



# ★ WILD CARD ★ WEEKEND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
NFL-POST-1 12/30/08

## HERE WE GO! EVERYBODY'S 0-0!

It doesn't matter *how* you got here. All that matters is *that* you're here.

In one of the most storyline-filled NFL playoffs in memory, the scramble to reach Tampa Bay, Florida for Super Bowl XLIII on February 1 begins this Saturday and Sunday with Wild Card Weekend.

"We're all 0-0 now," exults quarterback **PHILIP RIVERS** of the San Diego Chargers, one of the teams with standout storylines entering the playoffs:

- Three Wild Card Weekend teams – Atlanta (**MIKE SMITH**), Baltimore (**JOHN HARBAUGH**) and Miami (**TONY SPARANO**) -- are led by rookie head coaches. It is only the second time in history that three rookie coaches took their teams to the playoffs in the same season (1992: **BILL COWHER**, Pittsburgh; **DENNIS GREEN**, Minnesota; and **BOBBY ROSS**, San Diego).
- The two first-round rookie quarterbacks who will start in the Wild Cards – Atlanta's **MATT RYAN** (the Associated Press Offensive Rookie of the Year) and Baltimore's **JOE FLACCO** – have accomplished never-before feats. Never in the same season have two rookie QBs started all 16 of their team's games and taken those teams to the playoffs. Ryan and Flacco also took their clubs to the biggest win-improvements in history by rookie QBs who started every game. Ryan led the 11-5 Falcons to a seven-win improvement over 2007, and Flacco to a six-win jump for the 11-5 Ravens. They will become the first rookie QBs to start in the same postseason.
- Call it the "gumption" playoffs. The field is packed with teams that would *just not give up!* In addition to the Falcons and Ravens (above), there are the 11-5 Dolphins, who matched 1999 Indianapolis as the only teams in history to make 10-game improvements from one season to the next. The Chargers became the first team in history to start 4-8 and make the playoffs. The Colts began their season at 3-4, then won their last nine. The Vikings started 1-3 and won five of their last six. The Eagles were 5-5-1 in late November and won four of their last five. "Everybody turned their backs on us," says Philadelphia safety **BRIAN DAWKINS**, in essence speaking for all these teams. "But we believed in one another."

So let the 2008 NFL playoffs begin – with nine of the 12 teams with double-digit wins and, for the 13th consecutive season, at least five new teams from the year before:

**ATLANTA FALCONS (11-5) at ARIZONA CARDINALS (9-7) (Saturday, NBC, 4:30 PM ET)**

**STORYLINE: The rookie first-rounder vs. the veteran no-rounder.**

In other words, **QB MATT RYAN** (see above), the Falcons' first-round draft pick this year, against 11-year NFL veteran **KURT WARNER**, the classic undrafted-free-agent-to-Super Bowl MVP success story.

They direct highly ranked units that could dominate the game. The Falcons, behind one of the greatest UFA acquisitions ever, **MICHAEL TURNER**, rammed the league's No. 2 rushing attack (152.7 yards per game) down everyone's throats this year. Newcomer Turner (No. 2 in NFL rushing with 1,699 yards) set a club record with 17 TDs (all rushing).

Warner's Cardinals? Just how he likes it – air attack. Warner – coming off a four-touchdown game – ignited the league's No. 2 passing game this year (292.1) by throwing to only the fifth teammate receiver threesome in history with 1,000 yards

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### NFL WILD CARD FACTOID

**IT'S NO GUARANTEE:** Attaining the No. 1 seed in your conference is no guarantee of Super Bowl entry. Fourteen seasons have passed since the last time two No. 1 seeds faced each other in Super Bowl (1993 season, Buffalo vs. Dallas in Super Bowl XXVIII).

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apiece – **LARRY FITZGERALD** (1,431), **ANQUAN BOLDIN** (1,038) and **STEVE BREASTON** (1,006). “They like to throw the ball around the yard,” understates Atlanta head coach **MIKE SMITH**.

Three of four NFC Pro Bowl receivers will be in action in the game: Boldin and Fitzgerald – the starters – along with Atlanta’s **RODDY WHITE**, a first-time All-Star. They join Carolina’s **STEVE SMITH** in the foursome.

**INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (12-4) at SAN DIEGO CHARGERS (8-8) (Saturday, NBC, 8:00 PM ET)**

**STORYLINE: Colts vs. Bolts – again!**

It’s almost like they’re division rivals. Saturday will be the fourth time in the past two seasons the teams have met – with the first three games being decided by a total of nine points.

“It’s always a great game against these guys, and it’ll be another great game,” says Chargers **QB PHILIP RIVERS**. “You can’t ask for anything more in the playoffs.”

On November 11, 2007 in San Diego, Indy’s **ADAM VINATIERI** missed a 29-yard FG attempt with 1:31 to play in a 23-21 Chargers win. In the Divisional Playoffs in Indianapolis that season, San Diego’s **BILLY VOLEK** scored on a quarterback sneak with 4:50 remaining to ice a 28-24 Chargers win. Then Vinatieri got retribution this past November 23 in San Diego with a 51-yard game-winning (23-20) kick.

The quarterbacks, of course, could be key Saturday night. Indianapolis’ **PEYTON MANNING** just extended his NFL record with his ninth 4,000-yard season. Rivers, the only QB this year with a 100.0 passer rating (105.5), tied New Orleans’ **DREW BREES** for the most TD passes (34), but goes against a unit that allowed only six scoring throws, the fewest ever in a 16-game season.

**BALTIMORE RAVENS (11-5) at MIAMI DOLPHINS (11-5) (Sunday, CBS, 1:00 PM ET)**

**STORYLINE: Their last game was a turning point – for both teams.**

It was this past October 19 in the same spot – Dolphin Stadium. And each team believes the result (a 27-13 Ravens win) propelled them to where they are today.

Baltimore had lost three in a row, including a 31-3 pasting by Indianapolis the week before, for a 2-3 record. Then the Ravens’ **WILLIS MC GAHEE** rushed for 105 yards, **LB TERRELL SUGGS** scored on a 44-yard interception return, and Baltimore heavily blitzed to negate Miami’s “Wildcat” offense, which produced only four yards in five plays. The win would be the first of four in a row for Baltimore and also the first of nine victories in their final 11 games. “That game was a turning point,” says Ravens **T WILLIE ANDERSON**. “The world was saying we were done.”

The Dolphins? They would win their next four for nine in their final 10 (both teams ended up 11-5). “We had no identity then,” says Miami **CB ANDRE’ GOODMAN**. “We didn’t know who we were, but now we have a pretty good idea.”

It will be a “chess-move” matchup. Miami finished the season with the second fewest interceptions in the league (7 to Washington’s 6). Baltimore had the most pickoffs with 26. This all leads to one of the most interesting matchups of the day: Miami **QB CHAD PENNINGTON**, the NFL’s all-time leader in completion percentage (66.0), against Pro Bowl **S ED REED**, the league-leader this year in interceptions (9), including four in the last two games.

**PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (9-6-1) at MINNESOTA VIKINGS (10-6) (Sunday, FOX, 4:30 PM ET)**

**STORYLINE: Weak starts, strong finishes.**

And it’s those strong finishes that can propel you deep into the playoffs. Both clubs started slowly (Eagles, 2-3; Vikings, 1-3), but finished the season with strong streaks (Eagles, 4 wins in their last 5; Vikings, 5 in their last 6). “We had to earn it, as it should be, and that makes it that much sweeter,” says Vikings head coach **BRAD CHILDRESS**, speaking, really, about both clubs. And why shouldn’t he? Childress was the Eagles’ offensive coordinator from 2002-05.

The teams are distinct in their offensive approaches. Philadelphia is a pass-first club, Minnesota a run-first. They have the people to back up those philosophies. Eagles **QB DONOVAN MC NABB** finished fourth and fifth in the NFL, respectively, in attempts and completions. Vikings **RB ADRIAN PETERSON** led the league in rushing (1,760 yards).

That said, the Eagles have the “most complete back in the NFL in rushing and receiving” in **BRIAN WESTBROOK**, says NFL Network’s **STEVE MARIUCCI** (Westbrook led the league in scrimmage yards in 2007). And the Vikings’ **BERNARD BERRIAN** is the only NFL receiver with at least 900 yards to average 20.0 yards a catch (20.1).

“It’s an exciting time right now,” says McNabb. Of course. It’s the NFL playoffs!

# 2008 NFL STANDINGS

American Football Conference - 2008 Regular Season																	
AFC East Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- Miami Dolphins	11	5	0	.688	345	317	28	40	5-3	6-2	4-2	.667	8-4	.667	3-1	5W	5-0
New England Patriots	11	5	0	.688	410	309	101	43	5-3	6-2	4-2	.667	7-5	.583	4-0	4W	4-1
New York Jets	9	7	0	.563	405	356	49	48	5-3	4-4	4-2	.667	7-5	.583	2-2	2L	1-4
Buffalo Bills	7	9	0	.438	336	342	-6	35	3-5	4-4	0-6	.000	5-7	.417	2-2	1L	1-4
AFC North Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- Pittsburgh Steelers	12	4	0	.750	347	223	124	38	6-2	6-2	6-0	1.000	10-2	.833	2-2	1W	4-1
y- Baltimore Ravens	11	5	0	.688	385	244	141	42	6-2	5-3	4-2	.667	8-4	.667	3-1	2W	4-1
Cincinnati Bengals	4	11	1	.281	204	364	-160	20	3-4-1	1-7	1-5	.167	3-9	.250	1-2-1	3W	3-2
Cleveland Browns	4	12	0	.250	232	350	-118	20	1-7	3-5	1-5	.167	3-9	.250	1-3	6L	0-5
AFC South Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
*- Tennessee Titans	13	3	0	.813	375	234	141	41	7-1	6-2	4-2	.667	9-3	.750	4-0	1L	3-2
y- Indianapolis Colts	12	4	0	.750	377	298	79	45	6-2	6-2	4-2	.667	10-2	.833	2-2	9W	5-0
Houston Texans	8	8	0	.500	366	394	-28	40	6-2	2-6	2-4	.333	5-7	.417	3-1	1W	4-1
Jacksonville Jaguars	5	11	0	.313	302	367	-65	35	2-6	3-5	2-4	.333	3-9	.250	2-2	2L	1-4
AFC West Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- San Diego Chargers	8	8	0	.500	439	347	92	51	5-3	3-5	5-1	.833	7-5	.583	1-3	4W	4-1
Denver Broncos	8	8	0	.500	370	448	-78	42	4-4	4-4	3-3	.500	5-7	.417	3-1	3L	2-3
Oakland Raiders	5	11	0	.313	263	388	-125	27	2-6	3-5	2-4	.333	4-8	.333	1-3	2W	2-3
Kansas City Chiefs	2	14	0	.125	291	440	-149	35	1-7	1-7	2-4	.333	2-10	.167	0-4	4L	1-4
National Football Conference - 2008 Regular Season																	
NFC East Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
*- New York Giants	12	4	0	.750	427	294	133	45	7-1	5-3	4-2	.667	9-3	.750	3-1	1L	2-3
y- Philadelphia Eagles	9	6	1	.594	416	289	127	45	6-2	3-4-1	2-4	.333	7-5	.583	2-1-1	1W	4-1
Dallas Cowboys	9	7	0	.563	362	365	-3	43	6-2	3-5	3-3	.500	7-5	.583	2-2	2L	2-3
Washington Redskins	8	8	0	.500	265	296	-31	27	4-4	4-4	3-3	.500	7-5	.583	1-3	1L	1-4
NFC North Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- Minnesota Vikings	10	6	0	.625	379	333	46	41	6-2	4-4	4-2	.667	8-4	.667	2-2	1W	4-1
Chicago Bears	9	7	0	.563	375	350	25	42	6-2	3-5	4-2	.667	7-5	.583	2-2	1L	3-2
Green Bay Packers	6	10	0	.375	419	380	39	48	4-4	2-6	4-2	.667	5-7	.417	1-3	1W	1-4
Detroit Lions	0	16	0	.000	268	517	-249	29	0-8	0-8	0-6	.000	0-12	.000	0-4	16L	0-5
NFC South Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- Carolina Panthers	12	4	0	.750	414	329	85	47	8-0	4-4	4-2	.667	8-4	.667	4-0	1W	4-1
y- Atlanta Falcons	11	5	0	.688	391	325	66	43	7-1	4-4	3-3	.500	8-4	.667	3-1	3W	4-1
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	9	7	0	.563	361	323	38	38	6-2	3-5	3-3	.500	8-4	.667	1-3	4L	1-4
New Orleans Saints	8	8	0	.500	463	393	70	57	6-2	2-6	2-4	.333	5-7	.417	3-1	1L	2-3
NFC West Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
z- Arizona Cardinals	9	7	0	.563	427	426	1	51	6-2	3-5	6-0	1.000	7-5	.583	2-2	1W	2-3
San Francisco 49ers	7	9	0	.438	339	381	-42	36	4-4	3-5	3-3	.500	5-7	.417	2-2	2W	4-1
Seattle Seahawks	4	12	0	.250	294	392	-98	32	2-6	2-6	3-3	.500	3-9	.250	1-3	1L	2-3
St. Louis Rams	2	14	0	.125	232	465	-233	20	1-7	1-7	0-6	.000	2-10	.167	0-4	10L	0-5

x - Clinched playoff  
 y - Clinched Wild Card  
 z - Clinched Division  
 \* - Clinched Division and Homefield Advantage

## **LAST WEEK'S NFL RESULTS (DECEMBER 28)**

(Home team in CAPS)

### **Sunday, December 28**

ATLANTA 31, St. Louis 27  
New England 13, BUFFALO 0  
CINCINNATI 16, Kansas City 6  
GREEN BAY 31, Detroit 21  
HOUSTON 31, Chicago 24  
INDIANAPOLIS 23, Tennessee 0  
MINNESOTA 20, N.Y. Giants 19  
Carolina 33, NEW ORLEANS 31

### **Sunday, December 28, Cont.'d.**

PITTSBURGH 31, Cleveland 0  
Oakland 31, TAMPA BAY 24  
ARIZONA 34, Seattle 21  
BALTIMORE 27, Jacksonville 7  
Miami 24, N.Y. JETS 17  
PHILADELPHIA 44, Dallas 6  
SAN FRANCISCO 27, Washington 24  
SAN DIEGO 52, Denver 21

## **WILD CARD WEEKEND SCHEDULE – JANUARY 3-4**

(All times Eastern)

### **Saturday, January 3**

Atlanta at Arizona, 4:30 PM (NBC)  
Indianapolis at San Diego, 8:00 PM (NBC)

### **Sunday, January 4**

Baltimore at Miami, 1:00 PM (CBS)  
Philadelphia at Minnesota, 4:30 PM (FOX)