superbowls.

While the offense if typically seen as the main scorers of a team, the defense can be equally as important. The right defense can change the outcome of a game drastically.

[Sacks—Q4—clock does not stop—those precious seconds lost can greatly affect the outcome of the game]