

HOW WE SEE IT

Daily Journal staff members predict the outcome of the three NFL playoff games this weekend not involving the Indianapolis Colts:

Rick Morwick (4-0) Sports editor

Philadelphia (11-6) at New Orleans (10-6)
It would be unfair to say the Eagles haven't missed a beat without Donovan McNabb, but they've been pretty darn good with Jeff Garcia. New Orleans has been the surprise of the league with Drew Brees and first-year NFL head coach Sean Payton. Philly has the post-season experience and the momentum, but New Orleans has a confident Brees and an emotional home-field advantage.

Saints 28, Eagles 17

Seattle (10-7) at Chicago (13-3)

Regardless of how many fumbles and interceptions Rex Grossman serves up during the first quarter en route to a negative quarterback rating, the Bears' defense carries the day. Brian Griese picks up the victory in relief. Turn out the lights, Seattle. The playoff party's over.

Bears 27, Seahawks 10

New England (13-4) at San Diego (14-2)

What fun are predictions if you don't go out on an occasional limb? Hang on, here we go. LaDainian Tomlinson has certainly carried the Chargers a long way. But the guy who hands off to him is a first-year starter. The guy directing the Pats' offense has three Super Bowl rings. Philip Rivers vs. Tom Brady? I'll take Brady. Did I mention coaches? Marty Schottenheimer's perpetual post-season failures are well-documented. Bill Belichick's playoff mastery is legendary. And to think the Colts could have hosted the AFC Championship after all.

Patriots 31, Chargers 10

Paul Hoffman (3-1) Special publications editor

Philadelphia (11-6) at New Orleans (10-6)
Newcomers Drew Brees and Reggie Bush have been a big hit in New Orleans. Their talents on offense helped lead a revitalization of the Saints, who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina last year and have been in the playoffs only once in the past 14 years. The Saints will rain on the Eagles' parade.

Saints 33, Eagles 20

Seattle (10-7) at Chicago (14-2)

Remember that board game that was popular with pre-teen girls back in the '70s, Mystery Date? "Will he be a dream? Or a dud?" Then, either some hunky guy or a dweeb shows up at the door. In the 2006 Chicago Bears version of the game, Rex Grossman plays both the dream and the dud. You just never know which one you're going to get. With his job on the line, let's assume he rebounds with a decent game.

Bears 17, Seahawks 13

New England (13-4) at San Diego (14-2)

With the L Train leading the way, the Chargers are good, and they have plenty more than just the NFL MVP gobbling up yards and touchdowns. LaDainian Tomlinson may be the sweetest piece of the Chargers team. But there is plenty of help. If Marty Schottenheimer allows offensive coordinator Cam Cameron to make the calls, they may avoid Marty's penchant for an all-too-conservative playoff game plan. But you can never count out Tom Brady and Bill Belichick.

Chargers 24, Patriots 23

Jeff Decker (3-1) Assistant sports editor

Philadelphia (11-6) at New Orleans (10-6)
It feels almost blasphemous to even think that the Saints might not win this game. Sure, New Orleans (the city and the team) is the feel-good story of the year. But has anyone noticed that the Saints seem to falter every time we're ready to proclaim them the best team in the NFC?

Eagles 24, Saints 20

Seattle (10-7) at Chicago (14-2)

As bad as Rex Grossman is, and as poorly as the Bears' defense played down the stretch, and as bad as Chicago's track record is in recent home playoff games, it's hard to imagine Seattle winning this game. The Seahawks wouldn't even have been in Chicago if not for the slippery fingers of Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo.

Bears 17, Seahawks 10

New England (13-4) at San Diego (14-2)

In terms of talent, this one shouldn't even be close. The Chargers, on paper, are superior in almost every way. But take a look at two key categories. At coach, New England's Bill Belichick has a far more impressive playoffs résumé than San Diego's Marty Schottenheimer. And at quarterback, no one needs to be reminded of Tom Brady's post-season success. Philip Rivers played well most of the season for the Chargers, but he struggled down the stretch and has no big-game experience.

Patriots 31, Chargers 27

Matthew Glensk (3-1) Sports writer

Philadelphia (11-6) at New Orleans (10-6)
This is the party Saints fans have waited for. As electric as the atmosphere was for the Saints' home opener, expect twice as much electricity this time around. Philadelphia might be the hottest team in the NFC, but with a banged-up defense, the Saints' offensive firepower will be too much to overcome.

Saints 31, Eagles 17

Seattle (10-7) at Chicago (13-3)

First, I'm a Bears fan. Have been my whole life. And Rex Grossman scares the orange and blue right off my jersey. But Seattle isn't what it was a year ago. The Bears embarrassed the Shaun Alexander-less Seahawks 37-6 earlier in the year, and Seattle struggles on the road. Rex, don't let me down.

Bears 20, Seahawks 13

New England (13-4) at San Diego (14-2)

I don't pick against New England in the playoffs. San Diego has been the strongest team throughout the season, but look no further than the quarterback position to see the disparity between the teams. Philip Rivers: zero post-season starts. Tom Brady: three Super Bowls. Can you say Pats-Colts AFC title game?

Patriots 24, Chargers 23



Philadelphia (11-6)
at New Orleans (8-6)
8 tonight,
WXIN-Channel 59



Lines pave way for Eagles, Saints

By BRETT MARTEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS

On separate practice fields this week, hundreds of miles and a time zone away from each other, Drew Brees and Jeff Garcia both called their offensive lines tremendous.

The two seasoned quarterbacks weren't referring to the size of the players who have cleared the way for their success this season: They were praising the effort by their front lines.

For all the playmakers the New Orleans Saints and Philadelphia Eagles have in the backfield and at wide receiver, Brees and Garcia know they are fortunate to have continuity and consistency on their offensive lines.

The line has helped Brees and the Saints (10-6) secure the second seed in the NFC playoffs, good for a first-round bye and a home game against the Eagles (11-6) tonight in the divisional round.

Going into the season, the Saints' offensive line was believed to be among the team's biggest potential weaknesses, not just by observers but by the linemen themselves.

"We definitely were the question mark on the team, at least on offense," center Jeff Faine said. "We had this kind of a ragtag group."

Faine, in his own words, had been run out of Cleveland. He ended up in New Orleans after a draft-day trade last spring.

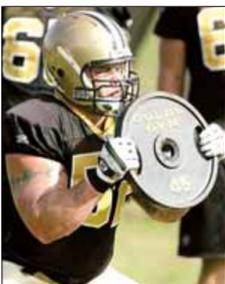
Jammal Brown, the Saints' top pick in 2005, was expected to be good someday, but in only his second year he was moved from right tackle to left, meaning he'd have to face some of the best defensive ends in the league while protecting the right-handed Brees' blind side.

Guard Jahri Evans is a rookie who played at Division II Bloomsburg last season. Right tackle Jon Stinchcomb had never started and missed all of last year with a torn patellar tendon.

And guard Jamar Nesbit, now in his eighth season, hadn't been a full-time starter for several years.

Philadelphia's offensive line was not expected to be a weakness. But good lines don't always hold together, driven apart sometimes by adversity or injury.

Veteran tackles Jon Runyan and William (Tra) Thomas, center Jamaal Jackson and guards Shawn Andrews and Todd Herremans have started all 17 games. They allowed only 28 sacks.



AP PHOTO
New Orleans Saints center Jeff Faine came to the team in a draft-day deal last year.

GAME AT A GLANCE

Opening line: Saints by 4
Record vs. spread: Eagles 8-7-2; Saints 10-6
Series record: Eagles lead 15-9
Playoffs record: Eagles 17-16; Saints 1-5
Most recent meeting: Saints 27, Eagles 24, Oct. 15 at New Orleans
Last week: Eagles beat Giants 23-20 (wild-card game); Saints lost to Panthers 31-21 in Week 17
Eagles' offense: Overall (2), rush (11), pass (3)
Eagles' defense: Overall (15), rush (26), pass (9)
Saints' offense: Overall (1), rush (19), pass (1)
Saints' defense: Overall (11), rush (23), pass (3)
Streaks, stats and notes: Philadelphia and New Orleans both went from worst in their division last season to first this season. ... Philadelphia has won six straight games. ... The Eagles had the second-best total offense (381.4) in the NFL and the NFC's second-best passing offense (257.4). ... Philadelphia led with 74 offensive plays of 20 or more yards. ... The Eagles had the third-best red-zone offense in the NFC (56.5). ... Since losing Donovan McNabb, QB Jeff Garcia has led the Eagles to a 6-1 record in his seven starts. In those seven starts, including last week's game, Garcia has 10 TDs, two INTs and 100.4 passer rating. ... Philadelphia finished tied for second in the league with the fewest INTs thrown (9). ... RB Brian Westbrook was fourth in the NFC with 1,916 yards from scrimmage (1,217 rushing, 699 receiving). Westbrook has 100 or more yards from scrimmage in the past four playoff games, including last week's 141-yard rushing effort. Westbrook's 141-yard game was a career best and the third-highest rushing total in team playoff history. ... WR Donte Stallworth (38 catches, 725 yards, 19.1 average, 5 TDs) was a Saints player from 2002-05. Stallworth's 19.1 average was second highest in the NFL (minimum 25 catches). ... CB Lito Sheppard (6 INTs) is out with dislocated right elbow. ... DE Darren Howard (5 sacks) played his first six seasons in New Orleans (2000-05) and had 44½ sacks. ... The Eagles were 5-3 on the road. ... New Orleans was 4-4 at home. ... New Orleans led the NFL in total offense (391.5) and passing offense (281.4). ... The Saints ranked first in NFL with 65 20-yard or longer passing plays. ... The Saints had the No. 1 defense against the pass in the NFC (178.4). ... QB Drew Brees led the NFL in yards passing (4,418) and the NFC with 26 TD passes and passer rating (96.2). Brees had eight 300-yard games this season. ... Reggie Bush led NFL rookies with 88 catches (742 yards).



Seattle (10-7)
at Chicago (13-3)
1 p.m. Sunday
WXIN-Channel 59



Bears linebacker 0 for postseason

By ANDREW SELGIMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAKE FOREST, Ill.

There's one glaring omission, a large blank space on a résumé otherwise crammed with accolades, and Brian Urlacher realizes it.

Pro Bowl selections? Six.

Defensive player of the year? He won that in 2005.

Defensive rookie of the year? Got that in 2000.

Post-season victories? Well, there's the blank space.

Urlacher hopes to fill it in Sunday when the Chicago Bears host the Seattle Seahawks.

"Everyone wants to win a ring," said Urlacher, the Bears' middle linebacker. "That's how I want to be remembered, a championship football player, stuff like that."

"But I don't think if you don't do it you have failed in your career or anything like that. We've done some good things here since I have been here. Personally, I would definitely want to win one or two or three or however many we can get."

The Bears' only Super Bowl championship came 21 years ago, and the decades since haven't been kind.

Chicago hasn't won a postseason game at Soldier Field since Jan. 6, 1991, when it beat New Orleans 16-6. Its most recent playoff victory was just four years later, 35-18 at Minnesota. Sunday will be its third appearance since then, the previous two ending in quick exits after earning first-round byes.

In 2001, Urlacher's second season, the Bears went 13-3 but lost 33-19 to Philadelphia. Last year, they were a surprising 11-5 and won the NFC North on the strength of their defense before falling 29-21 to Carolina.

Now, the expectations are higher. And so is the angst surrounding the team.

Fans fret over which Rex Grossman will show up: the "Good Rex" who plays at a Pro Bowl level, or the "Bad Rex" who sparks memories of past quarterbacks such as Jonathan Quinn or Craig Krenzel.

They worry about a defense that lost safety Mike Brown, the leader of the secondary, and defensive tackle Tommie Harris to foot and hamstring injuries, and saw its ranking drop from first to fifth over the final month and a half of the regular season.

But they don't fret over Urlacher. That's the pro the Seahawks do.



AP PHOTO
Chicago Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher, right, hasn't tasted postseason success.

GAME AT A GLANCE

Opening line: Bears by 8
Record vs. spread: Seahawks 6-9-2; Bears 9-6-1
Series record: Seahawks lead 6-3
Playoffs record: Seahawks 6-8; Bears 14-16
Most recent meeting: Saints 27, Seahawks 6, Oct. 1 at Chicago
Last week: Seahawks beat Cowboys 21-20 (wild-card game); Bears lost to Packers 26-7 in Week 17
Seahawks' offense: Overall (19), rush (14), pass (20)
Seahawks' defense: Overall (19), rush (22), pass (16)
Bears' offense: Overall (15), rush (15), pass (14)
Bears' defense: Overall (5), rush (6), pass (11)
Streaks, stats and notes: A meeting of NFC's top two teams in wins during the past two seasons. Including the playoffs, the Seahawks have won 25 games, and the Bears have 24 victories. ... Seattle is the defending NFC champion. ... Seattle has won two of its past five games. ... The Seahawks lost leading WR Darrell Jackson again to a toe-ligament injury last week. Jackson led the team with 63 catches for 956 yards and 10 TDs. ... Coach Mike Holmgren has a 12-9 playoff record and is 14-3 against the Bears. ... Last week's 21-20 win against Dallas was only the 15th postseason game in NFL history decided by one point. ... Including last week's win, the Seahawks have won five of six games decided by three points or less. ... QB Matt Hasselbeck has eight TDs and five INTs in six career playoff starts, including two 300-yard games. He has a 2.20 INT rate (5 INTs in 227 attempts) in the postseason. Hasselbeck has 17 INTs in 13 games this season, including 10 in seven games since returning from his knee sprain. ... RB Shaun Alexander has 296 yards rushing (98.7 per game) and two TDs in the past three playoff games. Alexander, who missed the Oct. 1 game with a broken foot, rushed for 896 yards and seven TDs in eight games. ... Chicago went 11-1 vs. the NFC and 6-2 at home. ... The Bears gave up a conference-low 255 points and scored a conference-high 427 points. ... Chicago led the NFL with 44 takeaways and finished plus-8 in turnovers. ... Chicago's defense has given up more than 300 yards in each of its final six regular-season games. ... DE Mark Anderson led all rookies with 12 sacks. ... Chicago leads the NFC in total defense (294.1). ... Robbie Gould set a team record with 32 FGs, leading all kickers with 143 points (32 of 36 FGs; 47 of 47 PATs). ... RB Cedric Benson carried 157 times for 647 yards, and RB Thomas Jones gained 1,210 on 296 carries. ... QB Rex Grossman is 17-6 as starter.



New England (13-4) at San Diego (14-2)
4:30 p.m. Sunday
WISH-Channel 8



Chargers hoping fans make noise

By HOWARD ULMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FOXBOROUGH, Mass.

Linebacker Shawne Merriman wants a strong start for the Chargers in Sunday's playoff game — from their fans.

The sooner they begin screaming, the better he'll like it when San Diego faces the New England Patriots.

Tom Brady is traveling all the way across the country only to be greeted by a hostile crowd whose decibel level may drown out his signal calling.

"I want to hear it ASAP," said Merriman, the NFL sacks leader. "Louder when L.T. is about to get the ball and going to break another record or something."

Fans at Qualcomm Stadium have cheered LaDainian Tomlinson all season. He has four of the best 11 single-game rushing performances in the NFL this season, three of them at home. And the Chargers are 8-0 at home with an average victory margin of 14.6 points.

As if a team with a 14-2 record and home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs needed more of an edge, ticket sales to the divisional playoff game were restricted to Southern California residents this week.

Curious, then, that the Patriots saw some positives in taking the journey Friday to play a team that fell short of an unbeaten season by just two three-point losses.

"I love traveling, man," Patriots backup defensive end Jarvis Green said Thursday, "getting on the plane. It's a time to relax for me, just getting out there, just time to get away from home. I've got three kids at home."

"Getting a nice hot meal on the plane, it's like a vacation time. I don't take many vacations, but going on the road for me is fun."

Disneyland, it's not. But some of his teammates see it as just another challenge to overcome. Besides, they've done well on the road with a 7-1 record and a point differential of 13.9 per game.

"It's a challenge when everybody's against you," nose tackle Mike Wright said. "It just makes you that much more focused, and that might not be a complete advantage, but I look at it as a positive. It just gets you going."

The Patriots' only road loss was their worst performance of the season, 21-0 at Miami in their 12th game. Since then, they are 4-0, including a 37-16 home playoff win against the New York Jets, and have outscored opponents by an average of 35-17.



AP PHOTO
Chargers running back LaDainian Tomlinson greets fans after a win against the Arizona Cardinals on Dec. 31.

GAME AT A GLANCE

Opening line: Chargers by 4½
Record vs. spread: Patriots 9-6-2; Chargers 9-7
Series record: Patriots lead 17-14-2
Playoffs record: Patriots 18-11; Chargers 7-12
Most recent meeting: Patriots 18-11, Patriots 17, Oct. 2, 2005, at New England
Last week: Patriots beat Jets 37-16 (wild-card game); Chargers beat Cardinals 27-20 in Week 17
Patriots' offense: Overall (11), rush (12), pass (12)
Patriots' defense: Overall (6), rush (5), pass (12)
Chargers' offense: Overall (4), rush (2), pass (16)
Chargers' defense: Overall (10), rush (7), pass (13)
Streaks, stats and notes: New England is the only team to win a playoff game in each of the past four seasons. ... The Patriots have won seven of their past eight games. ... Coach Bill Belichick is 12-2 (11-1 with New England) in career playoff games, second-best all-time behind Vince Lombardi (9-1). ... The Patriots set team record for fewest points allowed per game (14.8). ... CB Asante Samuel finished tied for the NFL lead with 10 INTs, including seven at home. Samuel has an INT in three consecutive playoff games; two went for TDs. ... The Patriots, No. 2 in the AFC with 35 takeaways, have forced eight turnovers while committing none in the past three games. ... QB Tom Brady has an 11-1 playoff record and the lowest interception percentage (1.25) in playoff history. ... Brady, who completed 61.8 percent of his passes for 3,529 yards, 24 TDs and 12 INTs in the regular season, has a TD pass in 10 consecutive playoff games, tied for the third-longest such streak in the NFL history. ... RB Corey Dillon rushed for 812 yards and 13 TDs. ... WR Reche Caldwell led the team with a career-high 61 receptions (760 yards, 4 TDs). ... Rookie RB-KR Laurence Maroney has 939 yards from scrimmage (745 rushing, 194 receiving) and finished second in the NFL with 28.0 kickoff return average. ... San Diego is one of two teams to go 8-0 at home this year. ... The Chargers have won 10 straight and set a franchise record for wins. ... The Chargers went 5-0 vs. 2005 playoff teams. ... San Diego led the league with 492 points scored. ... The Chargers had plus-13 in turnover differential. ... RB LaDainian Tomlinson led the NFL with 1,815 yards rushing and a record 31 TDs. Tomlinson also led the league with 2,323 yards from scrimmage (1,815, 508). ... LB Shawne Merriman (17) and LB Shaun Phillips (11½) were the league's best sacks duo. ... The Chargers led the league with 61 sacks. ... QB Philip Rivers passed for 3,388 yards with 22 TDs and nine INTs.

DIXIE CHOPPER

The World's Fastest Lawn Mower
Call Now To Schedule A Spring Tune-up!

Indiana Top Gun Dealer
Factory Outlet
All mowers in stock

The dealer that has owned, operated, and maintained Dixie Choppers and our own lawn care business for 20 years.

Not only your BEST DEAL, but a dealer who KNOWS and CARES.
Complete Service Dept.



0 Payments, 0 interest
for 6 months (W.A.C.)
Certain credit restrictions apply

WWW.DIXIECHOPPER.COM

PRICE'S
Dixie Chopper
1090 Yandes St.
Franklin, IN 46131
317-738-0618
or 736-6091

What in the world is going on?
Find out in the Daily Journal.

Franklin Varsity Basketball Alumni Night



Former Girls & Boys Varsity Basketball Players are Invited to Celebrate the Last Regular Season Home Game in Vandivier Gymnasium

GIRLS: Saturday, January 27, 2007 vs. Martinsville 7:30 PM
BOYS: Friday, February 23, 2007 vs. Jennings Co. 7:30 PM

R.S.V.P TO:
Noel Heminger

High School Athletic Office
317-738-5711 or Fax: 317-738-5729

Name: _____
Please Circle: Coach or Player
Graduation Year: _____
Address: _____ Phone: _____
E-mail: _____

Yes, I will be attending



Fuzzy Vandivier