

# National Football League Set For Season Opening This Weekend

**By Larry Barber**  
 Now that the National Football League's pre-season has given us five weeks of shaded reality, will regular play, which begins this weekend, shock us beyond that point into a world of bewildered uncertainty? If it cranks up from last year, we are in for a wild 1979-80 joyride, and with the overall balance between teams, prognosticators had better duck now.

Pittsburgh's Super Bowl-winning club is still tightly bound, and will be the team to compare championship qualities by, but it pays in probably the league's top division. Dallas, the team losing to those Steelers last January 21, will again be characteristically sound; but stands severely weakened by retirements and injuries.

Look for an outright shake-up in the standings this year with some recent-year patsies figuring in the title chase, some former powerhouse deteriorating into mediocrity, and new teams dawning on the horizon.

Serious championship contenders will be Houston, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, will surprise playoff teams in 1978; plus be aware of comebacks from Oakland, San Diego, Cincinnati, Detroit, Green Bay, and Chicago. Of these, San Diego might be the best of the bunch. Falling from playoff sight could be Minnesota, largely because of Fran Tarkenton's retirement, and Washington, which let the "Over-the-Hill" gang go over the hill. New teams that will give everyone trouble are, of course, new teams; Seattle and Tampa Bay, expansion franchises of 1977.

What one must keep in mind is that there is a broad line between being competitive, and winning. The two have nothing in common when the records are posted.

With is in perspective, here is how they will look at regular season's end.

The AFC East could come down to head-to-head competition between New England and Miami, and with the Patriot's firepower, they get the nod. Steve Grogan will be calling his own plays this year, and should have more confidence than ever. New England has an abundance of fine runningbacks led by Sam Cunningham, and deadly receiving troops in Harold Jackson, Stanley Morgan and Russ Francis. Miami's Dolphins are always near the crest because of quarterback Bob Griese and a super coach. Last year they added 1,000-yard runner Delvin Williams to the roster, and this season returned Larry Czonka. Nat Moore and Duriel Harris lead a fine crop of receivers. The Baltimore Colts will make a comeback because quarterback Bert Jones will be back and healthy. If not, they acquired Greg Landry to spell him. The two have excellent people to throw to in Roger Carr, Glenn Doughty and Raymond Chester. Versatile Joe Washington will lead the runners along with Don Hardeman. The New York Jets will be better in 1979, as will the Buffalo Bills, but are outclassed.

The AFC West might have the most exciting title race of all, with the San Diego Chargers and Seattle Seahawks coming off fine campaigns, and Oakland forgetting all about 1978. Defending divisional champions, the Denver Broncos, are not going to relinquish their crown without a fight. Their offense is sometimes suspect, but that "Orange Crush" defense can beat most clubs. San Diego and Seattle live by the offense and are capable of outscoring any opponent. If Oakland plays the flawless game like in the past, their balance will overtake the other three. The Kansas City Chiefs are not yet ready.

Despite the Dallas Cowboys' obvious troubles, they still have Roger Staubach, Tony Dorsett, Harvey Martin, Drew Pearson, and Tom Landry. With names like these, they will again dominate the NFC East. The Philadelphia Eagles improved last year but are still a season away. The Washington Redskins, St. Louis Cardinals and N.Y. Giants are going through changes, and are not ready to make a real challenge.

The NFC Central is a true puzzle, and the winner might be no better than 9-7. The Detroit Lions came on strong late last season with a new found offense and tough defense. The Green Bay Packers started off like days of old then died near the end, just missing the crown because Minnesota beat them in head-to-head competition. The Chicago Bears still have Walter Payton, but are engulfed in inconsistency. The young Tampa Bay Buccaneers are up and coming, but that youth will cost them dearly in the close games. Perennial champions Minnesota Vikings have lost Tarkenton and opted for youth, so with that transition; look for them to falter.

The Los Angeles Rams will again be the class of the NFC West, and maybe the team to erase Dallas as the king. They run a controlled machine that is well oiled. Surprise team, the Atlanta Falcons have one of the best defenses in the league, but the schedule might keep them from a wild card in 1979. The New Orleans Saints will be vastly improved, and will score points, but they give up too many. The San Francisco 49ers just have not gotten themselves together.

**Opening Day Predictions:**  
 Detroit 24, Tampa Bay 14  
 New Orleans, 23, Atlanta 21  
 Baltimore 28, Kansas City 10  
 Denver 17, Cincinnati 7  
 Cleveland 20, N.Y. Jets 13  
 Dallas 27, St. Louis 10  
 Chicago 17, Green Bay 13  
 Houston 28, Washington 16  
 Miami 31, Buffalo 20  
 Philadelphia 24, N.Y. Giants 6  
 Los Angeles 23, Oakland 20  
 San Diego 35, Seattle 24  
 Minnesota 26, San Francisco 14  
 Pittsburgh 28, New England 24

### DIVISIONAL BREAKDOWN

The AFC will only be a matter of who can possibly catch up to Pittsburgh, a team possessing uncanny winning tendencies of late and are record setting time-three world titlist. Reasons: Bradshaw, Swann, Harris, Greene, Stallworth, White, Greenwood, Ham, Lambert, Blount, Shell...and the list goes on. These men and their teammates form the most powerful balanced club in the NFL. The champions will get heat from the brash Houston Oilers, who lost to them in last season's conference title game. The Oilers have 1978's top rookie Earl Campbell, who led the league in rushing, and Dan Pastorini throwing to Ken Burrough and Mike Barber. Also, Billy "White Shoes" Johnson, a wide-receiver-returned, is back from a 1978 injury. The Cincinnati Bengals could be a factor if they can keep quarterback Ken Anderson injury-free. He has two wide receiving antelopes in Isaac Curtis and Billy Hooks, and can hand off to Pete Johnson and Archie Griffin. The Cleveland Browns are among the winningest clubs since 1969, but must be more consistent if they are to continue. They do have talent with Brian Sipe coming on at quarterback, Greg Pruitt's running, and Reggie Rucker's receiving.

### American Football Conference

- New England (Ron Erhardt) 1
- Miami (Don Shula) 2
- Baltimore (Ted Marchibroda) 3
- N.Y. Jets (Walt Michaels) 4
- Buffalo (Chuck Knox) 5

- Pittsburgh (Chuck Noll) 1
- Houston ("Bum" Phillips) 2
- Cincinnati (Homer Rice) 3
- Cleveland (Sam Rutigliano) 4

- Denver (Robert Miller) 1
- San Diego (Don Coryell) 2
- Oakland (Tom Flores) 3
- Seattle (Jack Patera) 4
- Kansas City (Marv Levy) 5

### National Football Conference

- Dallas (Tom Landry) 1
- Philadelphia (Dick Vermeil) 2
- Washington (Jack Pardee) 3
- St. Louis (Bud Wilkinson) 4
- N.Y. Giants (Ray Perkins) 5

- Detroit (Monte Clark) 1
- Chicago (Neill Armstrong) 2
- Green Bay (Bart Starr) 3
- Tampa Bay (John McKay) 4
- Minnesota ("Bud" Grant) 5

- Los Angeles (Ray Malavasi) 1
- Atlanta (Leeman Bennett) 2
- New Orleans (Dick Nolan) 3
- San Francisco (Bill Walsh) 4



Basketball is the only major sport that is completely American in origin.



*Coca-Cola adds life to...*  
 good food-anytime

**Durham Coca-Cola Bottling Company**

## EARTH, WIND & FIRE

### WDUR And The Power Of Earth, Wind & Fire Are Yours

IT'S THE



## Super Star Earth, Wind, & Fire Weekend

Featuring Free Album Give-Aways Free Concert Tickets &

Earth, Wind & Fire's Greatest Hits

### Labor Day Weekend

September 1 And 2

Listen to WDUR For the Special Announcement About How You Can Go To the Earth, Wind & Fire Concert in Greensboro on Friday, September 21, With The Whole WDUR Gang.



The unaided human eye, under the best possible viewing conditions, can distinguish ten million different color surfaces.