

GAMES AT A GLANCE



**Washington (11-6)
at Seattle (13-3)**
4:30 p.m. today
WXIN-Channel 59



Opening line: Seahawks by 9.
Record vs. spread: Redskins 10-6-1; Seahawks 9-6-1
Series record: Redskins lead 9-4
Most recent meeting: Redskins 20, Seahawks 17, Oct. 2 at Washington
Last week: Redskins beat Bucs 17-10; Seahawks had bye, lost to Packers 23-17 in Week 17
Redskins offense: Overall (11), rush (7), pass (21)
Redskins defense: Overall (9), rush (13), pass (10)
Seahawks offense: Overall (2), rush (3), pass (13)
Seahawks defense: Overall (16T), rush (5), pass (25)
Key matchup: Washington RB Clinton Portis vs. Seattle run defense. While Seattle has the NFL's top rusher in Shaun Alexander, Portis could play a bigger role in this game. Portis rushed for franchise single-season record 1,516 yards and had five 100-yard rushing games to coincide with Washington's five-game winning streak to make the playoffs. Last week, the Redskins had 95 yards rushing, with Portis getting 53 yards in 16 carries. Portis left the game periodically after his sore shoulders got banged up even more. The Seahawks rank fifth in NFL, allowing 94.4 yards rushing per game, and seventh in points, surrendering 16.9 per game. The 120 yards of offense generated last week by the Redskins set an NFL record for fewest yards by a winning team in the postseason. Washington

needs more out of Portis if it is going to beat top-seeded Seattle. The No. 1 seed in the NFC is 15-0 since the current playoff format was instituted in 1990.
Streaks, stats and notes: Washington has won six straight after being written off at 5-6. ... Coach Joe Gibbs has a 17-5 playoff record, 5-3 on the road. ... Redskins have a 23-15 record in the postseason. ... In five career games vs. Seattle, QB Mark Brunell has 95.5 passer rating with seven TDs vs. two INTs, and a 63.0 completion rate (97 of 154). ... WR Santana Moss (84 catches, 1,483 yards) led NFL with 10 catches of 40-plus yards (17.7 yards per catch). ... Chris Cooley finished fourth among TEs with 71 receptions (774 yards). ... S Sean Taylor was fined \$17,000 for spitting in the face of Tampa Bay RB Michael Pittman last week. ... CB Shawn Springs, who missed the Tampa Bay game with a groin injury, said he will play. ... DE Renaldo Wynn, who broke his arm against the Buccaneers, was placed on injured reserve. LB Nick McNeil fills his spot. ... Seattle won 11 straight after losing to Washington on Oct. 2, posting a franchise-best 13-3 record. ... Seattle is 22-4 at Qwest Field since the end of the 2002 season, including 8-0 this season. Seattle and Denver are tied for the longest current home winning streak, 10 straight. ... Coach Mike Holmgren is 9-8 in the postseason, including 0-3 with the Seahawks. ... Alexander set NFL single-season record with 28 TDs.



**New England (11-6)
at Denver (13-3)**
8 p.m. today
WISH-Channel 8



Opening line: Broncos by 3
Record vs. spread: Patriots 9-8; Broncos 11-4-1
Series record: Broncos lead 24-15
Most recent meeting: Broncos 28, Patriots 20, Oct. 16 at Denver
Last week: Patriots beat Jaguars 28-3. Denver had bye, beat Chargers 23-7 in Week 17
Patriots offense: Overall (7), rush (24), pass (2)
Patriots defense: Overall (26), rush (8), pass (31)
Broncos offense: Overall (5), rush (2), pass (18)
Broncos defense: Overall (15), rush (2), pass (29)
Key matchup: Poised vs. unsteady. New England QB Tom Brady vs. Denver QB Jake Plummer. In past five playoffs, Brady has 11 touchdowns versus one interception for cumulative passer rating of 107.9 in that span. Brady is 10-0 in the playoffs and owns lowest postseason interception ratio in league history: 331 attempts, three interceptions for 0.91 percent. Brady is coming off his best season with 4,110 yards passing. He set a career mark for attempts (530) and fell percentage points shy of a new high in passer rating (92.3). Since Week 6, Plummer has reached the third-best passer rating in league (97.7). Plummer passed for 3,366 yards, completing 60.7 percent (277 of 456) with 18 touchdowns and seven interceptions this year. Though Plummer has transformed into a mature, confident,

dependable quarterback, he hasn't shown it in the postseason.
Streaks, stats and notes: New England has an NFL record of 10 consecutive playoff victories. ... Patriots are 17-10 in the postseason. ... Patriots have held three of their past six opponents without a touchdown. ... The Patriots had 13 sacks in the final three regular-season games, then added six against Jacksonville. LB Willie McGinest set two postseason records in that game: 4.5 sacks in a single game and 16 in his career. ... Coach Bill Belichick has all-time best playoff record of 11-1 (.917) and is 16-1 (.941) in games after Christmas Day since joining Patriots in 2000. Patriots return much healthier since the first time they faced the Broncos. Defensive end Richard Seymour, RBs Corey Dillon and Kevin Faulk and WR Troy Brown missed that game but are back. ... Since 2001, when the Patriots won their first Super Bowl, no team has beaten them twice in a season. That includes all their AFC East opponents, as well as St. Louis (2001) and Pittsburgh (2004), who both played them in the regular and postseason in the same year. ... Adam Vinatieri (24) stands No. 2 in all-time playoffs FGs made (Gary Anderson, 32). ... Denver, 11-2 at home in the playoffs, will be hosting its first playoff game since 1998. ... Denver and Seattle are tied for the longest current home winning streak, 10 straight. ... Denver finished the regular season with four straight wins.



**Carolina (12-5)
at Chicago (11-5)**
4:30 p.m. Sunday
WXIN-Channel 59



Opening line: Bears by 3
Record vs. spread: Panthers 9-7-1; Bears 9-5-1
Series record: Tied 2-2
Most recent meeting: Bears 13, Panthers 3, Nov. 20 at Chicago
Last week: Panthers beat Giants 23-0; Bears had bye, lost to Vikings 34-10 in Week 17
Panthers offense: Overall (22), rush (19), pass (17)
Panthers defense: Overall (3), rush (4), pass (9)
Bears offense: Overall (29), rush (8), pass (31)
Bears defense: Overall (2), rush (11), pass (5)
Key matchup: Carolina's defense vs. Chicago's defense. Two of the best defenses in the NFL meet again. Last week, Carolina became the first road team to score a postseason shutout since 1980, holding the Giants, the NFL's No. 4 offense (361.7, 422 points) to 132 total yards. The Panthers' defense forced five turnovers as they scored their third straight road win in the postseason. Carolina's defense ranked third, allowing 41.0 red zone TD percentage (16 TDs, 39 trips) and did not allow red-zone possession vs. Giants. Carolina's secondary finished with 23 interceptions this season, fourth in the league. Chicago's defense was ranked second overall (281.8) and fifth against the pass (179.5). The defense led the league, allowing a 32.5 red zone TD percentage (40 possessions, 13 TDs), and tied for second with 24 interceptions. The Bears allowed 61 points at home, the

fewest by any club in a season since the 16-game schedule was instituted in 1978. On Nov. 20, Chicago sacked Carolina quarterback Jake Delhomme eight times, and Nathan Vasher had two interceptions to set up a touchdown and a field goal.
Streaks, stats and notes: Carolina has a 5-2 playoff record. ... In five career playoff games, Delhomme has passer rating of 105.1, seven TDs vs. one INT and 1,127 yards passing. Delhomme passed for 3,421 yards and tied for the NFC-lead with 24 TD passes. ... RB DeShaun Foster, who rushed for a team playoff mark of 151 yards, last week, averages 5.0 yards per carry in five career playoff games (69-347). ... WR Steve Smith set franchise records with an NFL-best 1,563 yards and 103 receptions, tied for most in league. Smith, who tied for the NFL lead with 12 TDs, caught a team-record 14 passes for 169 yards in the most recent game against Chicago. ... Panthers have a plus-16 turnover differential. ... WR Ricky Proehl averaged a career-best 17.6 yards per catch in regular season (25-441) and averages 16.6 yards per catch (19-316) in 12 career playoff games. ... DE Julius Peppers posted the third 10-sack (10.5) season of his four-year career. ... Chicago is 14-15 in the playoffs, including a 9-6 record at home. ... Lovie Smith, AP Coach of Year, makes playoff head coaching debut. ... QB Rex Grossman makes first career playoff start and has led team to five wins in eight career games. ... RB Thomas Jones rushed for 1,335 yards and joined Walter Payton as only players in team history with 1,300-yard season.

Dynasty defense difficult

Broncos know what New England faces

By EDDIE PELLIS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER

Denver's quest for a third straight Super Bowl title was over almost as soon as it began. John Elway had retired, paving the way for Brian Griese. Terrell Davis suffered a knee injury while making a tackle on an interception return. Shannon Sharpe soon joined Davis on the bench with an injury. The Broncos started 0-4.

"We weren't even close, for a number of reasons," coach Mike Shanahan said.

The New England Patriots visit the Broncos tonight for a playoff game that could move them two wins away from a third straight championship.

It's an unprecedented feat and, much like hitting .400 in baseball or breaking 60 on the PGA Tour, it has long stood as one of the most elusive of challenges in sports.

And while every sports fan knows what an amazing feat it would be, nobody quite relates like the Denver players who were around in 1999, the most recent time any team in the league had a chance.

"It's impossible," defensive lineman Trevor Pryce said. "I have one statement: I went to the Pro Bowl the year the Ravens won it. Ray Lewis was at the table, talking crazy about repeats and three-peats.

"I said, 'OK, remember this. You've got an X on your back. We had it twice. It's hard to win it. You will not win it again.' And they didn't."

In one sense, the Patriots have been lucky in that they've been able to keep their core together and still have the means to fill in missing pieces. Part of that is because some of their best veterans, such as Troy Brown and Tedy Bruschi, have been willing to play for less in New England than they could have gotten elsewhere.

But if it's not one thing, it's another.

This season, injuries almost did in the Patriots. Bruschi, Richard Seymour, Rodney Harrison, Corey Dillon, Matt Light, Kevin Faulk. All are key cogs who missed significant time.

When the Patriots came to Denver for a reg-



AP PHOTO
New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady puts on his practice jersey during the team's workout in Foxborough, Mass., on Wednesday. The Patriots visit the Denver Broncos for a playoff game tonight.

ular-season game Oct. 16, they barely resembled playoff material, let alone a dynasty.

A weakened defense and a struggling offensive line that caused Tom Brady to take a beating were a big reason they fell behind 28-3. Their championship mentality is a big reason they rallied and nearly tied it before falling 28-20.

"There are a lot of things that are different" between now and then, Brady said. "I don't want to sit up here and rattle off all the things that I think we can accomplish. We have to just play better football."

Since then, they certainly have.

During the final six games of the regular season, they allowed only 2.9 yards per run. Brady has thrown for a career-high 4,110 yards. They won six of seven before falling in the regular-season finale, a game in which coach Bill Belichick rested many of his starters.

Still, all those stats simply speak to the bigger point, that the Patriots are champions, they know how to win, and they know how to do it with everyone else targeting them.

"It's why they are what they are," Shanahan said. "They've got a chance to do something pretty special."

Only six players remain from Denver's most recent Super Bowl team, and much has been made of the fact that the Broncos haven't won a playoff game in seven years and haven't hosted one in that span, either.

Gone is Mile High Stadium, the site of Denver's most recent home playoff win, 23-10 against the Jets in the 1998 AFC championship game. In its place stands Invesco Field, the newer, cushier and, many think, not quite-as-loud replacement.

The tandem of Mike Anderson and Tatum Bell are now in the position held by Terrell Davis. Sharpe, one of the game's best, has been replaced by the not-well-known tandem of Job Putzler and Stephen Alexander.

And Elway? After Shanahan's experiment with Griese failed, Jake Plummer became the heir apparent.

Plummer appreciates what the Patriots are trying to do.

"They're going after something that has never been done," Plummer said. "Everyone wants to be the greatest, and if they go out and win another one, it will be hard to say that they're not the greatest dynasty ever, as far as the NFL."

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www.centergrovefootball.com

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Center Grove Soccer Club 422-9555 www.centergrovesoccer.org

Center Grove Wrestling Club 887-1424

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