

NFL playoffs HEAT UP



Contenders separate themselves from pretenders in this year's edition of the NFL Playoffs

up between the Arizona Cardinals and Green Bay Packers gave the most drama. Down 31-10 in their first drive of the second half, the Packers fought back to tie the game at 45 at the end of regulation. The game went to overtime, where the Cardinals' Karlos Dansby recovered a fumble by Packers' quarterback, Aaron Rodgers, and returned it for a touchdown, sealing victory, 51-45.

A shocking upset in Foxboro, Mass. occurred in the AFC Wild Card round game when the Baltimore Ravens showed up at the New England Patriots' doorstep. From the opening drive, the Ravens were out to prove something to the doubters. On the opening play of the game, Ravens' running back, Ray Rice sprinted for an 83 yard touchdown. The onslaught did not subside; the Ravens finished the first quarter with a 24-0 lead on the Patriots, leaving their fans bewildered, astounded and bored. The Ravens ran out of Gillette Stadium with a 33-14 win and a lot of confidence.

The games played in NFC Divisional round games gave less suspense, where the New Orleans Saints came off of a

bye week to play the Cardinals at home and subsequently stomped them, 45-14, giving the Saints their first home NFC Championship Game in team history. Saints running back, Reggie Bush, once dubbed a draft bust by NFL analysts due to his in-season performance, proved his worth with a punt return touchdown, and 84 rushing yards to go along with a rushing touchdown.

They would play the winner of the Minnesota Vikings-Dallas Cowboys game, which was a 34-3 Vikings victory. In the NFC Championship game, the Saints and Vikings will face off in a battle between the top two teams in the conference.

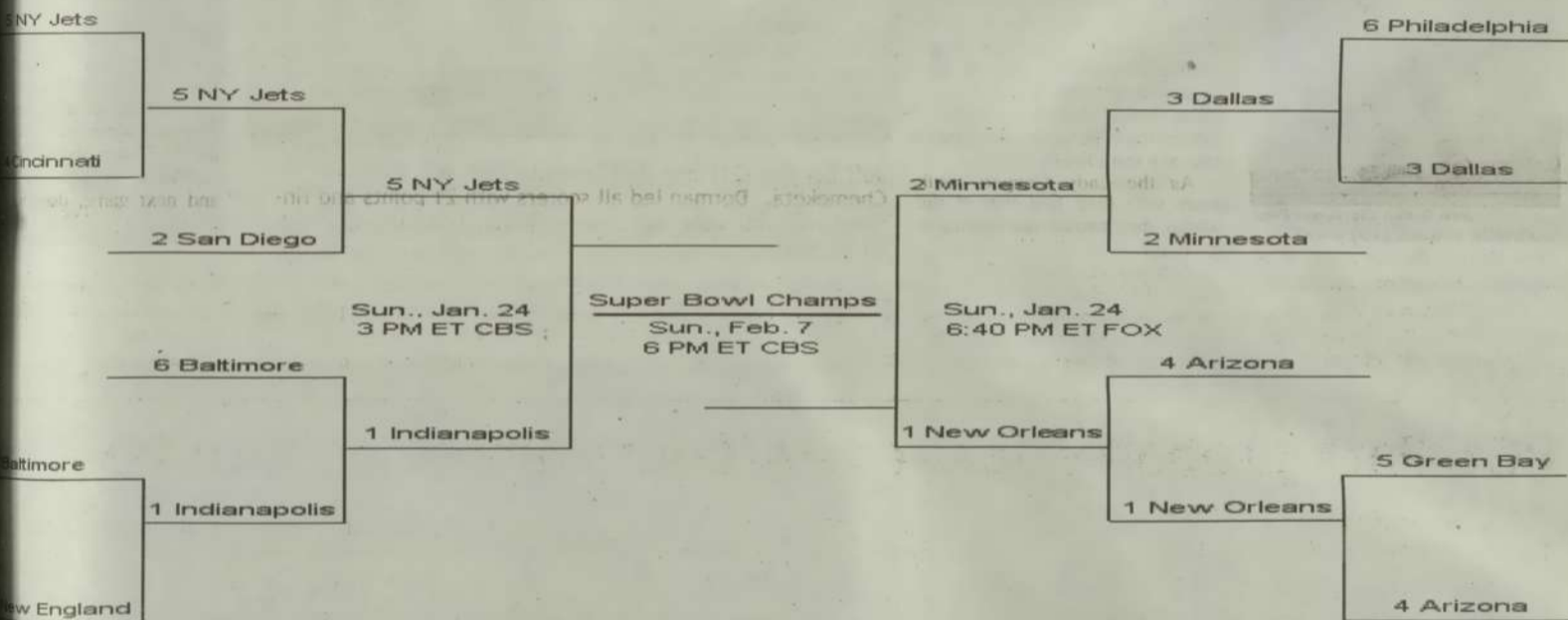
The AFC's Divisional round games were battles of who could limit their margin of error and move on in the playoffs. The powerful Indianapolis Colts, led by four-time NFL MVP quarterback Peyton Manning, took on the Baltimore Ravens in a game that was originally predicted by experts to be a fight between efficient offense - No. 2 in Passing Yards per game according to www.NFL.com - and smashmouth defense - No. 3 in

least yards allowed according to www.NFL.com. The game ended 20-3, Colts pulling out the victory. Ravens' miscues and Peyton Manning's passing attack were the keys to the Colts' win.

It was down to the New York Jets and San Diego Chargers to decide the Colts' challenger. In a back-and-forth game, the Jets took a 17-7 lead on a Shonn Greene run, after which the Chargers struck back to bring it to 17-14. The Jets converted on a fourth-and-one with 1:09 remaining to win the game, 17-14. The Chargers continued their playoff failures, and the Jets continue their playoff resurgence.

While the playoffs have given us little to sit on the edge of our seats about, the Championship games should give us enough drama to shake a stick at. Saints-Vikings will be on FOX, Sunday, January 24, and Colts-Jets will be on CBS the same day. The winners of these two games will face each other in Super Bowl XLIV, to be played on Feb. 7. Football fans, stick around, the beginning may not have been that exciting, but we could have a photo finish.

Keep score at home with this ultra handy bracket



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