

NFL



AP Photo/Scott Eklund, File

Seattle Seahawks fans yell as Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (12) tries to run a play in the first half of an NFL football game in Seattle earlier this season. Along with great quarterbacks, the four NFL teams hosting playoff games this weekend have something else on their side. The Seahawks have the racket of Century Link Field, the Packers that Lambeau mystique. Denver has the thin air a mile up and the Patriots the biting winds and bitter cold of foreboding Foxborough. The foursome went a combined 30-2 at home this season and heavily favored in the divisional round.

There's no place like home

Playoff hosts are combined 30-2 at home

By ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

DENVER — Along with great quarterbacks who all own Super Bowl rings, the four NFL teams hosting playoff games this weekend have a little something else on their side: an extraordinary home-field edge.

Seattle has the racket of Century Link, Green Bay the mystique of icy Lambeau. Denver's mile-high altitude and NASCAR offense benefit the Broncos. And the Patriots appreciate the biting winds and bitter cold of foreboding Foxborough, where that hoodie sure comes in handy.

The four host teams are a combined 30-2 at home this season; each is at least a touchdown favorite in the divisional round.

In the last decade, only

Clearing a path to the conference championships

The divisional round kicks off with Tom Brady and the Patriots facing the Ravens, and Peyton Manning taking on the Super Bowl champs, the Colts, in the other matchups. The Packers square off with a Cowboys team that has yet to take on the road this season, and Carolina travels to Seattle to take on the No. 1 NFC seed Seahawks.

MATCHUP	STRENGTH
RAVENS 14 at PATRIOTS 20	The Patriots are always formidable at home. Ravens were impressive at Pittsburgh last Saturday, and Joe Flacco has become just an elite QB quarterback as opposed to a Colts-type QB that has yet to take on the road this season, and Carolina travels to Seattle to take on the No. 1 NFC seed Seahawks.
MAINTERS 10-61 at SEAHAWKS 23	Brady's offense is potent, especially on offense. Denver's offense has that early playoff edge when you're playing at home. Manning has led the Packers to a 13-1 record in 2014.
COLTS 20-41 at PACKERS 27	The Colts have to deal with Green Bay to advance. It's not an easy task. Manning's offense has been dominant, and the Packers have a strong defense led by Clay Matthews.
COLTS 20-41 at BRONCOS 23	The Colts will be in Peyton Manning and the quarterback who has led the Colts to a 13-1 record in 2014. Manning has led the Packers to a 13-1 record in 2014.

two other seasons, 2005 and 2011, featured collective records that good among the four hosts who sat out wild-card weekend, according to STATS.

Interestingly, in neither of those postseasons did any of the four win it all. Sixth-seeded Pittsburgh won in '05 and the Giants won as a fourth seed to close out 2011.

This year's foursome includes the Broncos and Packers with perfect home records, but not the top seed, so the road to the Super Bowl might not even go through Denver or Green Bay.

Seattle's lone home loss was a 30-23 hiccup against

Dallas during the champs' early-season stumble. The other defeat was a giveaway: New England's 19-7 loss to Buffalo in the season finale with the No. 1 seed already secured by the Patriots.

"Unnerving," is how Richard Sherman describes the sound in Seattle, which can get so loud that the Seahawks' defense has to find creative ways to make checks and calls.

Panthers tight end Greg Olsen played at Seattle with the Bears a few years ago and left with his ears ringing. He said he expects an even louder stadium Saturday night: "Playoff game, coming off a

Super Bowl, I can only imagine."

Denver quit being such an intimidating place to play after John Elway retired with two rings. It's a big deal again since Manning's arrival in 2012.

"Our fans have been great ... I think they cause problems for other teams," Manning said, echoing sentiments in Massachusetts, Washington and Wisconsin. "Players just feed off that energy when you're playing at home. I think it makes a big difference."

Throw in the no-huddle and the lung-searing altitude and you can see why the Broncos are 24-3 at home with Manning, including 17-1 over the last two seasons.

"Playing up-tempo and then the altitude out here can really give a defense fits," said C.J. Anderson, who knows it's working when defensive linemen interlock their knuckles behind their head, heaving between snaps.

UNGER: Offense took big hit in his absence

Continued from 1B

denying the Seahawks have better offensive numbers when Unger is on the field.

In the six games Unger played — the first four and Weeks 10 and 11 — the Seahawks averaged 392.5 yards of offense per game, including 203.8 yards rushing. Seattle also allowed 13 total sacks in those six games and quarterback Russell Wilson had a passer rating of 95 or higher in five of the six.

In the 10 games Unger missed, Seattle averaged nearly 30 yards less of offense, but the big drop off was in the

running game. The Seahawks rushed for just 153.9 yards in those 10 games when Unger was out.

"That's his guidance and his experience for the other guys up there. He's an expert at recognizing looks and calls and directing what's going on there," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. "So it just stands to reason that we maximize more so with him there. We'll just be a little bit more accurate with stuff and the kind of experience that just takes time to get. Patrick and Lemuel, they just haven't had the background. It's a wonderful dimension for us that helps us just be right more and that's a really important

thing in the game."

Despite the lengthy layoff, Unger and his coaches don't believe there will be any rust in the return. Unger practiced both days last week during Seattle's bye and was close to being able to return for the regular-season finale against St. Louis.

"The bye was huge as it always is coming off a long schedule and being able to take a week off and come back," Unger said. "Especially for me and not having played for the last six weeks, that was big not to be thrown in there and be able to have a couple of days of practice."

SCOREBOARD

Local Slate

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

Today
Umatilla JV at Helix, 7:30 p.m.

Friday
Irrigon at Culer, 6 p.m.

Ione at Arlington, 7:30 p.m.

Condon/Wheeler at South Wasco County, 7:30 p.m.

Joseph at Echo, 7:30 p.m.

Nixyaawii at Powder Valley, 7:30 p.m.

Weston-McEwen at Stanfield, 7:30 p.m.

Heppner at Pilot Rock, 7:30 p.m.

Saturday
Lebanon at Pendleton, TBD

Hermiston at Summit, 1:30 p.m.

Mac-Hi at Weston-McEwen, 4:30 p.m.

Dufur at Ione, 5:30 p.m.

Arlington at Horizon Christian, 5:30 p.m.

Mithcell/Spray at Condon/Wheeler, 5:30 p.m.

Helix at Powder Valley, 5:30 p.m.

Echo at Nixyaawii, 5:30 p.m.

Umatilla at Nyssa, 4 p.m.

Riverside at Vale, 6 p.m.

PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

Today
Umatilla JV at Helix, 6 p.m.

Friday
Irrigon at Culer, 4:30 p.m.

Joseph at Echo, 6 p.m.

Condon/Wheeler at South Wasco County, 6 p.m.

Ione at Arlington, 6 p.m.

Heppner at Pilot Rock, 6 p.m.

Weston-McEwen at Stanfield, 6 p.m.

Saturday
Lebanon at Pendleton, TBD

Helix at Powder Valley, 4 p.m.

Mithcell/Spray at Condon/Wheeler, 4 p.m.

Dufur at Ione, 4 p.m.

Arlington at Horizon Christian, 4 p.m.

Riverside at Vale, 4 p.m.

Umatilla at Nyssa, 4 p.m.

Mac-Hi at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.

Echo at Nixyaawii, 6 p.m.

PREP WRESTLING

Today
Hood River Valley at Pendleton, 7 p.m.

Hermiston at Yelm (WA), 7 p.m.

Saturday
Hermiston at Gut Check Challenge in Olympia, Wash., 9 a.m.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Friday
Eastern Oregon at College of Idaho, 6:30 p.m.

Saturday
Blue Mountain at Walla Walla Community College, 4 p.m.

Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, 7 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Friday
Eastern Oregon at College of Idaho, 4:30 p.m.

Saturday
Blue Mountain at Walla Walla, 2 p.m.

Football

NFL

Divisional Playoffs
Saturday, Jan. 10

Baltimore at New England, 1:35 p.m. (NBC)

Carolina at Seattle, 5:15 p.m. (FOX)

Sunday, Jan. 11

Dallas at Green Bay, 10:05 a.m. (FOX)

Indianapolis at Denver, 1:40 p.m. (CBS)

NCAA

Saturday, Jan. 10

Medal of Honor Bowl

American vs. National, 11:30 a.m.

Monday, Jan. 12

College Football Championship

Ohio State (13-1) vs. Oregon (13-1), 5:30 p.m. (ESPN)

Saturday, Jan. 17

East-West Shrine Classic

East vs. West, 1 p.m. (NFLN)

NFLPA Collegiate Bowl

National vs. American, 1 p.m. (ESPN2)

Saturday, Jan. 24

Senior Bowl

North vs. South, 1 p.m. (NFLN)

Basketball

NBA

Eastern Conference
Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	24	10	.706	—
Brooklyn	16	19	.457	8½
Boston	12	21	.364	11½
Philadelphia	5	29	.147	19
New York	5	33	.132	21

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	27	8	.771	—
Washington	24	11	.686	3
Miami	15	20	.429	12
Charlotte	13	24	.351	15
Orlando	13	25	.342	15½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	25	11	.694	—
Cleveland	19	17	.528	6
Milwaukee	19	18	.514	6½
Indiana	14	22	.389	11
Detroit	12	23	.343	12½

Western Conference
Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	25	10	.714	—
Dallas	26	11	.703	—
Houston	24	11	.686	1

San Antonio

21 15 .583 4½

New Orleans 17 18 .486 8

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Portland	27	8	.771	—
Oklahoma City	17	18	.486	10
Denver	16	20	.444	11½
Utah	13	23	.361	14½
Minnesota	5	29	.147	21½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Golden State	27	5	.844	—
L.A. Clippers	23	12	.657	5½
Phoenix	22	16	.579	8
Sacramento	14	20	.412	14
L.A. Lakers	11	24	.314	17½

Wednesday's Games

Milwaukee 97, Philadelphia 77

Washington 101, New York 91

Charlotte 98, New Orleans 93

Houston 105, Cleveland 94

Atlanta 96, Memphis 86

Boston 89, Brooklyn 81

Utah 97, Chicago 77

Detroit 108, Dallas 95

Denver 93, Orlando 90

Phoenix 113, Minnesota 111

Oklahoma City at Sacramento, (n)

Indiana at Golden State, (n)

L.A. Lakers at L.A. Clippers (n)

Thursday's Games

Charlotte at Toronto, 4:30 p.m.

Houston at New York, 5 p.m.

Miami at Portland, 7:30 p.m.

NCAA

Top 25 Fared
Wednesday

(2) Duke 73, Wake Forest 65

(3) Virginia 61, NC State 51

(4) Wisconsin 62, Purdue 55

(5) Louisville 58, Clemson 52

(9) Utah 74, Colorado 49

Illinois 64, (11) Maryland 56

(12) Kansas 56, (21) Baylor 55

(15) Wichita State 63, Bradley 43

Xavier 69, (19) Seton Hall 58

(20) VCU 71, Davidson 65

Pac-12

California at USC, (n)

Today

San Francisco at (6) Gonzaga, 6 p.m.

(7) Arizona at Oregon, 7:30 p.m.

(25) Old Dominion at Marshall, 4 p.m.

Pac-12

Arizona State at Oregon State, 6 p.m.

Stanford at UCLA, 6 p.m.

Hockey

NHL

Eastern Conference
Atlantic Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	42	26	12	4	56	138	110

Montreal 40 26 12 2 54 110 93

Detroit 40 21 10 9 51 113 101

Boston 41 20 15 6 46 107 110

Toronto 41 21 17 3 45 132 128

Florida 37 17 11 9 43 87 97

Ottawa 39 16 15 8 40 103 107

Buffalo 41 14 24 3 31 78 140

Metropolitan Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Pittsburgh	40	24	10	6	54	120	97
N.Y. Islanders	40	26	13	1	53	123	112
Washington	39	21	11	7	49	118	101
N.Y. Rangers	36	21	11	4	46	113	90
Columbus	38	18	17	3	39	100	121
Philadelphia	40	15	18	7	37	108	121
New Jersey	42	15	20	7	37	94	118
Carolina	40	12	24	4	28	79	105

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central Division

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	39	26	9	4	56	11	