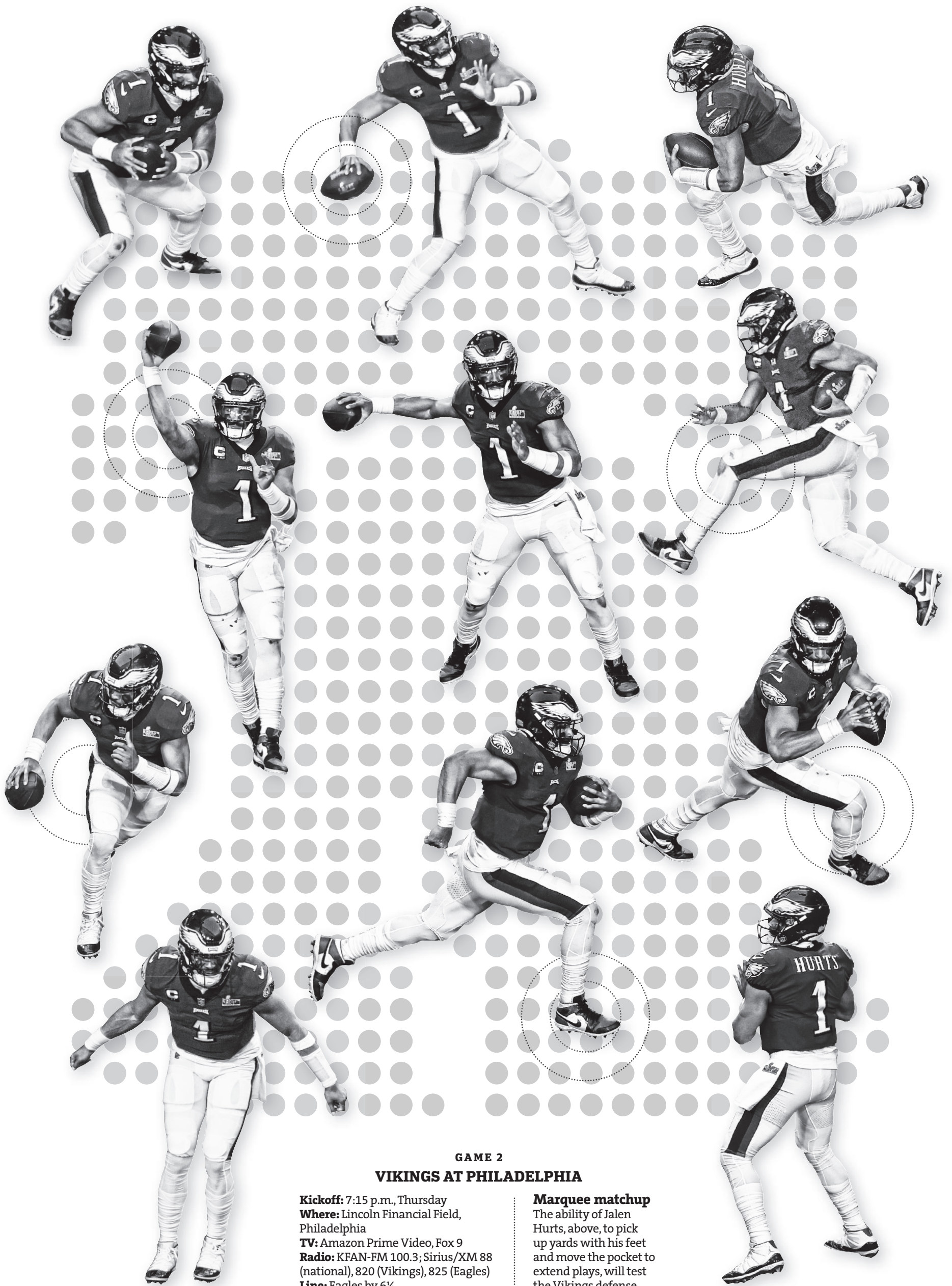


VIKINGS GAMEDAY



GAME 2

VIKINGS AT PHILADELPHIA

Kickoff: 7:15 p.m., Thursday
Where: Lincoln Financial Field, Philadelphia
TV: Amazon Prime Video, Fox 9
Radio: KFAN-FM 100.3; Sirius/XM 88 (national), 820 (Vikings), 825 (Eagles)
Line: Eagles by 6½

Marquee matchup
 The ability of Jalen Hurts, above, to pick up yards with his feet and move the pocket to extend plays, will test the Vikings defense.

INJURIES LOOM LARGE: WHO WINS AND WHY?

Story by BEN GOESSLING • ben.goessling@startribune.com • Photos by ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIKINGS OFFENSE VS. EAGLES DEFENSE

Eagles' front is a challenge

Georgia defensive tackle Jalen Carter was seen as a possible No. 1 overall pick, but he slid to ninth overall in the draft after pleading no contest in March to a reckless driving charge stemming from a fatal street racing accident. The Eagles traded up from the 10th pick to select him, and he had a sack while playing 50% of the team's defensive snaps in his first game last week. He usually lines up in the nickel package next to Fletcher Cox, the 32-year-old six-time Pro Bowler who remains an effective pass rusher, though he is dealing with a rib injury. The Eagles complement their pass rushing group with veterans Brandon Graham and Derek Barnett. They have menacing nose tackle Jordan Davis in their base front, and a vociferous crowd means center Austin Schlottmann will have to be locked in with Kirk Cousins while setting protections against the Eagles' front.

Avoiding the Slay snare

Veteran cornerback Darius Slay intercepted Cousins twice last year, in a game where the Eagles pressed Justin Jefferson and limited him to six catches for 48 yards. Slay returned a Mac Jones interception 70 yards for a touchdown on Sunday; the Eagles will be without cornerback James Bradberry because of a concussion, but Slay, who has 27 career interceptions, remains adept at baiting quarterbacks into throws. Cousins will have to be aware of him Thursday night.

VIKINGS DEFENSE VS. EAGLES OFFENSE

Corners could get tested deep

The Vikings' young cornerbacks played serviceably against the Buccaneers, as Akayleb Evans broke up a pass and allowed just two completions in six targets. The Eagles receiving tandem of A.J. Brown and DeVonta Smith might be an even tougher test, especially if Jalen Hurts gets chances to push the ball downfield against man coverage looks. Hurts was tied for second in the league last year with 12 touchdown passes that traveled 20 yards or more in the air.

Handling Hurts with pressure

The Vikings blitzed Baker Mayfield a league-high 52.6% of the time last week, according to Pro Football Reference, and teams showed last year they weren't afraid to send extra pressure after Hurts (blitzing him 38.6% of the time, according to Pro Football Focus). Hurts' mobility can cause problems for teams that leave rush lanes open while coming after him, but he's shown he can be affected by pressure, as well. The Patriots, coached by Brian Flores' mentor Bill Belichick, pressured Hurts on eight of their 16 blitzes last week and sacked him twice. If the Vikings can rush him responsibly, they could create trouble for Hurts with their pressure packages.

THE BIGGEST STORY LINE

Can the Vikings' offense rebound?

Three turnovers — including a goal-line interception from Cousins just before halftime — cost the Vikings dearly in Sunday's three-point loss to the Buccaneers. They also lost center Garrett Bradbury to a back injury, while left tackle Christian Darrisaw tried to play through an ankle injury that forced him out of Sunday's game twice. The Eagles, who led the NFL with 70 sacks last year, added Carter in the first round of the draft, and intercepted Cousins three times in last year's victory. To win what might be their toughest road game of the year, the Vikings can't afford the kinds of mistakes they made in Philadelphia last year or against Tampa Bay on Sunday.

PREDICTION

Both teams have some injuries that could affect the outcome of this one; the Vikings' offensive line isn't at full strength, while the Eagles' secondary will be without Bradberry or Blankenship. It means Thursday's game could be closer than the Vikings' loss in Philadelphia last year, but of all the times for the Vikings to be shorthanded on the offensive line, a night game at Lincoln Financial Field against this talented defensive front is about as tough as it gets. If the Eagles control the line of scrimmage, it's tough to see the Vikings coming out of this one with a win.

Eagles 24, Vikings 13