

Written by Patrick Mayo

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 00:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 January 2010 15:43

---

Below, we explore what should happen in this week's NFL games. Of course, in the NFL, only half of what should happen actually does happen, but playing the percentages gives you the best chance of winning. Remember, think twice before benching a stud based on match-ups! We list the Vegas odds spread in parentheses and the Over/Under number in brackets.

Ask a question about your lineup in our [FORUM](#). Leave a comment about this article down below.

### **SATURDAY AFTERNOON (4:30pm ET)**

#### **Arizona @ New Orleans (-7) [57.5]**

57.5? Feels like a reaction to the 96 point battle the Cards were involved with on Saturday, but it just may not be high enough. There's no reason to think that this week's clash in the Bayou won't provide the kind of fireworks usually reserved for Chinese New Year. Over their last five playoff games, Arizona has averaged 33.8 ppg while allowing a very health 26.8. The Cardinals are prepared to get into a shootout and fully expect to beat you doing so. But have they met their match in the Saints? The Saints were 2009's highest scoring team with 510 points (31.9 a game), not quite the 2007 Patriots, but pretty damn good. But much of New Orleans' very dominant full season has been forgotten but today's pragmatic football fan. The NFL has become a "What have you done for me lately?" league.

People seem to forget that four weeks ago, the Saints were one of two teams that were destined to meet for the Lombardi Trophy. Sitting at 13-0, the Saints were on a crash course with the Colts, while Minnesota was deemed the only opponent capable of giving the Saints a fight. It's four weeks later, and suggesting a win for either team this week draws more commentary than lurking about a daycare with the sartorial choice of a trench-coat. The main reason everyone seems to be down on the Saints is due to their absence from the spotlight since the Week 15 home drubbing by the Cowboys. We found out that the Saints were beatable, as their play tried to suggest after weeks of close calls. Dallas ended a chance of a perfect season in the Big Easy, leaving New Orleans at a crossroads: What did they have left to play for? They knew home field advantage was still theirs -- the road to the Super Bowl would still come through the Superdome. In retrospect, it doesn't seem shocking that the lowly Buccaneers, playing for their coach's job, pulled an upset on a Saints team giving a half-hearted

Written by Patrick Mayo

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 00:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 January 2010 15:43

---

effort. I'm confident that Week 17 was just way to remind us of **Mark Brunell's** continued existence, although his stats against the Panthers would suggest he's, at best, frozen in carbonite.

While Green Bay mirrored Arizona's offense, their defense was supposed to be superior. But in today's NFL, a high-powered offense can trump an excellent defense. The Packers entered their Wild Card game with the league's second-ranked defense, and they boast a prolific passing attack. The Saints, on the other hand, essentially mirror the Cardinals in every way. Offensively, both teams like to spread the field, leaving their quarterbacks to find the appropriate mismatch. There is no discrimination on either team. Talent level be damned! **Brees** and **Warner**

only care if you're open. They both understand that throwing to a less talented receiver who is open is still a higher percentage play than forcing the ball to anyone with someone standing next to them. It's the exact opposite of what

**Brett Favre**

engages in, the challenge of throwing into coverage seems to excite him. It's the prevalent theme among most of the high-powered offenses this year -- apparently Marxism is the perfect ideology for football. A distribution of wealth among everyone on the offense yields greater returns than a monopoly on the gridiron. Football is enhanced with the elimination of the individual, the collective provides the optimal product for an offense but only when you have a leader that knows how to allocate his resources. Look at what happened in New England and Cincinnati, as a reliance on a small group of playmakers, regardless of their abilities, fails in comparison to any offense that maximizes its potential from every player. Kurt Warner doesn't care if your name is

**Ben Patrick**

or

**Jeremy Urban**

. If you're open, Kurt will will throw the ball. If

**Devery Henderson**

can find a seam in the defense, Drew Brees isn't going to force the ball into

**Marques Colston**

if he's in double coverage. It seems simple enough and is necessary in allowing the premier playmakers room to operate. Look at what happened to Green Bay last week. The initial threat of

**Larry Fitzgerald**

allowed Warner to use

**Early Doucet**

and

**Steve Breaston**

. Eventually, the Packers defense had to use the extra man on Fitzgerald to provide "help" elsewhere. Fitzgerald, now with some breathing room, showed why he's the predominant player on the field -- he's, for all intents and purposes, uncoverable in a one-on-one matchup. By using all the bishops and knights to distract the opposition, the queen has room to roam free.

Written by Patrick Mayo

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 00:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 January 2010 15:43

---

If both teams' high-powered passing attacks are a push, I'm setting the line on their rushing games at a pick'em. Neither team can run the ball to close out games. Both use the running game to keep defenses honest, whether **Sean Peyton** and **Ken Whisenhunt** admit it or not. They rely on the pass to allow big plays from their running backs. Like in the passing game, each team's rushing attack comes at you by committee. Arizona uses

### **Tim Hightower**

on the goal line and passing situations to extend the defense with his speed, leaving crossing route open while linebackers are forced to follow him into the flats. The bruising

### **Beanie Wells**

can give you nightmares with his ability to pound the ball between the tackles. But if you commit a safety to the box, Arizona has you where they want -- playing single coverage on the outside with no deep help. Hello 50-yard gain! The Saints employ this exact method, but with three backs.

### **Reggie Bush**

extends the defense horizontally,

### **Mike Bell**

allows you to go vertical, but it's

### **Pierre Thomas**

that can really take advantage. He is the only back on either team that can do both. If Fitzgerald is the centerpiece of the Cardinals offense, it's Thomas for the Saints. Some may argue that it's Reggie Bush, but frankly, 2009 Reggie Bush is basically McNulty in season four of *The Wire*.

Sure, he gets star billing, but he's really just a bit player in the grand scheme of things.

The defenses? This is where things get fun. The Cards and Saints try to use the time-tested "bend but don't break" method, but both end up using the "broken glass" approach. You can usually clean it up without getting cut, but a surprise laceration can cut deep. Neither team is good at making stops, but have a propensity of making six points out of turnovers. New Orleans has the better secondary (which isn't saying much), and Arizona gets better pressure on the quarterback. Again, not a tremendous honor.

So who comes out on top? No clue. I have my doubts Arizona wins in a blowout. If someone can guarantee me this game ends in a blowout, I would suspect it was Arizona that didn't show up. But Arizona's better than that. I expect this game to be close. The Cardinals have proven they show up when it counts, and New Orleans specializes in playing tight contests. This game will come down to which team plays the best red-zone defense. The key is holding drives to field goals. Whichever team kicks the most field goals will lose. Simple as that. Look for the scores to be huge, with the offenses in the limelight, but, like last week, a big defensive play will end up deciding the game. **Tracy Porter** or **Dominique Rodger-Cromartie** will be abused all day long but come up with a big play at end to excuse their performances. This is a pick'em game in every way. The Saints appear to be a better team, but Arizona has established they can beat anybody once the playoffs begin. It's how the Patriots would always roll the Colts in

## NFL - 2009 Fantasy Football Divisional Playoffs Week 19 Spread Pick'em Preview (ARI @ NO)

Written by Patrick Mayo

Tuesday, 12 January 2010 00:05 - Last Updated Tuesday, 12 January 2010 15:43

---

the playoffs. The Colts always appeared to be the slightly superior team, with a better record and better stats. This Saints team has that same kind of feel. No one will be surprised if New Orleans wins in a route, as they're the better team on paper. But the Cardinals know how to win, and that is the only characteristic that matters this time of year.

Last week I declared that the winner of Packers/Cardinals would end up representing the NFC in Miami, and since consistency gives me an excuse to pick Arizona, I will. Take Arizona in a high scoring, hotly contested match. If the Saints win 12-7, consider me on suicide watch.

**ARI 41, NO 38 (Pick: Arizona +7, over 57.5)**

Again, ask a question about your lineup in our [FORUM](#) . Leave a comment about this article down below.