

## NFL

## Seahawks to play in London for first time, will face Raiders

By **ROB HARRIS**  
Associated Press

LONDON — The NFL is heading to a new destination in London, and the first match-up at English Premier League club Tottenham will be the Oakland Raiders against the Seattle Seahawks in October.

That's if the 60,000-plus capacity stadium, which has been designed to accommodate soccer and NFL, is completed in time for Week 6.

While Tottenham is sure that building work is on schedule on the White Hart Lane site where its previous stadium was demolished last year, the NFL has contingency plans to move the Oct. 14 game to Wembley Stadium.

The home of the England

national soccer team is where the NFL will be staging another two games after Raiders-Seahawks match-up, giving London three consecutive weeks of American football for the first time.

The Philadelphia Eagles will play the Jacksonville Jaguars, and the Tennessee Titans will take on the Los Angeles Chargers. The NFL is yet to decide which game will be on Oct. 21 in Week 7 and which slots into Week 8 on Oct. 28.

"It's a great learning for us, it's another test for us," Mark Waller, the NFL's executive vice president of international, said Thursday at the site of Tottenham's new stadium. "If we were ever to put a franchise in the UK we would need to know we can do three consecutive



In this Aug. 31, 2017 file photo, Seattle Seahawks' Cyril Grayson Jr. (13) runs in front of Oakland Raiders defensive back Marcus McWilson (28) during an NFL preseason game in Oakland, Calif.

weekends."

The NFL had planned to stage two games in the 2018 season at Tottenham, which was runner-up in the Premier League last season.

But Tottenham, which is using Wembley as its own temporary home this season, doesn't want the burden of two NFL fixtures when it is still settling into its new,

unnamed stadium.

"We have created something very unique," Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy said at the announcement of fixtures. "We still have another six or seven months of really hard work of construction."

Tottenham has signed a 10-year contract for games with the NFL.

"We very much hope there will be a franchise in London and we would very much like this stadium to be used for that club," Levy said. "We haven't assumed there is going to be a franchise. It's very much our desire."

The new stadium was designed with NFL-sized changing rooms and to ensure the grass soccer pitch can be retracted and kept under lights below the stands

when the artificial surface is required for NFL.

Waller said they "don't want to alienate" fans of Tottenham's rivals by being so closely associated with one Premier League team.

"We will need to get that right," Waller said. "But we are also playing at Wembley so there will be plenty of other opportunities for fans to go elsewhere as well. It also puts an onus on us to ensure we are thoughtful about how we manage all our relationships."

By the end of the year, 29 of the NFL's 32 franchises will have played in London since regular-season games were first played in the British capital in 2007.

"When we played the first game here we had no idea if we were ever coming back," Waller said.

## Titans, Jaguars aim to show they're the real deal in AFC

By **BARRY WILNER**  
Associated Press

The general belief is there are four contenders for the Super Bowl in the AFC, two in the AFC.

Let's see if Tennessee or Jacksonville can prove that theory wrong this weekend.

Both AFC South representatives are significant underdogs, the Titans at New England on Saturday night, the Jaguars at Pittsburgh on Sunday. For weeks, it's been presumed Steelers vs. Patriots will decide who goes to the Super Bowl from the conference.

The Titans and Jaguars want to have their say.

"They're the champs and these are the types of teams you've got to beat if you want to be the champs," says Tennessee coach Mike Mularkey, who is 0-5 against the Patriots. "You've got to beat these teams at their place."

Jacksonville already has done that, routing the Steelers at Heinz Field 30-9 in Week 5.

"We did beat them the first time, so to have all the

## AFC Divisional Playoffs



• **Saturday, 5:15 p.m. (CBS)**  
• at Gillette Stadium



• **Sunday, 10 a.m. (CBS)**  
• at Heinz Field

## NFC Divisional Playoffs



• **Saturday, 1:35 p.m. (NBC)**  
• at Lincoln Financial Field



• **Sunday, 1:40 p.m. (FOX)**  
• at US Bank Stadium

confidence coming out of there is interesting," Jaguars DT Malik Jackson says. "They got a bye week, so they're probably feeling really confident. We'll see Sunday."

Tennessee (10-7) at New England (13-3), Saturday

All the numbers favor the Patriots extending their record of consecutive title games reached to seven. They are, by far, the more experienced side: 14 Patriots players have played at least 10 playoff games. That's more such players than the 11 other 2017 playoff teams combined (13). Tom Brady has a 6-1 career record against the Titans, throwing for 13 TDs and one interception. He's 11-2 in 13 divisional-round games since 2002 and has completed 316 of 509 passes for 3,700 yards

and 28 TDs in those games.

And amid reported turmoil involving Brady, owner Robert Kraft and coach Bill Belichick, the quarterback isn't likely to lose focus.

"We do what we always do. We show up to work and try to do the best we can do," the All-Pro quarterback says. "We know there's a lot at stake and I think everyone's put a lot into it. It doesn't really matter what happened outside of this facility."

Tennessee has lost six in a row to New England, but comes off a stirring second-half rally at Kansas City from 18 points down, the largest postseason comeback on the road in the Super Bowl era.

**Jacksonville (11-6) at Pittsburgh (13-3), Sunday**  
Ben Roethlisberger had the worst game of his career

in that October loss to the Jags. Pittsburgh lost only once after that, at home to the Patriots in a game that decided the AFC's top seed.

While Roethlisberger probably will play far better than that, the biggest challenge for Jacksonville could be stopping Le'Veon Bell in the running game. The Jaguars ranked first stopping the pass, but 21st against the run.

"I feel great, especially not playing these last two weeks, not going to (training) camp earlier in the year," Bell says. "I can't complain. I like where I am. This is the freshest I've ever been going into the playoffs so we'll see how it goes."

Pittsburgh also gets back receiver Antonio Brown, like Bell an All-Pro this season. Jacksonville needs far

better passing from Blake Bortles. He gained more yards running than throwing vs. Buffalo in the wild-card round.

**Atlanta (11-6) at Philadelphia (13-3), Saturday**

Although Philly is the No. 1 NFC seed, the Falcons are favored. Part of that owes to Atlanta's impressive work in winning at the Los Angeles Rams last week. Part has to do with the Falcons nearly winning the Super Bowl last February.

And part has to do with Nick Foles being the Eagles' quarterback instead of the injured Carson Wentz.

Foles, though, has had some success in Philadelphia.

"It's just going out there and playing and staying in the zone and trusting my instincts," Foles says. "I've

played this game a long time. There's a reason I've been able to do what I've been able to do. When I play my best and I'm most comfortable, I just go out there and play."

By contrast, Atlanta's Matt Ryan has a passer rating of at least 100 in five straight postseason games, tied for the second-longest streak in league history. Only Joe Montana had a longer string with eight.

**New Orleans (12-5) at Minnesota (13-3), Sunday**

Minnesota easily handled New Orleans in the season opener, eons ago in NFL terms. The Vikings had a different quarterback then in Sam Bradford. Case Keenum has put together a superb stretch of games since replacing the injured Bradford.

The Saints' RB tandem of Mark Ingram and rookie Alvin Kamara wasn't quite in place yet, either. And the New Orleans defense didn't come to fruition until Week 3.

Minnesota's D is balanced from front to back, so how Drew Brees deals with it could be the decider here.

## Golf

## Kirk takes lead, Spieth takes late tumble to start Sony Open

By **DOUG FERGUSON**  
Associated Press

HONOLULU — Chris Kirk finished strong at the Sony Open, making three birdies over his last four holes for a 7-under 63 and a one-shot lead.

Jordan Spieth wasn't quite so fortunate.

Spieth hit four trees with four shots on the par-4 eighth hole — his 17th of the round — an episode that began with his tee shot caroming off a trunk and into a ditch. He wound up with a quadruple-bogey 8, and even a pitch from the rough short of the ninth green that stopped inches away from birdie wasn't enough to appease him.

He made eight birdies and shot 69.

That was even more surprising than Thursday a year ago, when he had a 65 and was six shots behind Justin Thomas, who shot 59 in the same group.



Jordan Spieth drives off the seventh tee during the first round of the Sony Open on Thursday in Honolulu.

Spieth declined media requests after he signed his card, instead taking 15 minutes to sign autographs.

Kirk played bogey-free on a gorgeous day along the shores just up the road from Waikiki Beach and had a

one-shot lead over Vaughn Taylor, Kyle Stanley and Talor Gooch among the early starters at Waialae Country Club.

Thomas, the defending champion who broke the PGA Tour's scoring record

last year, played in the afternoon.

Kirk had only one top 10 last year — his final even of the year in the RSM Classic at Sea Island — and nearly two months off didn't appear to half any momentum. He might have been rusty, but not when it comes to island life.

Because of the chilly weather in the South, Kirk brought his family out to Oahu a week ago Monday. He practiced a little in the morning at Ko Olina and hung out with his wife and children in the afternoon. He realized how little golf he had played during the short offseason when he reached into his bag and found golf balls that he had marked for the final round at Sea Island.

"I've probably been off long enough now that you never know what's going to happen," he said. "I really had no expectations whether I was going to play good or bad after having some time off.

But this is a golf course that I've traditionally done pretty well on, and a place that I really love. So you always feel like it's possible."

He hit wedge to about 3 feet on the 15th and 16th, and that final birdie on the par-5 18th was a two-putt from 10 feet.

Spieth played well enough to be right there with Kirk except for a couple of long three-putt bogeys.

And one tee shot that led to plenty of calamity.

His drive on No. 8 was not terribly offline, and the trees to the left are a common spot. This one hit the trunk of a tree and tumbled down a wide (and dry) ditch about 8 feet below the fairway. He studied his options. He found none.

He could have dropped it with a penalty stroke, but there was nowhere to go. His plan was to hit out of the sandy base of the ditch toward the trees closer to the fairway. If it hit the trees and

dropped out, he would have been closer than the drop and at least had an opening to the putting surface.

It hit one of the smaller branches and came back toward him, about a yard short of go back down into the ditch. For his third shot, he had a gap toward the front of the green (the pin was back left), but out of a fluffly lie, the ball came out high and hit more trees, bouncing left and settle near another tree.

Next, he had to go under the tree in front of him and over a tree guarding the green. He only got the first part right.

At his point, he was lying 4 and was only a few yards away from the second tee, waiting for another group to tee off. His only choice there was to dump it into the bunker, where the sand was thin. He hit that out to 30 feet and two putts later had a snowman (8).

In Hawaii, of all places.

## NBA

## Scheduling issues hamper NBA's plans for European expansion

By **MATTIAS KAREN**  
Associated Press

LONDON — If Adam Silver learned one thing from his latest trip to London, it's that the appetite for more NBA games remains huge around Europe — and the rest of the world.

And while the league commissioner would love to satisfy that appetite, there is still an Atlantic-sized gap between the NBA's desire for overseas expansion and what's actually doable.

So while the NFL continues to stage multiple regular-season games each year in London — albeit cutting the number from four to three next season — Euro-



pean basketball fans may have to continue to settle for just one.

"We're considering bringing additional games to Europe," Silver said ahead of Thursday's game between the Boston Celtics and Philadelphia 76ers at the O2 Arena. "It's just the logistical challenges for us are so much greater (than for the NFL). The demand is there and the interest is there. It's really more a question of our schedule and whether we can make it work."

The NBA has been staging regular-season games at the O2 since 2011

in an attempt to grow the game both in Britain and worldwide. And the interest in this latest edition was sky-high. Tickets sold out in under an hour and were going for multiple times their face value from online re-sellers, with a multitude of soccer stars and other celebrities sitting court-side.

And it was clear from Silver's pregame news conference that other countries want an up-close look at the spectacle as well. Journalists from Australia, France, Germany, Turkey and Africa all had the same question: when will the NBA bring regular-season games to their part of the world?

"We would love to do

it," was Silver's universal answer — before outlining the scheduling difficulties that are currently hampering any such plans. The Celtics and 76ers, for instance, both had at least four days off before and after this game in order to cope with the travel. That's one reason the Celtics have played the most games of any team in the league so far — 44 — as their schedule was compressed to make room for this trip. The 76ers have played the fewest games of any team — 39 — and have the busy part of their season yet to come.

"When you build some buffer around this game in the middle of the season, it requires compressing the

schedule in other parts of the season. And the more teams we bring, the more scheduling difficulties we have," Silver said. "This game, as you all know, sold out in less than an hour, and the reason it even took 52 minutes was the limitation of technology in terms of how fast people could enter their credit cards and buy the tickets. We could easily sell out two games, three games, four games."

Silver pointed to state-of-the-art arenas in Paris and Berlin as possible venues for future regular-season games, but said he couldn't offer a "specific calendar" for when it might happen.

Sixers center Joel Embiid

hopes it happens soon, though. The Cameroon native said he loved the experience of playing internationally, despite having a sub-par game with 16 points in Philadelphia's 114-103 loss.

"For me to come here, I appreciate these types of moments. I'm really (upset with) myself that I didn't have a good game," Embiid said. "I really want to come back to change that. But I feel that it's a good opportunity, and the last couple of days that I've been here I loved it. I hope in the future we get the opportunity to come back for another game so I can have a better one and win the game."