

## VIKINGS GAMEDAY

PRIME  
TIME  
WITH  
PURDY

Vikings are underdogs in a Monday night matchup as they try to avoid starting 0-4 at home for the first time.

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For the first time at U.S. Bank Stadium, the Vikings are scheduled for two Monday night games at home in the same season. They will play the first of those two against the 5-1 49ers, who have played in three of the past four NFC Championship Games, are ranked second in the league in scoring offense, lead the league in scoring defense this season and are trying to avoid a losing streak after a defeat against the Browns broke a string of 15 consecutive regular-season victories. Here's a look at the key matchups and story lines for Monday night:

#### Brock Purdy vs. Vikings pass rush

Brock Purdy's 10-to-1 TD-to-interception ratio this season will be challenged by Brian Flores' pass-rush schemes Monday night.

Star Tribune and Associated Press photos

#### GAME 7

#### VIKINGS VS. SAN FRANCISCO

**Kickoff:** 7:15 p.m. Monday  
**Where:** U.S. Bank Stadium  
**TV:** ABC, ESPN, ESPN2  
**Radio:** KFAN-FM 100.3; Sirius/XM 88 (Westwood One), 83 (Vikings), 158 (49ers)  
**Line:** 49ers by 6½

#### VIKINGS OFFENSE VS. 49ERS DEFENSE

##### Bosa, 49ers front will test Vikings O-line

The Vikings used Dalton Risner for the first time last week since signing him on Sept. 18, and Risner will start at left guard with Ezra Cleveland nursing a foot injury. Coach Kevin O'Connell has praised the improvement he has seen from the group, and the Vikings rank sixth in the league in ESPN's Pass Block Win Rate metric. The line will have one of its toughest assignments of the year Monday, against a 49ers front seven that ranks near the top of the league in pass rush and run stop metrics. San Francisco defensive end Nick Bosa, last year's NFL Defensive Player of the Year, leads the group; he will line up across from Christian Darrisaw in a matchup of two of the league's best.

##### Cousins gets another chance vs. Shanahan

San Francisco coach Kyle Shanahan's affinity for Kirk Cousins — dating back to 2012 when Washington drafted Cousins while Shanahan was the offensive coordinator — has been discussed for years. Cousins is set to be a free agent in March, but the 49ers seem set with Brock Purdy at quarterback, but even if the possibility of a Cousins-Shanahan reunion appears remote at this point, the veteran could make a strong statement with a big performance Monday night. To do so, Cousins might need to challenge the 49ers secondary downfield more than he did last week in his first game without Justin Jefferson, when Cousins averaged just 6.2 air yards per attempt against the Bears.

#### VIKINGS DEFENSE VS. 49ERS OFFENSE

##### Pressuring Purdy

A week after blitzing Bears quarterbacks 71.8% of the time, the Vikings figure to send plenty of pressure after Purdy, who's been one of the NFL's most-blitzed quarterbacks this season. That could be especially true in light of the 49ers' injuries. Deebo Samuel will not play because of a shoulder injury, and Christian McCaffrey is questionable because of an oblique injury, meaning the 49ers could be without two of the league's best at turning short passes into big plays. The Vikings, meanwhile, will play without Marcus Davenport because of a high ankle sprain that will keep him out four weeks, so they could be even more inclined to generate pressure by sending extra pass rushers after Purdy.

##### 'Get your mind right'

The Vikings have talked all week about preparing for the physicality of a 49ers team that frequently lines up with heavy personnel and has run an average of 33 times per game this season. "It's just their personality," said linebacker Jordan Hicks, who frequently faced the 49ers twice a year during his time in Arizona. "You've got to get your mind right." The Vikings have routinely used one or two defensive linemen in many of their packages this season; when they played without Davenport at Philadelphia, they gave up 259 rushing yards to an Eagles team that was content to run 48 times. The 49ers would have to distribute carries without McCaffrey but could turn to Jordan Mason or Elijah Mitchell.

#### THE BIGGEST STORY LINE

##### Vikings try to build momentum with trade deadline looming

The Vikings started 10-2 last year. Since then, they are 5-7, with their Christmas Eve victory over the Giants their only victory over a team with a winning record. Beating the 49ers on Monday would get them to 3-4 for the season, give them back-to-back victories for the first time since last December and keep them no more than a game back of the NFC's final wild-card spot. To the extent their record this season will dictate their approach before the Oct. 31 trade deadline, a win over a contending team such as the 49ers could provide some incentive for the Vikings to keep players like Danielle Hunter and K.J. Osborn, who are scheduled to be free agents after the year.

##### PREDICTION

The 49ers defense might be a bigger problem for the Vikings than their offense, especially if Minnesota struggles to block an imposing front that ranks fifth in the league against the run and will attack with linemen and linebackers surging straight ahead into gaps. If the Vikings can create some space for their backs and attack the man coverage looks they figure to see from the 49ers secondary, they could be productive enough to beat a team that won't have at least one of its Pro Bowl playmakers. But when the Vikings are missing an All-Pro receiver as well, the San Francisco defense will be just a bit too much to overcome.

**Prediction:** 49ers 16, Vikings 13