



Sunday is Football “Prediction” Day

By: Austin Rader

September 5, 2019 — Some kids spend their Sunday’s sleeping in. Other’s get up early to play video games or go to the mall.

I spent my Sunday mornings analyzing every NFL game slated for the day.

Ever since I was a kid, my dad would put the Sunday sports page in front of me at breakfast. I would circle all of the NFL games and pick the winners. My best day was 13-1. I usually did quite well and often picked the upset of the day.

Usually it got harder as the season went on.

One time, I was 9-0 on the week, and my favorite team at the time, the St. Louis Rams, were playing the Arizona Cardinals. I picked Arizona to win, forcing me to root against my favorite team. The Rams blew a two possession lead and Patrick Peterson won the game on a 90 yard punt return for a touchdown. I was running around my grandparents house with joy while my grandfather was livid about the result.

It was short lived.

Five minutes later “Tebow Time” was in full effect, and Tim Tebow led the Denver Broncos past the Oakland Raiders thus ending my 10-0 week.

Now, I’m not going to predict every game this year from weeks 1 through 17. But I will pick who I think will be hoisting the Lombardi Trophy at Hard Rock Stadium on February 2nd.



Out of the NFC North, I have the Chicago Bears winning the division. I like the Vikings to take a step forward but their offensive line is holding them back. Also Kirk Cousins is 4-26 against winning teams in his career. Not a good stat.

Out of the NFC South, I have the Atlanta Falcons re-taking the crown. New Orleans will make the playoffs but as a wild card. Atlanta, New Orleans and even Carolina are all capable of winning this

division. But I'll go with the birds.

The Philadelphia Eagles will win the NFC East handily. Yes, the Dallas Cowboys will have a good season but Philly has too much talent and leadership returning. As long as Carson Wentz stays healthy, this is a super bowl roster.

Finally, in the NFC West, I have the Los Angeles Rams winning their 3rd straight division crown. They reloaded on defense and having Cooper Kupp back in the lineup at receiver will help Jared Goff on third downs this season.

Now, let's look at the AFC.

In the North, I have Cleveland winning the division. Pittsburgh will take a step back this year. I'm high on their offensive line and running back James Connor, but not having Antonio Brown is a game changer and will result in them missing out on the playoffs once again.

The Baltimore Ravens are a talented team but are also a mystery in a way. They lack a playoff worthy receiving corps but they have a solid o-line and running backs and their quarterback mini Michael Vick, I mean Lamar Jackson played unbelievable last season. In the seven games he started in, the Ravens went 6-1 only losing to Kansas City on the road in overtime. If he can stay healthy, this is a dangerous team.

I know picking the Cleveland Browns to win this division is a little bold (and also a little trendy). They have a rookie head coach, a decent offensive line, and a decent defense. But their receivers are unbelievable, and their quarterback Baker Mayfield is only going to get better. They might start off rocky, but by the time Kareem Hunt returns from his suspension against the Bills in week 9, the Browns will be rolling.

On to the AFC South. Andrew Luck's shocking retirement puts this division up for grabs between the Texans, Titans and Jags. I see the Houston Texans winning this division behind a great season from Deshaun Watson. I know Lamar Miller went down, but his backup (Duke Johnson)

will have a solid season, as well as newly acquired Carlos Hyde. Deandre Hopkins and JJ Watt will have monster seasons again and Houston should go 9-7 or 10-6 and win the division by a game in week 17.

The AFC East. No surprise here. The New England Patriots have won the East 10 times in a row. They will make it 11.

Last but not least, the AFC West. I love the Chiefs-Chargers rivalry. If both teams stay healthy, we will have two awesome playoff type matchups during the regular season. I don't think Oakland or Denver will compete this season in that division. But the Chiefs will take the division for the fourth straight year behind another Patrick Mahomes record breaking season. Phillip Rivers will have another great season. Even if Melvin Gordon gets traded, they're still a lock to make the playoffs.

Playoff Bracket:

NFC

Wild Card Weekend

(6) Dallas Cowboys @ (3) Chicago Bears
(5) New Orleans Saints @ (4) Atlanta Falcons

I have Chicago edging out a win over Dallas in what will be a low scoring affair dominated by defense. The Bears defense will force a couple of turnovers to advance to the divisional round for the first time since the 2010-11 season.

The Atlanta Falcons will win an instant classic matchup on a Matt Bryant field goal.

Divisional Round

(3) Chicago Bears @ (2) LA Rams
(4) Atlanta Falcons @ (1) Philadelphia Eagles

Chicago will travel to LA with a chip on their shoulder. Going against a more veteran squad in LA, the Bears might be a bit younger, but they have more experience playing together leading to a close win dominated by yet another defensive performance.

The Atlanta Falcons will travel to Philly in a rematch of the 2017 divisional round. I see Carson Wentz firing on all cylinders and the crowd being too much for Matt Ryan and company.

NFC Championship

(3) Chicago Bears @ (1) Philadelphia Eagles

In a rematch of last years wild card round or better known as "double doink," Chicago will travel to Philly with a new kicker and a chip on their shoulder. The "revenge factor" will play a part leading to a Bears early lead. However, Wentz will lead a comeback only to fall short with a red

zone stop by the Bears defense that at this point of the season, will have the new nickname "85 Bears 2.0."

AFC

Wild Card Weekend

(6) Baltimore Ravens @ (3) Cleveland Browns

(5) LA Chargers @ (4) Houston Texans

Cleveland will take care of Lamar Jackson and the Baltimore Ravens easily. Expect a close game in the Chargers-Texans game that will end in a Deshaun Watson touchdown to move on to the next round.

Divisional Round

(3) Cleveland Browns @ (2) Kansas City Chiefs

(4) Houston Texans @ (1) New England Patriots

The Cleveland Browns will upset the Kansas City Chiefs. I love this Browns roster and even though they might be "a year away," I believe the time is now to make a run. Baker Mayfield will out-duel Patrick Mahomes to secure a spot in the AFC Championship in a shootout in Kansas City.

The Houston Texans will hang with the defending champs, but Tom Brady and company will be too much for Houston's depleted secondary. The Pats will win by double digits.

AFC Championship

(3) Cleveland Browns @ (1) New England Patriots

The Baker Mayfield hype train travels to New England on a freezing night in Foxborough. Cleveland will hang tough but this team is missing the veterans and experienced coaching staff that New England has already established to make it to the Super Bowl. Baker will play well but not well enough to make it to Cleveland's first ever Super Bowl. Tom Brady will do what Tom Brady does. Sony Michel will also have a phenomenal game out of the backfield.



Super Bowl LIV

Chicago Bears vs. New England Patriots

And finally, the grand finale. Super Bowl LIV. The Bears and Patriots will travel to Miami Gardens to meet in a rematch of Super Bowl XX in the 1985-86 season. Chicago will get off to a good start on offense which will help give Trubisky confidence throughout the game, something Rams quarterback Jared Goff couldn't establish in last year's Super Bowl.

In a back and forth game, the Bears defense will win them this game. A Pats turnover will shift the momentum and Matt Nagy will call a great game to move the ball on the Patriots defense. Down by four, Brady will lead the Pats down the field late in the game, but the Bears will get a stop on fourth down deep in their territory that leads to the historic franchise's 2nd Super Bowl.

There you have it folks. I'm excited to look back on this at the end of the season and see how many picks I got right. The 100th season of the NFL is set to be a good one. And it kicks off tonight at Soldier Field with the NFL's oldest rivalry set to set the tone for the 2019-20 season.