

The Fight for

NFL WILDCARD GAMES

Journey to milestone Super Bowl begins with wild card

After a handful of preseason matchups and a grueling, 16-game regular season, 12 teams still have a shot at reaching Super Bowl 50. The wild-card round features three recent Super Bowl champions in the Seahawks, Packers and Steelers. All three struggled at times this season, but found their way to the postseason (with Seattle looking as dangerous as ever). The Chiefs, Texans, Bengals, Vikings and Redskins round out this year's wild bunch.



AFC: KANSAS CITY (11-5) at HOUSTON (9-7),
Saturday, 4:35 p.m. EST, ABC/ESPN

OVERVIEW: The Chiefs might be the NFL's version of a family sedan. Practical. Efficient. Responsible. Occasionally boring. Still, Kansas City enters the playoffs as the NFL's hottest team, ripping off 10 straight following a 1-5 start, and the one win in that stretch was a season-opening 27-20 victory at Houston. The Chiefs take care of the ball (they are plus-16 in turnover ratio during their current run) and keep opponents out of the end zone. It's a formula as basic as coach Andy Reid's game-day demeanor, yet a style that has arguably made Kansas City the least-flawed team in an AFC where weaknesses abound. The Texans have plenty of them. They captured the AFC South crown by being the best of a, to put it politely, mediocre bunch. J.J. Watt did J.J. Watt thing, finishing with a league-high 17 1/2 sacks while turning each celebration into an interpretive and not always fluid dance-off. Coach Bill O'Brien made an offense that couldn't seem to keep a quarterback healthy work anyway. The merry-go-round has come full circle, with Brian Hoyer back in control of the huddle as Houston seeks to improve to 3-0 in the wild-card round in the franchise's brief history.



AFC: PITTSBURGH (10-6) at CINCINNATI (12-4)
Saturday, 8:15 p.m. EST, CBS

OVERVIEW: A decade later, the AFC North champion Bengals finally have their shot at postseason payback. The resilient Steelers, meanwhile, are eyeing a familiar path to a frequent destination. The Bengals were on the rise in 2005 when they hosted the Steelers in the wild-card round. Then Pittsburgh defensive tackle Kimo von Oelhoffen went crashing into quarterback Carson Palmer's left leg in the first quarter, shredding Palmer's knee. Cincinnati struggled behind backup Jon Kitna and the Steelers rolled to a 31-17 victory, the first of three road triumphs on the way to the franchise's fifth Super Bowl title. The circumstances now are oddly similar. Cincinnati won the division with backup A.J. McCarron after Andy Dalton broke his right thumb in a home loss to Pittsburgh last month. McCarron is a respectable 2-1 in Dalton's absence, but he was three months old the last time the Bengals won a playoff game, a drought that turns 25 this month and includes six straight postseason losses. The Steelers, meanwhile, haven't gone more than five years between playoff wins since Richard Nixon was president. Pittsburgh has injury problems of its own with running back DeAngelo Williams nursing a sprained right ankle.



NFC: SEATTLE (10-6) at MINNESOTA (11-5)
Sunday, 1 p.m. EST, NBC

OVERVIEW: The Vikings are the No. 3 seed in the NFC thanks to an inspired victory at rival Green Bay in the final game of the regular season that ended a four-year grip on the NFC North by the Packers, but a game against the Seahawks is hardly a reward for their first division title since Brett Favre's 2009 renaissance. The Seahawks, of course, are the two-time defending NFC champions who were one play away last February from back-to-back Super Bowl titles. They finished strong, with six wins in their last seven games despite the loss of stalwart running back Marshawn Lynch and then his rookie lookalike Thomas Rawls.



NFC: GREEN BAY (10-6) at WASHINGTON (9-7)
Sunday, 4:30 p.m. EST, FOX

OVERVIEW: On the surface, the Packers got a decent consolation prize for losing to the Vikings with a game against Washington, the champions of what was a diluted NFC East. The Packers had the same record on the road (5-3) as they did at Lambeau Field, so the site in and of itself should not be issue for Green Bay. The Packers will take a lot of baggage with them to Washington (or, to be more accurate: Landover, Maryland), though, starting with their uncharacteristically punchless offense. The Redskins, on the other hand, averaged nearly 33 points over a four-game winning streak to finish the regular season.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

Takalo scores 37 points in Knappa victory

By GARY HENLEY
The Daily Astorian

ROCKAWAY BEACH — Knappa tuned up for a key Northwest League showdown Friday with a 70-61 win at Neah-Kah-Nie Tuesday night.

The Loggers led by just two at halftime, but opened the third period on a 12-0 run, and maintained the lead for the remainder of the game.

"It was a big win on the road," said Knappa coach Chris Spencer. "Neah-Kah-Nie is not a bad team — their record (1-8 overall, 0-4 in league) is not an indication of what kind of team they have."

Like everyone else, however, the Pirates could not stop Knappa's Dale Takalo.

The sophomore had 23 of his game-high 37 points in the first half, and was 15-of-21 at the free-throw line.

Sophomore Colton Weir added 18 points.

Knappa had just five players in the scoring column, while the Pirates had points from nine different players. Max Halverson led with 20.

The Loggers were 27-of-38 at the free-throw line, as Knappa improves to 7-5 overall. Knappa hosts Vernonia Friday, in a showdown between the two teams expected to battle for the NWL title.

OES 46, Warrenton 37
WARRENTON — The Warrenton Warriors returned to Lewis & Clark League action Tuesday night, as they put their three-game win streak on the line against Oregon Episcopal.

And the Aardvarks overcame an early deficit to hand the Warriors their first loss of the new year, 46-37.

A 3-pointer and a little floater in the lane by Warrenton's Christian Holt gave the Warriors a 7-4 lead after one quarter, and Warrenton still led midway through the second period, 11-10.

Moments later, OES guard Ian Holzman drilled a 3-pointer for a 13-11 lead, and the Aardvarks never trailed again.

Oregon Episcopal began the second half with an 11-2 run, as sophomore Alex Olander scored eight points



'It was a big win on the road. Neah-Kah-Nie is not a bad team — their record is not an indication of what kind of team they have.'

Chris Spencer
Knappa coach

in the third period to help build an eventual 40-27 lead.

Holt and freshman Dalton Knight both hit a pair of 3-pointers in the second half for Warrenton, which had just seven players available.

Holt finished with 13 points for the Warriors.

Lions 59, Blue Jays 36
JEWELL — Livingstone Adventist held Jewell to just 17 points through three quarters Tuesday night, as the Lions posted a 59-36 win over the Blue Jays in a Casco League boys basketball game.

Livingstone's Pierce Kroschel led all scorers with 22 points, while Sean Hinson had 14 points and 10 rebounds for Jewell.

Ben Stahly added seven rebound and three assists, and Thomas Meehan had six boards and three assists.

Girls Basketball
OES 43, Warrenton 31
WARRENTON — The Oregon Episcopal Lady Aardvarks had luck on their side Tuesday night at Warrenton.

The Aardvarks connected on just 3-of-19 field goals in

the second period, but still held a 12-point halftime lead on their way to a 43-31 win, in the Lewis & Clark League girls basketball game.

Back-to-back scores by Warrenton's Landree Miethe had the Lady Warriors within 16-11 late in the first half, but OES senior Jane Schlendorf made two free throws, Emilie Dellit scored on a layup, and Rachael Haugh hit a 3-pointer from 30 feet at the buzzer for a 23-11 halftime lead.

Miethe's 3-pointer to start the game gave Warrenton its only lead, as she finished with seven points, along with Sophia Thomas.

Pirates 48, Loggers 14
ROCKAWAY BEACH — The points continue to be hard to come by for the Knappa Lady Loggers, who were held under 20 points for the fourth time in the last six games in a 48-14 loss at Neah-Kah-Nie Tuesday night.

The Pirates led 19-5 after one quarter, then outscored Knappa 17-5 over the second and third periods.

Neah-Kah-Nie had three players in double figures, led by Alaina Holm with 14.

Paris Vanderburg had eight points for Knappa, which was missing Kaitlyn Landwehr and Ashly Silva (out with a concussion), and Kaitlyn Truax suffered a sprained ankle in the second quarter.

Lions 39, Lady Jays 27
JEWELL — Emillie Hathaway poured in 20 points to lead Livingstone Adventist to a 39-27 win over Jewell, in a Casco League girls basketball game Tuesday.

Gabi Morales had a big all-around game for the Jays, scoring 11 points to go with five rebounds and four steals. Emma Guillen added 10 points and five boards.

Astoria sweeps Estacada
ESTACADA — The Astoria boys basketball team jumped back on the winning track Tuesday night, with a 58-50 nonleague win at Estacada, completing a basketball doubleheader sweep over the Rangers.

The victory snapped a two-game losing skid for the

Astoria boys, who were coming off a 61-58 loss at Cascade.

Astoria improves to 7-3 overall, with upcoming non-league games. vs. North Mar-

ion, Stayton, Molalla and Yamhill-Carlton.

In the girls' game, Astoria avenged a 50-40 loss to Estacada last season with a 46-31 win over the Rangers.

SCOREBOARD

PREP SCHEDULE

TODAY
Girls Wrestling — Astoria at Ilwaco, 5:30 p.m.

THURSDAY
Boys Basketball — Ilwaco at Raymond, 7 p.m.
Swimming — Astoria at Tillamook, 4 p.m.

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