

CASE NFL

NFL WEEK 17

1. Patriots -11 OR LESS hosting Bills (2 units)

New England is at least three touchdowns better than Buffalo at home. The key for the Patriots is motivation. And the Patriots should have plenty of that. They still need a victory to lock up home field advantage throughout the playoffs. There's also revenge. The Bills upset New England in Week 3 as Tom Brady tied a career-worst with four interceptions.

I thought this line would be much higher. Yes, the Bills are off a 40-14 pasting of Denver. Brady isn't Tim Tebow, though. Before this past Saturday, Buffalo had lost seven in a row by a combined margin of 124 points. The Bills are 0-6 on the road, 0-5-1 ATS.

New England does have injuries in its offensive line, but the Bills' offensive line is in worse shape. It's nearly decimated.

The Patriots' defense should start improving as key injured players have started to return. Before defeating the Broncos, the Bills were averaging 14.2 points in their previous seven games. New England is averaging 30.9 points and ranks No. 2 in total offense and passing.

The Patriots had won 15 in a row against Buffalo before Week 3. They are 11-5 ATS in the last 16 meetings versus the Bills.

Buffalo generates no pass rush. The Bills are sitting ducks for a motivated Brady, who has a 13-to-1 touchdown-to-interception ratio in his last six games, and their offense isn't nearly strong enough to trade points

2. Colts +4 at Jaguars (2 units)

The wrong team is favored in this one. Right now Indianapolis is plain better than Jacksonville. The Colts are playing their best ball having won two in a row knocking off Tennessee, an above .500 team, and Houston, a division champion. Jacksonville is decimated physically - down 12 defensive backs including their top four corners - and mentally.

Playing at home means nothing for the Jaguars because their apathetic fans don't care about this matchup and won't come out.

CASE NFL

The Colts' offense is better with Dan Orlovsky at quarterback. He has three good wide receivers to throw to. The Jaguars don't have nearly the secondary depth, or decent pass rush, to bother Orlovsky.

Jacksonville is laying more than a field goal yet averaging less than 15 points per game. The Jaguars rank last in total offense and in passing yards.

The Colts will be keying on Maurice Jones-Drew knowing overmatched rookie quarterback Blaine Gabbert and his pedestrian wideouts can't hurt them. The Colts also have had extra time to prepare and rest having last played on Thursday. The Colts have a number of proud veterans. The team isn't going to lie down in order to land the first overall pick, especially when it's not crucial with Peyton Manning coming back.

3. Ravens -2 at Bengals (1 unit)

I like the Ravens to cover this short number. I'm not saying the Ravens don't have flaws. They certainly do. Joe Flacco isn't very accurate, the team hasn't performed well on the road and special teams aren't great.

But the Ravens are a legitimate playoff team and Super Bowl contender. Cincinnati is not. The Bengals are more about overachieving than being a playoff team. Who have the Bengals beaten? Nobody. The only above .500 team Cincinnati has won against is 8-7 Tennessee. The Bengals have lost to the Broncos, 49ers, Texans, Steelers twice and to the Ravens, 31-24, in Week 11 after Baltimore build a 31-14 lead.

Baltimore is 7-0 in its AFC North Division games. The Bengals have feasted on bad opponents and bad quarterbacks having the good fortunate to go against six backup quarterbacks.

Cincinnati's defense is good, but it's trumped by the Ravens, which rank No. 2 in rush defense, No. 3 in fewest points at 16.7 and No. 3 in total defense. Baltimore's Ray Rice is the best skill-position player on the field. Bengals rookie quarterback Andy Dalton has tailed off. He has as many interceptions, six, as touchdown throws during the last seven weeks. He hasn't cleared 200 yards passing since November.

Star wideout A.J. Green is the Bengals' top playmaker and Dalton's top target. However, Green has a sore shoulder that hampers his play. He played in spite of the injury last week but could only manage two receptions for 25 yards.

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4. Chargers plus 3 at Raiders (1 unit)

The Raiders own the better record, but the Chargers are the better team. The question here comes down to motivation and poise. Oakland wins the AFC West with a victory. The Chargers are out of it.

It's highly likely this is Norv Turner's last game as Chargers coach. Turner has been miscast as a head coach, but his players like him. They will play hard for him. There also is no love lost between the Chargers and the Raiders, who beat San Diego in Week 10, 24-17.

The Chargers have the firepower to beat the Raiders. The Chargers also can win by the Raiders giving them the game. I don't trust or like Oakland in a must-win type of spot. The Raiders have failed to cover 14 of the last 18 times they've been a home favorite. The Raiders are undisciplined and don't take care of the football. Carson Palmer has 15 interceptions in nine games. The Raiders are probably going to break the NFL season-record for penalties and penalty yards.

Oakland hasn't been able to stop great passers this month getting rocked by Aaron Rodgers and Matthew Stafford. Philip Rivers is an elite quarterback. The Chargers have been a strong December team under Turner winning 12 of the last 14 times. San Diego blew out Baltimore, Buffalo and Jacksonville before losing last week on the road against the Lions.

The Raiders have been outgained by 268 yards on the season. They have allowed 44 more first downs. San Diego, on the other hand, has outgained its foes by 801 yards and has made 51 more first downs.

5. Panthers plus 9 at Saints (1 unit)

The Panthers are not an easy out anymore. The Panthers have won and covered four of their last five games. Cam Newton has accounted for 34 touchdowns. That makes Carolina a very dangerous team, especially if the Saints decide to mail this game in, which very well could be the case.

New Orleans has won the NFC South Division. The Saints are the No. 3 seed. They only could be the No. 2 seed and get a first-round bye if the 49ers lose to the Rams. That's not going to happen. Both New Orleans and San Francisco have early start times on Sunday. So Saints coach Sean Payton is going to be doing a lot of scoreboard watching. If the 49ers stomp the Rams - and they are double-digit favorites - then Payton won't take chances with Drew Brees and other key starters. He'll yank them since that would render this matchup meaningless from a New Orleans perspective.

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Saints backup quarterback Chase Daniel has thrown only five career passes. Even if Payton elects to play his starters the entire game, the Saints will be in for a tough afternoon. Carolina is averaging 33.1 points in its last six games. The Saints have a great offense, but leaky defense. New Orleans ranks 30th in passing yards and 26th in total defense.

Carolina nearly upset the Saints back in Week 5 losing 30-27 when New Orleans scored a touchdown with 50 seconds left. The Panthers have covered five of the past seven in the series. Rarely have the Panthers been blown out. Of their nine defeats, six have been by eight points or less.

6. 49ers -10 1/2 at Rams (2 units)

The 49ers still need to take care of business with a victory in this matchup to wrap up the No. 2 seed in the NFC playoffs. Jim Harbaugh won't allow San Francisco to let up or not play hard.

The Rams are hopeless. They lost to the 49ers earlier this month, 26-0, behind second-string quarterback A.J. Feeley. San Francisco's top-ranked defense held the Rams to 31 yards rushing and nine first downs.

St. Louis isn't going to be any better this week with third-string quarterback Kellen Clemens. Josh McDaniels has a sharp offensive mind, but his system and stubborn reliance on it has proven disastrous for the Rams, who lack quality receivers aside from Brandon Lloyd and have a makeshift offensive line that is overwhelmed by strong defensive fronts.

St. Louis is averaging a league-low 11.1 points. The Rams are 31st in total offense at 281.7 yards per game. San Francisco is giving up the fewest points at 13.5 per game and also rate No. 1 in rush defense.

The 49ers are not in a good mood either after Marshawn Lynch became the first running back in 37 games to run for 100 yards on them.

San Francisco lacks an explosive offense. But the 49ers can run the ball with Frank Gore and Kendall Hunter. The Rams are surrendering 154.5 yards per game on the ground, worst in the NFL.

Some may think that laying double-digits on the road in the NFL is a bad thing. But each matchup has to be examined in its own individual terms. In this case, I don't see the Rams staying anywhere close to the 49ers. They don't have the talent, sophistication or motivation.

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St. Louis is 0-5-1 ATS in its last six games. The Rams are averaging 6.5 points during the last four weeks. The 49ers kill the Rams in the trenches. They don't have to do anything fancy or unusual to cover this number.

7. Chiefs plus 3 1/2 at Broncos (1 unit)

The wheels are coming off for overachieving Denver and Tim Tebow. In the last two weeks, the Broncos have lost by 18 points to New England at home and by 26 to Buffalo, which had lost seven in a row.

Defenses have figured out Tebow and the Broncos' lopsided reliance on the run. The Chiefs have recent exposure on Tebow having lost to the Broncos, 17-10, in Week 10. They will be ready for him. The Chiefs have excellent cornerbacks who can cover one-on-one leaving the rest of their defense to key on Tebow and Willis McGahee. If you discount a 35-point effort in the dome against Minnesota, the Broncos are averaging just 16.6 points in their last six games.

The Chiefs are motivated to win for popular interim coach Romeo Crennel, especially Kyle Orton. He was waived by Denver last month after being the Broncos' starter for nearly 2 1/2 seasons. Kansas City's offense has been much better since Orton became its starter two games ago putting up 438 and 435 yards of offense.

Denver's defense is worn down from bailing out its offense and the Broncos' secondary is young and banged-up. The youthful Broncos are not used to pressure situations like this having not made the playoffs since 2005