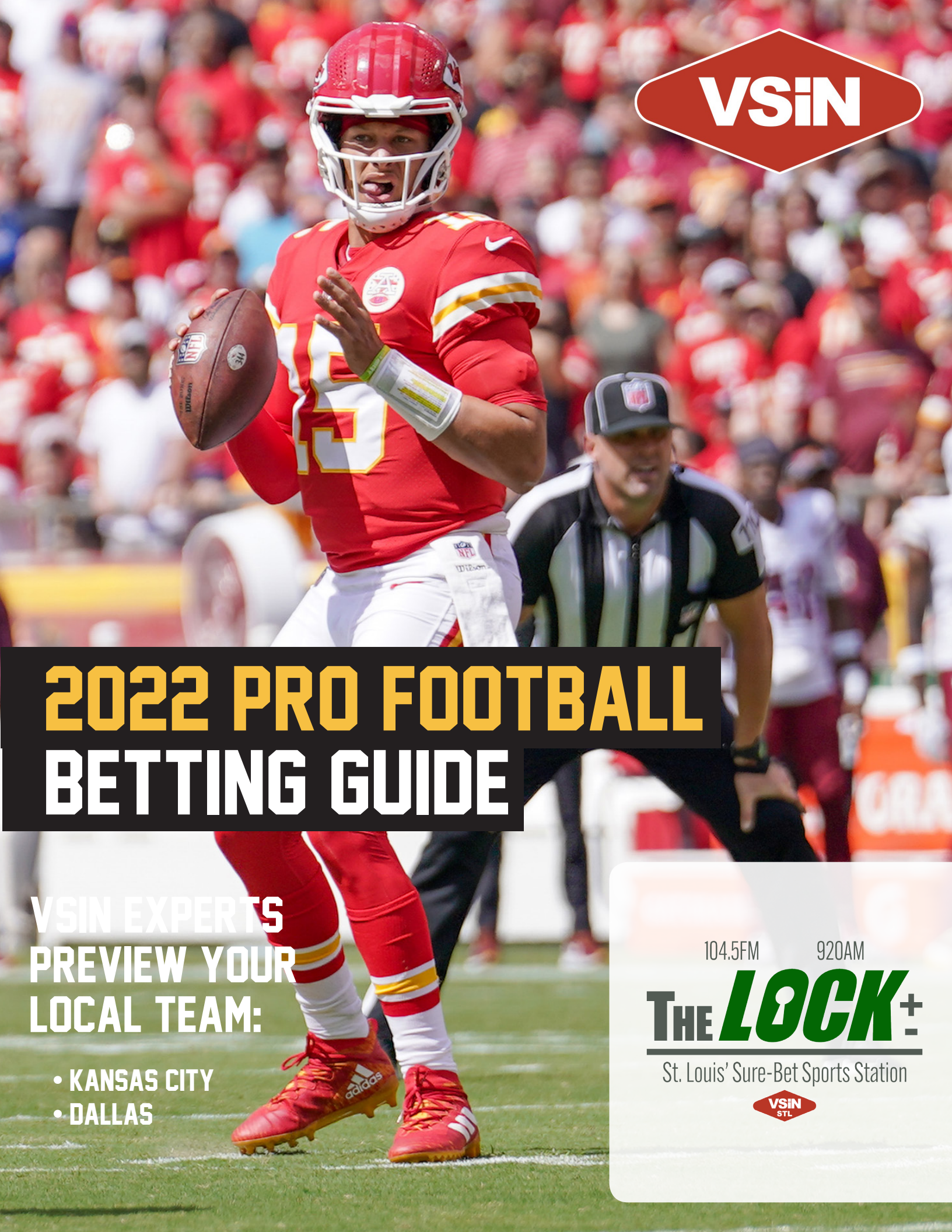




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The Year of the Moving Van Quarterback

By Brent Musburger



Welcome to the year of the Moving Van Quarterback. Eleven NFL teams – more than a third of the league – will open with a new signal-caller. Denver (Russell Wilson), Indianapolis (Matt Ryan), Washington (Carson Wentz) and Carolina (expecting Baker Mayfield to beat out Sam Darnold) will be starting quarterbacks who opened on other teams a year ago. And I expect Jimmy Garoppolo to be starting somewhere before the season hits Thanksgiving, if not sooner.

The AFC East is the only division without a new starting QB on one of its four teams.

The Moving Van Quarterback headlines handicapping 2022.

A year ago, I liked the Los Angeles Rams to contend in the NFC because of the addition of quarterback Matt Stafford, but in the AFC, I didn't give the Cincinnati Bengals a chance of making it to the Super Bowl. I underestimated Joe Burrow. My best bet of the year was nailing a Rams' December future wager to win the Super Bowl and then taking the Bengals and the points in the game itself. A rare middle which offset some of the losses during the season. Your friendly reminder: Don't just bet favorites.

The Detroit Lions finished 3-11-1 but against the spread they cashed 11 times against six losses. Only the Dallas Cowboys (13-4) and the Green Bay Packers (12-5) were better ATS, and both made the playoffs. As the season progresses, keep an eye on undervalued teams like the Lions, remembering that 90% of losing teams will have a better ATS record than won-loss record. Make jokes about bad franchises – like Jacksonville – but don't automatically bet against dogs, as several howl every week.

Speaking of Burrow, remember that only one Super Bowl loser (Dallas) ever made it back to the big game the following year. The hangover is real and, unfortunately, Burrow already underwent surgery to remove his appendix. Last year, the Kansas City Chiefs started 2-3 after their Super Bowl loss to Tampa Bay. I'm looking beyond Cincinnati this season.

The Los Angeles Chargers are my pick to make a serious run in the AFC. Quarterback Justin Herbert is one of the best young guns in the NFL. In the 35-32 overtime loss to the Las Vegas Raiders – which ended Los Angeles' playoff hopes, Herbert was unbelievable down the stretch. After a field goal put the Raiders ahead, 29-14, with 8:29 remaining, Herbert converted six fourth downs, including fourth-and-21 for a touchdown. For the season, he threw for 5,014 yards and 38 touchdowns. Add Khalil Mack and J.C. Jackson to the defense and the Chargers can upset the Chiefs in the brutal AFC West.

In the NFC, I'm backing the Dallas Cowboys as a serious contender. The media obsesses about the failures of head coach Mike McCarthy but his staff includes Dan Quinn (DC), Kellen Moore (OC), Jerry Philbin (O-line), John Fassel (special teams) and Doug Nussmeier (QBs). The staff is simply one of the best in the league.

A year ago, the Cowboys went 6-0 against NFC East rivals. They outscored Philadelphia, Washington and the Giants by a combined score of 240-to-107. That's domination and I don't see a serious challenger in the division.

Dak Prescott came back strong from a compound fracture of his right ankle, throwing for 4,449 yards and 37 touchdowns. The Cowboys traded Amari Cooper and his \$20 million dollar salary, but owner Jerry Jones watched the success of the Rams, acquiring Odell Beckham and Von Miller during the season. Look for Jones to open Dallas' hefty wallet before the trade deadline.

Like you, I can't wait for Thursday, Sept 8 and Week 1. Cash some tickets because that's what it's all about!



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VSIN Expert Predictions



	STEVE MAKINEN	MITCH MOSS	BRENT MUSBURGER	MIKE PRITCHARD	WES REYNOLDS	DAVE TULEY	JONATHAN VON TOBEL	MATT YOUMANS
AFC EAST	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills	Bills
AFC NORTH	Ravens	Ravens	Browns	Bengals	Ravens	Ravens	Bengals	Ravens
AFC SOUTH	Colts	Colts	Colts	Colts	Colts	Titans	Colts	Colts
AFC WEST	Chargers	Chiefs	Chargers	Chargers	Chargers	Chiefs	Raiders	Chargers
AFC WILD CARD	Broncos	Bengals	Chiefs	Ravens	Bengals	Raiders	Chiefs	Bengals
AFC WILD CARD	Bengals	Broncos	Bengals	Chiefs	Chiefs	Chargers	Chargers	Chiefs
AFC WILD CARD	Chiefs	Chargers	Broncos	Raiders	Dolphins	Bengals	Ravens	Raiders
NFC EAST	Cowboys	Eagles	Cowboys	Cowboys	Eagles	Cowboys	Eagles	Eagles
NFC NORTH	Packers	Packers	Packers	Packers	Vikings	Packers	Vikings	Packers
NFC SOUTH	Bucs	Saints	Bucs	Saints	Saints	Bucs	Saints	Saints
NFC WEST	49ers	49ers	Rams	49ers	49ers	Rams	Rams	49ers
NFC WILD CARD	Vikings	Vikings	49ers	Vikings	Packers	Vikings	Bucs	Bucs
NFC WILD CARD	Rams	Rams	Eagles	Eagles	Cowboys	Saints	Packers	Vikings
NFC WILD CARD	NY Giants	Panthers	Vikings	Rams	Rams	49ers	49ers	Rams
AFC CHAMPION	Chargers	Bills	Bills	Bills	Chargers	Titans	Colts	Colts
NFC CHAMPION	Packers	Packers	Rams	49ers	49ers	Rams	Vikings	Packers
SUPER BOWL CHAMPION	Packers	Bills	Bills	Bills	Chargers	Titans	Colts	Colts

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BALTIMORE

OVER
10.5

Adam Burke:

The Over 9.5 at -160 is an option, but the Ravens are the best team in the AFC North. They ranked 32nd in Adjusted Games Lost per Football Outsiders with 191.2. That was 33 more than any other team in the NFL. They lost running backs and defensive backs early and then lost Lamar Jackson later in the season. While Baltimore went from 8-3 to 8-9, a severely banged-up roster with a backup quarterback lost those six games by 1, 2, 1, 20, 1 and 3 points, with four of those losses against playoff teams, including the two Super Bowl participants.

The Browns clearly have their issues with Deshaun Watson's suspension. Many project the Bengals to fall back a bit. The Steelers may be in line for their first losing season under Mike Tomlin. It isn't out of the realm of possibility that Baltimore goes 5-1 or 4-2 in the division. The AFC East and NFC South are the divisions the Ravens drew on the schedule, but they also added Jacksonville and the Giants on the road along with Denver at home with their last-place schedule. While all three are improved, so, too, are the Ravens.

This team should be the AFC North champion and 11 or 12 wins should accomplish that feat, along with going Over this alternate win total.

INDIANAPOLIS

OVER
10
-105

Paul Howard:

The Colts should have made the playoffs last year and many think they upgraded big time with Matt Ryan replacing Carson Wentz. A great running game and offensive line will help Ryan, along with an underrated defense. It feels like 4-0 or 3-1 against Jacksonville and Houston, but the big move that will also help is Tennessee taking a huge step back. Ryan Tannehill was so bad in the playoff loss last year that he sought out therapy. A.J. Brown and Julio Jones are gone at wideout and their replacements are Robert Woods (coming off an injury) and Treyton Burks (rookie). If this team gets off to a slow start, Malik Willis could also take over at QB.

UNDER
10.5
+100

KANSAS CITY

Steve Makinen:

I have to admit, I was stunned watching Kansas City's second-half implosion in the AFC title game, and to this day, I don't feel QB Patrick Mahomes is taking enough criticism for the role he played in it. Toward the end of the game, he looked legitimately shook. Now, heading into the 2022 season, he has been stripped of perhaps the team's biggest difference-maker over the last six years in WR Tyreek Hill. He was the kind of player opposing defensive coordinators had to scheme for every play of the game. His loss, and it's importance on what this offense has been able to do, is being undersold if you ask me. He made Mahomes look better by opening the field. I think every other K.C. offensive option is going to suffer somewhat in his absence. Let's not forget the Chiefs also lost defensive playmaker Tyrann Mathieu. Andy Reid's team will face a major challenge from a division that is arguably the best in football. The Chargers' and Broncos' gains will be the Chiefs' loss in my opinion. Plus, the schedule to open the season is one of the most difficult eight-game starts I have ever seen, at least on paper.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

OVER
10
-140

Steve Makinen:

I have come to rely on one of my transitional systems more than others, and it revolves around prolific offensive teams not making the playoffs. There have been 12 teams that have scored 27+ PPG in the last 21 seasons and did not make the playoffs. The combined record of those teams in the follow-up season was 119-74, good for 61.7% and an average of 9.9 wins per season. Only three of those teams did not make the playoffs, and two others, the 2009 Saints and 2020 Buccaneers, went on to win the Super Bowl. The Chargers qualify for this system as well as another one that involves outscoring opponents while having a negative turnover differential. In 2021, the Chargers suffered from bad luck, rookie coaching decisions and injury woes. In my estimation, all three of those factors have a chance of completely turning around this season. Justin Herbert has developed into one of the NFL's top quarterbacks, a dynamic playmaker who led the Chargers on a six-game run at the end of the season in which they topped the 28-point mark in every game, averaging 33.5 PPG! This team also boasts a nice defensive front and some playmakers on the back end. In my opinion, the Chargers and Broncos take over the tough AFC West this season.

What Quality of Wins/Losses in 2021 May Mean in '22

By Steve Makinen

Changeover Systems, which are the previous season's records and/or statistics that provide insight into the upcoming season, are often extremely predictive. Two years ago, many of the most optimistic systems pointed to the Buccaneers enjoying a breakout season in 2020. All the Bucs did was go on to win their first Super Bowl title. Last year, the systems weren't quite as definitive, but several angles signaled declines for teams such as the Seahawks and Ravens and improvements for the Raiders and 49ers. The Seahawks and Ravens dropped by five and three wins. The Raiders, despite an in-season coaching change, jumped by two wins and reached the postseason for the first time in five years, while the 49ers improved by four wins and reached the NFC title game.

This exercise is a rite of spring for me. Each year, I go through the list of won-lost records and statistical traits I feel are most important for projecting the next season. In Part 1, I'll analyze the quality and quantity of each team's won-lost records. Next week, in Part 2, I'll dig into a number of key statistical angles that typically lead to significant improvement or decline.

The NFL is unlike any other league in how quickly teams can rise and fall from year to year. First-to-worst and worst-to-first moves are not unusual, so it benefits bettors to know the traits that lead to teams improving or declining so quickly. What is the typical resume of a team that improves greatly from one season to the next? Those who can find the answer can take advantage of not only futures wagers and season win totals but also point spreads in the early weeks of the season.

Read through my findings over the next couple of weeks and make your own assessments. Then factor in free-agent moves and other personnel changes and head to the betting window. I will share my own conclusions, along with my updated 2022 NFL Power Ratings, sometime in the next few weeks.

Systems for teams that had an unusually high or low total of close wins the prior season:

In 2019, the Seahawks' 10 "close wins" (eight points or less) were the most by any team over the last 30 seasons. In that span, the 33 teams that managed 8+ close wins had an average decline of 3.0 wins the following season.

Team affected in 2022: Pittsburgh.

From 2017-20, 41 teams won 6+ games by eight points or less. Only six improved the next season, with an average decline of 2.3 wins.

Teams affected in 2022: Atlanta, Baltimore, Green Bay, Las Vegas, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay, Tennessee.

Systems for teams that had an unusually high or low total of close losses:

From 1997-2020, 33 teams lost 8+ games by eight points or less. This group's average improvement the next season was 3.52 wins, with 29 of those teams improving.

Team affected in 2022: Minnesota.

From 2007-20, 67 teams lost 6+ games by eight points or less. Of those 67 teams, 53 of them improved their won-lost record the next season, including 27 by 4+ wins. The average improvement of the 67 teams was 2.81 wins. Of the six teams that qualified in 2021, four improved while the other two equaled their 2020 win total.

Teams affected in 2022: Baltimore, Carolina, Cleveland, Detroit, Minnesota.

Systems for teams that had an unusually high or low total of blowout wins:

The last team to record at least nine double-digit wins and improve its won-lost record the next season was the Broncos in 1997-98. Since then, the average decline of the 30 teams that did it was 3.97 wins.

Team affected in 2022: Buffalo.

(continued on next page)

None of the last 15 teams that recorded at least six “blowout wins” (20+ points) improved its record the next year. The average decline of those 15 teams was 3.3 wins.

Team affected in 2022: Tampa Bay.

From 1994-2020, eight teams won 6+ games without winning a single game by double digits. Although the 2020 Raiders became the first of that group to improve the next year, those eight teams had an average decline of 2.25 wins.

Teams affected in 2022: Atlanta.

Interestingly, teams that won five games or less but none by double-digit margins have shown significant improvement the following year. In fact, since 2006, 24 of the 26 teams in this group improved the next season, with an average improvement of 3.81 wins. All three teams from this group in 2020 improved by two wins in 2021.

Teams affected in 2022: NY Jets.

Systems for teams that had an unusually high or low total of blowout losses:

From 2000-20, 21 teams went 7-9 or worse and had zero “blowout losses” (20 points or more). These teams are natural candidates for improvement, and 19 of the 21 teams did just that, with an average jump of 3.05 wins.

Teams affected in 2022: Seattle.

Another sign of how quickly fortunes can change in the NFL: From 1999-2020, 35 teams lost at least nine games by double-digit margins. Of those, 30 improved the next season — by an average of 3.93 wins — including the Jaguars and Jets last year.

Teams affected in 2022: Houston, Jacksonville, N.Y. Giants.

From 1999-2020, 20 teams won at least 10 games and had 4+ losses by double-digit margins. Half of those teams declined by at least three wins (with an average decline of 4.9 wins).

Teams affected in 2022: Las Vegas.

Systems based on playoff results:

Only two of the last 28 teams to lose in the Super Bowl improved their won-lost record the following season, with an average decline of 3.36 wins.

Team affected in 2022: Cincinnati.

Alternatively, the last 29 Super Bowl winners have an average decline of only 1.1 wins, boasting an average won-lost record of about 11-5. Only two of those 29 teams finished below .500 the following season.

Team affected in 2022: LA Rams.

From 1991-2020, 34 teams won 13+ games and didn’t make the Super Bowl. None of those 34 improved their won-lost record the following season and only four equaled their previous win total. The average decline among this group was 3.71 wins.

Teams affected in 2021: Green Bay, Tampa Bay.

Systems for teams whose won-lost records are trending:

From 2001-20, 14 teams improved their record for a third consecutive season (or more). Of those 14, only one team improved the following season. The average decline for this group was 4.3 wins, with an average win total of 6.5.

Team affected in 2022: Arizona, Las Vegas, Tampa Bay.

From 2005-20, 30 teams won at least six more games than the previous season. Of those 30, only one improved in the following season, with an average decline of 3.37 wins.

Teams affected in 2022: Cincinnati, Dallas.



KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

HEAD COACH: ANDY REID (10TH)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: ERIC BIENIEMY

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: STEVE SPAGNUOLO

29.5 STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATING
(#4 OF 32)

In his nine years in Kansas City, coach Andy Reid has averaged 11.4 wins in the regular season, only winning fewer than 10 games once. The Chiefs have won the AFC West six straight years. Despite that consistent track record, many handicappers are predicting a Chiefs decline in the division after wide receiver Tyreek Hill was traded to Miami for five draft picks. DraftKings lists Kansas City as the +175 favorite to win arguably the toughest division in the NFL. The other three teams are closing a wide gap, but Reid still is king of the hill until he gets knocked off.

OFFENSE

Patrick Mahomes passed for 37 touchdowns with 13 interceptions last season, the worst TD-to-INT ratio of his four years as a starter. His numbers were down even with Hill in the offense, so was that the beginning of a trend? Probably not. Instead of busting the salary cap to re-sign Hill, the Chiefs rebuilt their receiving corps by adding JuJu Smith-Schuster from Pittsburgh, Marquez Valdes-Scantling from Green Bay and Skyy Moore in the second round of the draft. Mahomes is more than happy to welcome back wideout Mecole Hardman Jr. and tight end Travis Kelce, who combined for 151 receptions. The Chiefs can run the ball when they need to with Clyde Edwards-Helaire and Ronald Jones II. Left tackle Orlando Brown Jr. anchors a line that ranks among the league's best. An offense that ranked fourth in the league in scoring (28.2 PPG) might be more explosive, and Mahomes likely wants to show he can put up bigger numbers without Hill.

DEFENSE

The need to rebuild the defense was addressed in the draft, with the Chiefs using five of their 10 picks on cornerbacks and safeties. Kansas City's two first-rounders – cornerback Trent McDuffie from Washington and end George Karlaftis from Purdue – are expected to start immediately. Karlaftis joins Frank Clark and Chris Jones on a strong D-line. The pass defense ranked 27th in yards allowed and strong safety Tyrann Mathieu was allowed to walk away to New Orleans, so there will be doubts about this unit until some young players step up. The Chiefs allowed 36 points to Buffalo and 27 to Cincinnati in the playoffs. Without any guarantees the defense is improved, expect Kansas City to get into several high-scoring AFC West shootouts with Derek Carr, Justin Herbert and Russell Wilson.

OUTLOOK

If there's a knock against Reid, it's his lack of postseason success going back to his 14 years in Philadelphia. Kansas City has reached the AFC title game four years in a row, but has one Super Bowl win to show for it. Reid has a 19-16 career record in the playoffs, and his team blew a 21-3 halftime lead against the Bengals in last season's conference title game. Mahomes, who threw a career-high 50 touchdown passes in 2018, was not as sharp last season and deserves some blame for the team's playoff flop. Mahomes got careless with the football and seemed to lose his edge, but his talk in training camp indicates he's highly motivated to bounce back. After a 3-4 start, the Chiefs finished 12-5, including 5-1 in division play, and will be challenged to match those records against a more difficult schedule.

Kansas City opens with eight straight games against teams that finished above .500 a year ago, and that brutal stretch features road games against the Buccaneers, Cardinals, Colts and 49ers. Reid always finds a way to reach double digits in wins, and Mahomes is 50-13 as the starter, while never winning fewer than 11 games in a season. Bottom line: Bet Over 10.5 and force the Chargers, Broncos and Raiders to prove the gap has closed. – *Matt Youmans*

SEASON WIN
TOTAL PLAY

**OVER
10.5**

AFC WEST
ODDS TO WIN

+175

AFC CONFERENCE
ODDS TO WIN

+550

SUPER BOWL
ODDS TO WIN

10-1

STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STATISTICS

SEASON	NEW HC?	SM PR	EFF STRG	EYPP+/-	SM BR	OFFRS-NEW	EOPPG	EOYPP	EOYPPT	DEFRS-NEW	EDPPG	EDFYPP	EDYPPT
2021		31	7.1	0.04	-8.5		28.3	6.12	14.07		21.2	6.08	17.33
2020		33.5	8.2	0.59	-7.4		28.6	6.41	14.46		22.6	5.82	15.86
2019		33.5	11	0.85	-5.9		31	6.47	12.35	Yes	20.9	5.62	16.92
2018		30.5	8.5	0.78	-8.3	Yes	35.2	6.97	11.99		26.7	6.19	15.29

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

24.85
(#1 of 32)

FIELD RATINGS

2.1 / 0.2
(HOME/ROAD)

2022 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	Est. Line	SERIES TRENDS
9/11	at Arizona	-2.7	ARIZONA has won L3 ATS hosting Kansas City
9/15	LA CHARGERS	-3	ROAD TEAMS are on 13-4-1 ATS run in LAC-KC rivalry
9/25	at Indianapolis	-2.1	UNDER the total is 8-2 in L10 of KC-IND h2h series
10/2	at Tampa Bay	+2.6	TAMPA BAY is 4-0-1 ATS in L5 at home vs. Kansas City
10/10	LAS VEGAS	-6.6	KANSAS CITY is 7-2 ATS in L9 hosting Raiders
10/16	BUFFALO	-0.7	L3 games of BUF-KC series went OVER total, producing 66 PPG
10/23	at San Francisco	-3.5	KANSAS CITY is on a 7-1-1 ATS run vs. San Francisco
11/6	TENNESSEE	-7.3	TENNESSEE is on 5-1 ATS run vs. Kansas City
11/13	JACKSONVILLE	-14	KANSAS CITY is 5-1 ATS in L6 vs. Jacksonville
11/20	at LA Chargers	-1	KANSAS CITY is on 7-1 ATS run when visiting Chargers
11/27	LA RAMS	-1.8	KANSAS CITY has won L7 ATS vs. Rams, scoring 39.1 PPG
12/4	at Cincinnati	-2.5	CINCINNATI is 4-1 ATS in L5 hosting Kansas City
12/11	at Denver	-2.8	KANSAS CITY is 7-1 ATS in L8 trips to Denver but lost LY
12/18	at Houston	-11.7	FAVORITES are on 6-1 ATS run in KC-HOU h2h series
12/24	SEATTLE	-12.9	The L5 games of SEA-KC h2h series have gone OVER the total
1/1	DENVER	-5.3	L4 games of DEN-KC rivalry in Kansas City went UNDER the total
1/8	at Las Vegas	-3.6	OVER the total is 7-2 in L9 of KC-LV series at Raiders

TEAM TRENDS

• KANSAS CITY
IS 9-0 ATS (L9G)
VS OPP 1,500
OR MORE TRAVEL
MILES

• KANSAS CITY IS
16-24 ATS (L40G)
AT HOME IN
NOVEMBER

• KANSAS CITY IS
12-3 OVER (L15G)
AS UNDERDOG

2021 RESULTS

14-6 SU & 10-10 ATS

DATE	OPPONENT	SCORE	SU	FL	ATS	TOTAL
9/12	CLEVELAND	33-29	W	-5.5	L	54.5 O
9/19	at Baltimore	35-36	L	-3.5	L	53.5 O
9/26	LA CHARGERS	24-30	L	-7	L	55 U
10/3	at Philadelphia	42-30	W	-7	W	54 O
10/10	BUFFALO	20-38	L	-3	L	56.5 O
10/17	at Washington	31-13	W	-6	W	54 U
10/24	at Tennessee	3-27	L	-4	L	58.5 U
11/7	GREEN BAY	13-7	W	-7	L	48 U
11/14	at Las Vegas	41-14	W	-3	W	53.5 O
11/21	DALLAS	19-9	W	-2.5	W	55.5 U
12/5	DENVER	22-9	W	-8.5	W	46.5 U
12/12	LAS VEGAS	48-9	W	-10	W	48 O
12/16	at LA Chargers	34-28	W	-3.5	W	54 O
12/26	PITTSBURGH	36-10	W	-10	W	44 O
1/2	at Cincinnati	31-34	L	-3.5	L	51.5 O
1/8	at Denver	28-24	W	-11.5	L	44.5 O
1/16	PITTSBURGH	42-21	W	-12.5	W	46 O
1/23	BUFFALO	42-36	W	-2.5	W	54 O
1/30	CINCINNATI	24-27	L	-7	L	54.5 U

2021 STATS & RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
Points Per Game	28.2	4	21.4	8
Yards Per Point	14.1	13	17.2	3
Plays Per Game	66.7	5		
Time of Possession	30:53	7		
3rd Down Conv. %	52.2%	1	40.2%	18
Total Yards Per Game	396.8	3	368.9	27
Yards Per Play	5.9	5	5.9	30
Rush Attempts Per Game	25.4	20		
Rush Yards Per Game	115	16	117.6	21
Yards Per Rush Attempt	4.5	7	4.8	31
Pass Attempts Per Game	39.7	2		
Completion %	66.4%	12	65.7%	18
Passing Yards Per Game	281.8	4	251.4	27
Yards Per Pass Attempt	7.3	13	7	26
Turnovers	1.5	23	1.7	5



DALLAS COWBOYS

HEAD COACH: MIKE MCCARTHY (3RD)

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR: KELLEN MOORE

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR: DAN QUINN

27

STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATING
(#7 OF 32)

It does not appear the Cowboys are better than last season, when they went 12-5 and dominated the division with a six-game sweep. It does appear the other three NFC East teams have improved. Expect to see some decline in Dallas and look for more signs of dysfunction as owner Jerry Jones is forced to make a decision on the future of a coach, Mike McCarthy, who never should have been hired. The Cowboys have not won a Super Bowl since the 1995 season, but they continue to stage the NFL's most popular soap opera.

OFFENSE

A year ago, there were plenty of questions about quarterback Dak Prescott, who was returning from a broken ankle. Prescott answered by starting hot and finishing with 37 touchdown passes, but he fizzled in a 23-17 playoff loss to the 49ers. Dallas has a deteriorated line, which is no longer among the league's elite, and Prescott lost his No. 2 wide receiver, Amari Cooper. The only reason running back Ezekiel Elliott is still around is the guaranteed money in his contract. Elliott rushed for 1,002 yards and 10 touchdowns last season, but he's fading fast and was less effective than his backup, Tony Pollard. On the positive side, top wideout CeeDee Lamb is a legit star and Dalton Schultz is a highly productive tight end off a 78-reception season. Prescott was outstanding while the Cowboys led the league in total offense (407 yards per game) and scoring (31.2 ppg), so there are always reasons for optimism. Still, the Cowboys are thinner at the receiver positions and weaker on the line, so there are signs that regression is coming unless Elliott makes a surprising resurgence.

DEFENSE

Dallas was lucky a star, — linebacker Micah Parsons — fell to the 12th pick in the 2021 draft. Parsons picked up 13 sacks as a rookie and should become an All-Pro. The key to a more effective defensive front will be keeping end DeMarcus Lawrence and linebacker Leighton Vander Esch healthy and on the field. Trevon Diggs made 11 interceptions last year and proved to be a ball hawk, but the Cowboys ranked 20th in pass defense (238 ypg) and the secondary as a whole was weak in coverage. It's worth questioning if a Dallas defense that ranked seventh in scoring (21.1 ppg) was somewhat phony due to the anemic offenses it faced in the NFC East. Dan Quinn is a sharp coordinator who will probably hold this unit together, and Parsons' versatility makes him one of the most valuable defensive players in the league.

OUTLOOK

The Cowboys still have the best quarterback in the division, but Prescott will be challenged to replicate his 2021 numbers with a weaker supporting cast. The media spotlight will be on McCarthy, who's 18-15 in two years and walking on thin ice. If things turn sideways, there will be intense pressure on Jones to dump McCarthy and hire former Saints coach Sean Payton. It's not enough to win a bad division and exit early in the playoffs, as Dallas did last season, yet there's no more proof this team is a serious Super Bowl contender. With the Eagles and Giants rising in the East, the Cowboys will not be on cruise control and the rest of their schedule is a tougher task with games against the Buccaneers, Bengals, Rams, Packers, Vikings, Colts and Titans. While the DraftKings win total of 10 looks right, the Cowboys could hover around .500 for much of the season. McCarthy is not a bet-on coach, and this team is not going to overachieve again unless all of its stars stay healthy. A win total of 10.5 (Under -145) is available, so that's a better bet. — Matt Youmans

SEASON WIN
TOTAL PLAY

UNDER 10

NFC EAST
ODDS TO WIN

+140

NFC CONFERENCE
ODDS TO WIN

+900

SUPER BOWL
ODDS TO WIN

20-1

STEVE MAKINEN'S EFFECTIVE STATISTICS

SEASON	NEW HC?	SM PR	EFF STRG	EYPP+/-	SM BR	OFFRS-NEW	EOPPG	EOYPP	EOYPPT	DEFRS-NEW	EDPPG	EDFYPP	EDYPPT
2021		29.5	9.2	0.33	-6.2		30.8	6.12	13.07	Yes	21.6	5.79	16.41
2020	Yes	20	-6.3	-0.66	7.6		25.5	5.48	14.34	Yes	32	6.14	12.28
2019		28	4.6	0.93	-1.9	Yes	26.5	6.43	15.84		22	5.5	15.29
2018		27	1.2	0.12	-2.8		21.6	5.71	15.94		20.4	5.58	16.09

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

22.79
(#26 of 32)

FIELD RATINGS

1.9 / -0.3
(HOME/ROAD)

TEAM TRENDS

- DALLAS IS 12-3 ATS (L15G) CONFERENCE GAMES
- DALLAS IS 3-12 ATS (L15G) IN JANUARY
- DALLAS IS 10-0 OVER (L10G) AT HOME 2ND GAME OF THE SEASON VS OPPONENT

2022 SCHEDULE

DATE	OPPONENT	Est. Line	SERIES TRENDS
9/11	TAMPA BAY	+0.8	UNDERDOGS are on 4-0-1 ATS run in TB-DAL h2h series
9/18	CINCINNATI	-4	DALLAS is on 3-0 ATS surge vs. Cincinnati
9/26	at NY Giants	-5.4	DALLAS is on 8-2 ATS run vs. NY Giants
10/2	WASHINGTON	-7.1	The L7 games of WAS-DAL series in Dallas went OVER the total
10/9	at LA Rams	+5.5	HOME TEAMS are 7-2 ATS in Cowboys-Rams series since '07
10/16	at Philadelphia	-2	DALLAS is on a 7-2 ATS run vs. Philadelphia
10/23	DETROIT	-11	OVER the total is 10-2 in L12 of DET-DAL h2h series
10/30	CHICAGO	-12.8	The L7 games of CHI-DAL h2h series went OVER the total
11/13	at Green Bay	+5.3	ROAD DOGS are on 4-0- SU & ATS run in DAL-GB rivalry
11/20	at Minnesota	+1	UNDERDOGS have won L5 ATS in DAL-MIN h2h series
11/24	NY GIANTS	-7.8	L3 games of NYG-DAL series in Dallas went OVER total, avg 62.3 PPG
12/4	INDIANAPOLIS	-4.2	HOME FAVORITES are on 5-1 ATS run in IND-DAL series
12/11	HOUSTON	-13.7	All five prior games of HOU-DAL h2h series went UNDER total
12/18	at Jacksonville	-6.8	The L5 games of DAL-JAC h2h series went OVER the total
12/24	PHILADELPHIA	-5.2	DALLAS is on 4-game SU & ATS win streak hosting Philadelphia
12/29	at Tennessee	+0.2	ROAD TEAMS have won L4 ATS in DAL-TEN h2h series
1/8	at Washington	-4.6	DALLAS is 6-2 ATS in L8 trips to Washington

2021 RESULTS

12-6 SU & 13-5 ATS

DATE	OPPONENT	SCORE	SU	FL	ATS	TOTAL
9/9	at Tampa Bay	29-31	L	9	W	52.5 O
9/19	at LA Chargers	20-17	W	3	W	55 U
9/27	PHILADELPHIA	41-21	W	-3.5	W	51.5 O
10/3	CAROLINA	36-28	W	-4.5	W	54 O
10/10	NY GIANTS	44-20	W	-7	W	52.5 O
10/17	at New England	35-29	W	-3.5	W	50.5 O
10/31	at Minnesota	20-16	W	4.5	W	49.5 U
11/7	DENVER	16-30	L	-10	L	50 U
11/14	ATLANTA	43-3	W	-7.5	W	55 U
11/21	at Kansas City	9-19	L	2.5	L	55.5 U
11/25	LAS VEGAS	33-36	L	-7	L	51 O
12/2	at New Orleans	27-17	W	-6.5	W	45.5 U
12/12	at Washington	27-20	W	-6.5	W	47.5 U
12/19	at NY Giants	21-6	W	-12.5	W	43.5 U
12/26	WASHINGTON	56-14	W	-10	W	46 O
1/2	ARIZONA	22-25	L	-6.5	L	53 U
1/8	at Philadelphia	51-26	W	-6.5	W	46 O
1/16	SAN FRANCISCO	17-23	L	-3	L	50.5 U

2021 STATS & RANKS

	OFFENSE		DEFENSE	
	STAT	RANK	STAT	RANK
Points Per Game	31.2	1	21.1	7
Yards Per Point	13.1	2	16.7	5
Plays Per Game	67.8	2		
Time of Possession	30:21	16		
3rd Down Conv. %	43.4%	11	34.1%	2
Total Yards Per Game	407	1	351	19
Yards Per Play	6	3	5.5	20
Rush Attempts Per Game	27.8	12		
Rush Yards Per Game	124.6	9	112.8	16
Yards Per Rush Attempt	4.5	8	4.5	23
Pass Attempts Per Game	38.1	6		
Completion %	68.6%	3	59.5%	3
Passing Yards Per Game	282.4	2	238.2	20
Yards Per Pass Attempt	7.7	6	6.6	17
Turnovers	1.2	10	2	1

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