

ShoresteinSays.com 2019 - NFL Wildcard

2019 Wildcard					
Away	Home	Calculated Spread	Actual Spread	Calculated vs Actual	Projected Winner ATS
Minnesota	New Orleans	(3.34)	(8.00)	4.66	Minnesota
Seattle	Philadelphia	4.27	1.50	2.77	Seattle
Tennessee	New England	(6.52)	(5.00)	1.52	New England
Buffalo	Houston	(1.20)	(2.50)	1.30	Buffalo

As we enter the playoffs, I try to give some commentary on each of the games being played this weekend. I like to give my overall thoughts on the teams and what to expect from their performance.

Minnesota @ New Orleans-8: I think you'd probably be crazy to fade New Orleans in this contest. I think you're looking at two teams that are trending in the opposite directions. Cousins and the Viking offense got off to a very hot start. At the midway point of the season, Cousins had the highest QB rating in the league, but I just never really bought into Minnesota as a serious contender. Cousins was poor in almost all games in which he faced a legitimate defense:

<i>Kirk Cousins Performances Against Strong Competition</i>			
Opponent	Rating	Points Scored	Result
Green Bay	52.90	16.00	L
Chicago	91.60	6.00	L
Kansas City	94.20	23.00	L
Seattle	87.20	30.00	L
Green Bay	58.80	10.00	L

I think Minnesota's best win was early in the season when they hosted Philly. When the Vikings can't run the ball, I think they get themselves into trouble. Dalvin Cook has been out of the lineup, so I would not be expecting a whole lot from him on Sunday. The Saints were the best team against the run a season ago, and I think they still have the talent to shut down just about anyone at home. If it becomes a shootout type game, I can see Cousins getting rattled under the intense Saints' pass rush.

The Saints have peaked at the right time. After stabilizing the Brees thumb injury, I think they've looked like a powerhouse, just like last year. The Vikings secondary will be outmatched. Xavier Rhodes is a shell of himself, and he will be no match for Michael Thomas. Brees is again seemingly completing every pass that he throws, and I'd be stunned if the Vikings were able to slow down their balanced offensive attack. As much as I hate Taysum Hill (I'm not sure why.... He just bothers me lol), he's been an unbelievable offensive weapon this year. Both as a running and receiving threat.

This is certainly the square, public pick, but the squares win 40% of the time too... I'm leaning New Orleans here.

Tennessee +5 @ New England: I'm still stunned that the Patriots were unable to finish a lowly Dolphins team with a playoff bye on the line. It's certainly looking like the Patriots historic defensive start was simply a product of one of the most hopeless quarterback schedules of all time.

Opposing Quarterbacks vs. Patriots 1st Half
<i>Ben Roethlisberger</i>
<i>Josh Rosen</i>
<i>Luke Falk</i>
<i>Josh Allen</i>
<i>Colt McCoy</i>
<i>Daniel Jones</i>
<i>Sam Darnold</i>
<i>Baker Mayfield</i>

My passer rating differential calculations unjustly favored the Patriots heavily for the bulk of the season. When the Patriots have faced any semblance of an offense, the defensive numbers have just been average. Deshaun Watson, Lamar Jackson, and now Ryan Fitzpatrick have all eviscerated the defense that a lot of people were calling historic. I think they are a top 3 defense in the league, but I always laughed at the comparisons of some of the most dominant defenses of the last decade.

It seems impossible that Ryan Tannehill could be the quarterback to end the Patriots run of dominance, but he's played incredibly well in the Titans stretch run. The Titans offense does present a lot of options that have historically given New England defenses problems. They've got the most effective runner in the league in Derrick Henry, quickness in the backfield with pass catching backs, and receivers that have beaten Stephon Gilmore in the past. I even like the emergence of their tight end in the last month.

I'm not sure what the Patriots offense does well at this point. They've had problems running for just about the entire season, and Tom Brady has really only put together two impressive games (Pittsburgh & Buffalo). There is a lot of talent on the Titans defense. The front seven has always been a good run stuffing unit, and I think they have shown that they can get creative with their blitz packages as well. Logan Ryan had one of his best seasons, and I think he should be able to matchup well with any of the Patriots outside receivers. I'm not sure if they will have a counter to the quick passing game with Edelman, White, and Burkhead who I'd expect to be out on the field together a lot in this game.

Another major factor for the Titans is their kicking game. They finished dead last in kicking accuracy, and if it's a close game, I think you could see some critical misses. I think New England wins a close one in the end, but I'd lean on taking +5 and the Titans.

Buffalo +2.5 @ Houston: Houston is hosting a Saturday playoff game yet again this season. I've officially taken the cheese too many times and bet them, only to have them roll out one gutless performance after another. Last year they were pounded by Indy, and this was just a few years after one of the most disgraceful performances in playoff history by Brian Hoyer.

Buffalo to me has been the tougher team all year. Houston has been one of the softest defenses in the NFL all year, and I think they will have major problems stopping the run both from the backs and with Josh Allen. Bill O'Brien has been an awful big game coach in his career, and I think he tightens up far too easily. It would not shock me at all to see Josh Allen running wild, with a completely unprepared Texans team scrambling around wondering how to stop it.

Defensively, Buffalo has consistently been one of the best teams all year. I'm looking forward for Tre Devious White to matchup with Deandre Hopkins, two of the best players at their respective positions.

At the end of the day, I really think you have an advantage when you can take points with an underdog that is clearly the tougher team.

Seattle -1.5 @ Philadelphia: I'll be completely honest here... I have no idea what to expect from this game. Seattle's coming off yet another heart-breaking loss at the goal line caused by the emotional, disorganized leadership of Pete Carroll.

Seattle has lost its offensive identity with injuries to Carson and Penny. Homer played well last week, but I don't think he can be relied on to be as effective between the tackles. I have major concerns about Seattle's ability to pass protect without the true threat of their power running game. Russell Wilson is a miracle worker, but the offense doesn't look the same when they aren't able to run the ball effectively. I think Tyler Lockett should be open at will in this matchup, but I've never been a fan of how they use him. He should get somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 targets a game, but they simply refuse to do that.

Speaking of injured, I think just about the entire Eagles offense is hurt. Carson Wentz deserves credit for willing the team into the playoffs. He's led a unit of practice squad guys and castaways to the NFC East title. Philly is always dangerous as a home underdog in my opinion. I've also been very impressed with Doug Peterson's "big game" coaching ability. Of course he led the team during the Super Bowl run, but he also won at Chicago last year and had the Saints on the ropes in New Orleans.

This honestly just feels like a game to avoid. I'm thinking Wilson should have enough to pull out a late W, but I can't get comfortable behind either side.

Good Luck!



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