

# NFL experiencing exciting changes as dynasties falter

By **FRANK KENNEDY**  
Assistant Sports Editor

The most notable trend in the National Football league in recent years has been a slow but sure metamorphosis from a league of a few dynasties to a league of distinct balance. There are rarely any clear-cut Super Bowl caliber clubs, and only a handful of teams that can say they've had a really bad season.

Consider the last three Super Bowls and the NFC entrant each year: Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington. Here were three teams that, in the previous few seasons, had little to show for themselves and were not expected to do all that well. Meanwhile, such dynasties as the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Minnesota Vikings have faded away.

From the most logical championship matchup of San Diego and Dallas, to a very possible surprise matchup like Green Bay and the New York Jets, the NFL should have its most exciting season ever as more than half the league is in the running for the top spot.

## AFC EAST

If ever there was a two-team race, this would have to be the one. Defending AFC champ **Miami** should muscle the explosive **New York Jets** right down to the final day.

The Jets have suffered from a series of pre-season injuries to some reliable starters, but quarterback **Richard Todd** and receiver **Wesley Walker** are looking mighty good in an offense that will rival everyone, including pass-happy **Air Coryell**. On defense, **Mark Gastineau**, as enthusiastic as ever, will lead the Sack Exchange again, and they did coach **Joe Walton** proud in forcing numerous **San Diego** mistakes during a victory Sunday. The key: Staying healthy.

For **Don Shula's** crew, the question is that ever-bizarre quarterback situation. Will **David Woodley** hold his No. 1 spot, and will **Don Strock** be satisfied as runner-up or even number three now that the Dolphins have **Pitt QB Dan Marino**?

**Miami's** downfall could be in the offense, no matter who is at quarterback. The Dolphins have become something of a methodical, ground-oriented team, and don't put too many points on the board. Their success will depend on how productive they can be against the mighty defensive squads of the Jets, and the Steelers.

The rest of the division will be a battle for last place. In opening day action, the **Buffalo Bills** proved that their offense is going nowhere as they were shutout by **Miami**. Perhaps **Joe Cribbs** doesn't have his heart in the game since he'll be going home to **Birmingham** to play for the **USFL** next spring. **Frank Kush** finally won a game at **Baltimore** Sunday, but don't get too excited. They beat the other East cellar-dweller, **New England**.

## AFC CENTRAL

This used to be the best division in football. Remember those rugged Pittsburgh-Houston slug fests? How about the Cincy-Cleveland donnybrooks? How much have things changed? Well, it's quite possible that only one of these four teams will win more games than it loses: **Pittsburgh**.

The **Steelers** had some offensive problems against **Denver** on Sunday, turning the ball over seven times. But the **Steelers** are rebuilding, and look to have a defense that may someday rival the **Steel Curtain** of the mid-seventies. When the injuries have healed and the offense, most especially **Franco Harris**, can get on track, the **Steelers** should have a cake-walk here. **Harris** needs 1,469 yards to become the all-time NFL rushing leader.

**Brian Sipe** and the **Cleveland Browns** are banking on catching the AFC off-guard this year. Their opener saw them fall to **Minnesota**, but the offense certainly looked better than at any time last year, with **Sipe** getting the ball on target. The **Cincinnati Bengals**, meanwhile, are missing by a mile every target they aim for. They have lost running back **Pete Johnson** to a drug suspension, **Cris Collinsworth** is defecting after the season is over, and so far they have displayed no real desire to cross the goal line. The team that made it to the Super Bowl two years ago went 0-4 in the pre-season and lost 20-10 to the **Raiders** on Sunday. And don't count on the defense to save them, because this is a unit which gave up over 120 points in its final three regular season games last year, and little hope is in sight. The good news for the **Bengals** is that they will not be as bad as the **Houston Oilers**, potentially the worst team in the league (even worse than **Baltimore**). **Earl Campbell** seems to be back in form, but even his exploits won't salvage the hapless **Oilers**.

## AFC WEST

Like the East, this should also be a two-team race as the teams with the inside track for the Super Bowl battle it out. The **Los Angeles Raiders**, their **Al Davis**-home stadium controversy out of the way, are loaded under **Tom Flores**.

Rookie of the Year **Marcus Allen** is off and running again, scoring three touchdowns against the **Bengals** on Sunday. **Jim Plunkett** appears to be finding his throwing arm again, and that will help to complement a rugged defensive line led by the likes of veterans **Lyle Alzado**, **Archie Reese** and **Ted Hendricks**. And it will be that defense which will give the **Raiders** the nod over **San Diego**, the pass-happy outfit that, alas, still gives up 30-40 points per game. The **Jets' Richard Todd** ripped through the **Charger** secondary in scoring in 41 points Sunday. That was the downfall for the **Chargers** in the AFC title game, giving up 34 points to **Miami**. Even a recruit like **Billy Ray Smith** out of **Arkansas** will not make things hunky-dorry for **Don Coryell**.

The rest of the division is a free-for-all. **Denver** is banking (to the tune of \$5 million) on **John Elway** at quarterback. **Elway's** first game against **Pittsburgh** was a flop, but the veteran **Steve Deberg** didn't do much better. This week, the **Broncos** face lowly **Baltimore** and **Elway** is again scheduled to start. Meanwhile, the defense remains as impressive as **Denver** fans are accustomed to. **Kansas City** has the potential to break away, but will sorely miss the late **Joe Delaney**, the 1981 Rookie of the Year. Former **Dallas** assistant **John Mackovic** will have three quarterbacks to choose from: veterans **Steve Fuller** and **Bill Kenney**, and rookie **Todd Blackledge**. **Chuck Knox** has taken over at **Seattle** and is hoping to add some diversity to an offense that has been using mostly a passing attack before this year.

## NFC EAST

There can be no doubt that this is the best division in all of football. So good is this group that all five teams here may finish at or above .500. Year in and year out, the number one team (at least on paper) is **Dallas**. Once again, the **Cowboys** are primed for a Super Bowl chase, having lost the NFC title game three years running. Playing in the shadow of recent drug allegations about four **Cowboys**, **Tom Landry's** troops will have to get away from the blasé attitude they seem to take as playoffs near. **Landry** has buckled down on folks like **Butch Johnson**, who does jigs in the end zone after touchdowns. No more showboating, said **Landry**.

It was, perhaps, that new discipline that catapulted the **Cowboys** to a dramatic comeback win

over the **Washington Redskins** Monday, 31-23. It was the second half effort that showed why the **Cowboys** are favored to take this division.

The **Redskins** have two things going against them this year. The **World Champions** are falling down right and left with injuries, and **Tony Peters** is gone for good due to a drug conviction. Moreover, no one has made back-to-back Super Bowl trips in five years. No one. Yet, if **John Riggins**, **Joe Theismann** and **Company** can stay healthy (and get some help from the younger talent) the **Redskins** will fight for the East right down to the final week. But it will be a struggle, because the **NFC** has equalled, if not surpassed, the **AFC** as the **NFL's** best conference. Meanwhile, the **New York Giants** are trying for their second playoff appearance in three years, but a stalemated offense may make that tough. **Lawrence Taylor** leads a defensive outfit that rivals anyone in the **NFC**, and that will help develop a solid challenge for a wildcard berth. Meanwhile, **Neil Lomax** for the **St. Louis Cardinals** and **Ron Jaworski** for the **Philadelphia Eagles** will be at the helm of solid teams that have the potential to win nine or ten games, and will have to rely on winning the close games to make the difference between finishing as high as second or as low as fifth.

## NFC CENTRAL

There's no need to call this the black-and-blue division anymore. For one thing, the **Green Bay Packers**, thanks to the **Lynn Dickey** to **James Lofton/John Jefferson** connection, stands a good chance at winning the league championship. Secondly the **Tampa Bay Buccaneers** don't wear blue or black.

The **Pack** is back. Make no mistake about that. **Bart Starr** has his men fine-tuned, and only a few suspect areas along the defensive line are question marks. This was quite evident in a 41-38 win over lowly **Houston** in the opener. **Earl Campbell** ran roughshod over the **Packer** defense, and **Starr** will have to work on that to sustain supremacy in the **Central**. Next up is the **Minnesota Vikings**, as **Bud Grant** tries to revive the dynasty of old. That won't happen this year, but **Tommy Kramer** through the air and **Ted Brown** on the ground will make for some long afternoons for the opposition. Also threatening are **Detroit** and **Tampa Bay**. The **Lions** will still operate behind the force of **Billy Sims** and an improved defensive wall for coach **Monte Clark**. However, there are still many gaps which must be filled. The **Bucs**, meanwhile, are a mystery as they went 4-0 in preseason but were shutout 11-0 in the opener. **QB Doug Williams** begins his final season for the **Bucs**, who would love to host the Super Bowl but probably won't come close. Finally, there are the **Chicago Bears**, an offense-minded corps with **Jim McMahon** tossing and **Walter Payton** running. Some insiders say this is the year for the **Bears**, but five games (four in preseason) have not shown any evidence of that.

## NFC WEST

This is it, folks. It took them 15 years, and this year they will do it at last. The team: **New Orleans**. The 15-year-goal: A winning record. And, not only will the **Saints** break that barrier, but the mediocrity of the rest of this division will allow them to be called **West Champions**. If anyone is the 1983 dark-horse, the **Saints** are it. Coach **Bum Phillips** has his troops thinking right, especially back **George Rogers**, who rushed for 206 yards as the **Saints** beat the **Cardinals** 28-17 Sunday. **Ken Stabler** was solid at quarterback last year, and now that he has a decent offensive line before him, things should only get better.

Elsewhere, the **Los Angeles Rams** looked solid enough through the pre-season and in the 16-6

opener against the **Giants** to warrant some praise, but not a lot. After all, this is still a young team, with much of the rushing weight falling on rookie **Eric Dickerson**, out of **SMU**. **Vince Ferragamo** will call the signals for coach **John Robinson**, but the key will be whether or not the **Ram Defense** can avoid blowing big leads like it has done the last two years. That awesome offense of the **San Francisco 49ers** has given way to a trouble-plagued defensive secondary, while problems in **Atlanta** have grown steadily for **Falcon** coach **Dan Henning**. The massive defense that led **Atlanta** to a 12-4 record just three years ago has now all but faded away. However, the numbers are not all that bad and if **Henning** can get a break here and there, plus winning the close games, a winning season may not be out of the question.

## THE PICKS

### AFC EAST

New York Jets	12-4
Miami Dolphins	11-5
Buffalo Bills	6-10
New England Patriots	5-11
Baltimore Colts	5-11

### AFC CENTRAL

Pittsburgh Steelers	10-6
Cleveland Browns	8-8
Cincinnati Bengals	7-9
Houston Oilers	4-12

### AFC WEST

Los Angeles Raiders	11-5
San Diego Chargers	10-6
Denver Broncos	8-8
Kansas City Chiefs	7-9
Seattle Seahawks	6-10

### NFC EAST

Dallas Cowboys	11-5
Washington Redskins	10-6
New York Giants	8-8
St. Louis Cardinals	8-8
Philadelphia Eagles	8-8

### NFC CENTRAL

Green Bay Packers	11-5
Minnesota Vikings	9-7
Detroit Lions	8-8
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	7-9
Chicago Bears	7-9

### NFC WEST

New Orleans Saints	9-7
Los Angeles Rams	8-8
San Francisco 49ers	7-9
Atlanta Falcons	7-9

## THE PLAYOFFS

**AFC:** **San Diego** def. **Miami** in wildcard game; **N.Y. Jets** def. **San Diego**; **L.A. Raiders** def. **Pittsburgh**; **L.A. Raiders** def. **New York Jets** for conference championship.

**NFC:** **Washington** def. **Minnesota** in wildcard game; **Green Bay** def. **Washington**; **Dallas** def. **New Orleans**; **Dallas** def. **Green Bay** for conference championship.

**SUPER BOWL:** **L.A. Raider** vs. **Dallas Cowboys**.

## WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE

Birth Control                      Menstrual Cramps  
Abortion (to 18 weeks)            Gynecology  
Pelvic Pain Diagnosis and Treatment  
Outpatient Tubal Ligation (Band-Aid Surgery)  
Endocrinology

"PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL CARE"

## TRIANGLE WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTER

109 Conner Dr., Suite 2202    Chapel Hill, N.C.

942-0011

Across from University Mall

## VILLAGE OPTICIANS

- PRESCRIPTIONS FILLED
- LENSES DUPLICATED
- CONTACT LENSES  
fitted—polished—cleaned
- SUNGLASSES  
Ray Ban & Designer  
prescription—non-prescription
- OVER 1400 FRAMES
- REPAIRS DONE ON PREMISES  
1 day service



121 E. Franklin St.  
942-3254

JOHN C. SOUTHERN • OPTICIAN