

Who Has the Edge On D?

High-flying offenses will likely be the topic of discussion heading into Super Bowl LII, but it's the underrated defenses that may well get the last laugh.

Some of the most memorable Super Bowl contests have featured unbelievable defensive play — whether it be James Harrison's 100-yard interception return in Pittsburgh's Super Bowl XLII victory or Malcolm Butler's goal line interception just a few years ago to help New England beat Seattle in Super Bowl XLIX.

Who will be the defensive star this year?

PHILADELPHIA DEFENSE

Defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz had a tall task in 2017, especially during the final quarter of the season. Once MVP candidate Carson Wentz was lost for the year on offense, Philadelphia turned to its defense for consistent play.

Defensive tackle Fletcher Cox and safety Malcolm Jenkins — the Eagles Pro Bowl picks — shouldered the burden and helped turn in an impressive playoff performance.

Philadelphia has allowed only 33 points total in its past four games, including 17 points through two postseason



TECH. SOURCE: CARON OELRICH / WIKIMEDIA / CREATIVE COMMONS

contests. The Eagles forced three against Minnesota in the NFC title game and will look for a similar performance to unseat New England.

Other players to watch: Defensive end Brandon Graham had an outstanding season, and cornerbacks Ronald Darby and Jalen Mills have been consistently strong, shutting down big-play wide receivers.

NEW ENGLAND DEFENSE

Patriots defensive coordinator Matt Patricia is likely coaching his last game as a Patriot, as it has been announced he will take over the Detroit Lions head coach job in 2018. Patricia has been a master of building solid defenses without a lot of star power.

While 2017 wasn't the best defensive unit of his career —

the Patriots ranked 29th in total defense — they came up big in the playoffs on their way to the team's 10th Super Bowl appearance.

New England's team defense approach shined in the second half of its win over Jacksonville in the AFC championship game. The Patriots stifled the Jaguars' offense in the final 30 minutes of the game to advance with a 24-20

victory.

Linebackers Kyle Van Noy and James Harrison have been solid at pressuring opposing quarterbacks, while the secondary lead by safety Devin McCourty has held its own against big-time quarterbacks.

The unit will have to be strong against Foles and the Eagles, which have shown a consistent ability to light up the scoreboard.