

## VIKINGS

## GAME-BY-GAME OUTLOOK

## Daunting task for division title



**WEEK 1 • VS. TAMPA BAY**  
noon Sept. 10 (Ch. 4)

The Buccaneers come to U.S. Bank Stadium as the defending NFC South champions but won that title with an 8-9 record and have since replaced Tom Brady with Baker Mayfield at quarterback. All teams want to start with a win, but this one nearly has a must-win feel for the Vikings, considering what comes next, the bad taste from last season's end, and how little we've seen their starters play together in the preseason.



**WEEK 3 • VS. L.A. CHARGERS**  
noon Sept. 24 (Ch. 9)

Thus begins the reunion part of the Vikings schedule, with linebacker Eric Kendricks returning to Minnesota as a member of the Chargers. Getting a mini-bye after facing the Eagles will be a good break for the Vikings' inexperienced secondary amid a daunting Hurts-Justin Herbert back-to-back. Herbert, the NFL's highest-paid QB in 2023 at \$52.5 million, was second in the NFL in passing yards (4,739) and passing attempts (699) last season and has a new play-caller in Kellen Moore.



**WEEK 6 • AT CHICAGO**  
noon Oct. 15 (Ch. 9)

The Vikings' first divisional game is a check-in on how the Bears' rebuild around quarterback Justin Fields is going after a 3-14 season. GM Ryan Poles got Fields more help in the offseason, bolstering the receiving corps with D.J. Moore, offensive line and defensive core. The Bears can't get much worse after finishing last in the NFL in myriad statistical categories like points allowed, passing yards, sacks and sacks allowed.



**WEEK 9 • AT ATLANTA**  
noon Nov. 5 (Ch. 9)

This middle of the season appears to be the softer part of the schedule where the Vikings need to collect wins before a closing gantlet. The Falcons turned their offense over to Desmond Ridder, a third-round pick in 2022, toward the end of last season, when they went 7-10. They then made their emphasis on the run clear by drafting Texas' Bijan Robinson No. 8 overall.



**WEEK 12 • VS. CHICAGO**  
7:15 p.m. Nov. 27 (ESPN)

The Vikings and Bears have played 16 times on "Monday Night Football" since 1972, including four since 2016, all at Soldier Field. The Vikings won three of those four, though. The Star Tribune's Jim Souhan called their 17-9 victory in 2021 "must-unsee TV." The Vikings' last home "MNF" game vs. Chicago was a 40-14 loss at TCF Bank Stadium in December 2010, in which Favre left early with a concussion and the Bears clinched the division title. Week 13 is the bye.



**WEEK 16 • VS. DETROIT**  
noon Dec. 24 (Ch. 9)

The schedule makers — like many prognosticators — seemed to anticipate the NFC North title coming down to the Vikings and Lions by putting two games between the teams in the last three weeks. The only year the Vikings have played the Lions for the first time in a season in December was the strike-shortened 1982 season. If the division race is tight, the closing stretch could yield big swings in the standings.

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As a reward for winning the NFC North last season, the Vikings get a 2023 schedule filled with other division winners. While the Vikings do get a break with four NFC South teams on the slate and their own division full of question marks, they have to face all four conference finalists from last season (and favorites to return this season) in the Super Bowl champion Chiefs, the NFC champion Eagles, the Bengals and the 49ers. Three of those games are in the first seven weeks of the season. Here's a game-by-game look at the schedule:



**WEEK 4 • AT CAROLINA**  
noon Oct. 1 (Ch. 9)

Hello again, Adam Thielen. The Vikings will play against the Detroit Lions wide receiver for the first time in his 10th NFL season. All four NFC South teams have different starting quarterbacks than they began last season with, none more prominent than the Panthers' Bryce Young, the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL draft out of Alabama.



**WEEK 7 • VS. SAN FRANCISCO**  
7:15 p.m. Oct. 23 (ESPN)

This is the first of two "Monday Night Football" games for the Vikings, who have not lost to San Francisco at home since 1992, a stretch of seven games. But their last two games against Kyle Shanahan's team — in the 2019 season playoffs and in 2021 — have not gone well. These 49ers are built to win now, though quarterback Brock Purdy, a sensation after being the last player drafted in 2022, is a big question mark as he returns from elbow surgery and, possibly, to Earth.



**WEEK 10 • VS. NEW ORLEANS**  
noon Nov. 12 (Ch. 9)

Here ends the tour of the NFC South, which it would behoove the Vikings to sweep. The Saints, also 7-10 last season, had a top-10 defense and maintained an elite secondary while changing out the defensive line, including edge rusher Marcus Davenport signing with the Vikings. Derek Carr is the latest quarterback to attempt to replace Drew Brees in New Orleans.



**WEEK 14 • AT LAS VEGAS**  
3:05 p.m. Dec. 10 (Ch. 9)

A December game in Las Vegas will be a big draw for traveling Vikings fans, though they probably won't be excited to see Davante Adams again. The former Packers receiver has 93 catches for 1,050 yards and 13 TDs against Minnesota. He's the top target for Jimmy Garoppolo, assuming the injury-prone new Raiders QB is still healthy in Week 14.



**WEEK 17 • VS. GREEN BAY**  
7:20 p.m. Dec. 31 (Ch. 11)

For the third year in a row, the Vikings and the Packers play in Week 17. The last two tilts at the turn of the year, both at Lambeau Field, have been bad memories for the Vikings, who were outscored 78-27 in two losses. With the scheduled Sunday night kickoff, could Vikings fans ring in 2024 celebrating a playoff spot or a division title?



**WEEK 2 • AT PHILADELPHIA**  
7:15 p.m. Sept. 14 (Amazon Prime)

The Vikings' last trip to Lincoln Financial Field, for "Monday Night Football" in Week 2 last year, was unpleasant: a 24-7 loss in which Kirk Cousins threw three interceptions and Eagles QB Jalen Hurts gave hints of a special year ahead. The Week 2 challenge this year may be even more formidable. It's "Thursday Night Football," four days after the opener; it's the Eagles' home opener as the reigning NFC champs; and despite losing both coordinators to head coaching gigs, their roster remains loaded.



**WEEK 5 • VS. KANSAS CITY**  
3:25 p.m. Oct. 8 (Ch. 4)

Hey, did you know that Patrick Mahomes' dad used to play for the Twins? Mahomes' first game in Minneapolis as the Chiefs' starting QB is a fine time to trot out all those photos of baby Patrick in tiny Twins gear with his father, Pat. Say, "Aww," now because Vikings fans will probably be saying, "Ooh" or "Oh no," when Mahomes, Travis Kelce, Andy Reid and Co. start attacking the Minnesota defense.



**WEEK 8 • AT GREEN BAY**  
noon Oct. 29 (Ch. 9)

Welcome to the rivalry, Jordan Love. Since December 1992, only two Packers quarterbacks not named Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers have started against the Vikings: Scott Tolzien (Nov. 24, 2013) and Brett Hundley (Dec. 23, 2017). The Vikings were 1-0-1 in those games, while going 14-17 against Favre and 11-17-1 against Rodgers.



**WEEK 11 • AT DENVER**  
7:20 p.m. Nov. 19 (Ch. 11)

The Vikings famously struggled to beat Russell Wilson when he was in Seattle, losing their first six games against him before winning the 2021 matchup. The Denver version of Wilson got beat up in a 5-12 season, leading to big spending in the offseason. But those moves pale in comparison to bringing Super Bowl-winning longtime Saints coach Sean Payton back to an NFL sideline to replace the in-over-his-head Nathaniel Hackett, who didn't last a full season in Denver.



**WEEK 15 • AT CINCINNATI**  
TBD

Joe Burrow and Ja'Marr Chase won the first LSU championship team reunion against Justin Jefferson in 2021, a penalty-filled season opener. Chase, a year younger than Jefferson, had five catches for 101 yards, including a 50-yard TD, in his NFL debut. He has been, uh, chasing Jefferson's milestones ever since, and this late-season game may have the subplot of two receivers in pursuit of Calvin Johnson's single-season record of 1,964 receiving yards.



**WEEK 18 • AT DETROIT**  
TBD

The Vikings' last three trips to Ford Field have been more stressful than their fans are used to against the Lions. The 2020 and 2021 games came down to late-fourth-quarter drama while the defense's implosion in the Dec. 2022 game, in which Jefferson broke Sammy White's single-game franchise record with 223 yards, exposed a rift between Kevin O'Connell and defensive coordinator Ed Donatell.