



BY PAUL DOMOWITZ  
**EAGLES VS. SAINTS**

**Playoff history:** The teams have played twice in the playoffs, both in New Orleans. The Eagles won on Jan. 3, 1993, 36-20, in a wild-card game. The Saints won on Jan. 13, 2007, 27-24, in a divisional round game. The Eagles lead the all-time series, 16-12.



THE RUNNING GAME

**WHEN THE EAGLES RUN THE BALL**

The Eagles are averaging a league-best 160.4 rushing yards per game and 5.1 yards per carry. LeSean McCoy, who won the league rushing title with 1,607 yards, had a career-high 314 carries, but has shown no ill effects from the workload. He finished the season strong, averaging 6.3 yards per carry in the final four games. Twenty-six of his last 82 carries have resulted in first downs. Nineteen were double-digit-yard runs. Bryce Brown and Chris Polk didn't get a lot of work this season, combining for just 86 carries. But they had five rushing touchdowns. The Saints are much better at rushing the passer than they are at stopping the run. They are 28th in yards allowed per carry (4.6) and 19th in rushing yards allowed per game (111.6). But because teams usually are playing from behind, it's a weakness that most teams haven't been able to exploit. The Saints' 387 opponent rushing attempts are the fifth fewest in the league.

**EDGE: EAGLES**

**WHEN THE SAINTS RUN THE BALL**

The Saints are a pass-oriented team that had the fifth-lowest run-play percentage (36.2) in the league. They've had more than 25 rushing attempts just twice in the last seven games. The Saints had four different backs with 50-plus carries, though Pierre Thomas (147 carries, 549 yards) is their primary runner. They had just one individual 100-yard rushing performance all season. That was by Mark Ingram (145 yards) against the Cowboys in mid-November. The Eagles' run defense has been very good most of the season. They have held opponents to 3.8 yards per carry, 2.7 in the last four games. They've given up just seven double-digit-yard runs in the last 127 carries, none longer than 12 yards. Their outside 'backers, Connor Barwin and Trent Cole, do a good job of setting the edge, and have combined for 19 tackles for losses. Their linemen have kept inside 'backers DeMeco Ryans and Mychal Kendricks clean all season.

**EDGE: EAGLES**

THE PASSING GAME

**WHEN THE EAGLES PASS THE BALL**

Armed with a live-to-fight-another-day mentality, Nick Foles has thrown just two interceptions in 317 attempts this season. He has just 13 incompletions in the last two games and eight of them were throwaways. Foles finished the regular season with the third-best passer rating in history (119.2). His situational numbers have been off the chart. Once considered a poor deep-ball thrower, he had a league-best 124.0 passer rating on throws of 20 or more yards, including 14 of his 27 touchdown passes. He led the league in third-down (110.0) and red-zone passing (119.6) and had a league-best 130.9 rating against the blitz. TEs Zach Ertz and Brent Celek have combined for 10 TD catches on 68 combined receptions. The Saints have a very good pass rush led by DE Cam Jordan and OLB Junior Galette, who have combined for 24.5 sacks.

**EDGE: EAGLES**

**WHEN THE SAINTS PASS THE BALL**

Drew Brees is one of the league's most accurate passers. His 65.9 career completion percentage is the second best in league history. Much like Peyton Manning, Brees is tough to blitz. Over the last 3 years, he has a 107.1 passer rating when defenses have sent extra rushers, throwing 28 TD passes and just five interceptions. That means the Eagles are going to have to try to get pressure on him primarily with a four-man rush. The Saints stretch defenses vertically and horizontally with their passing game. RBs Darren Sproles and Pierre Thomas have combined for 148 catches, 1,117 yards and five TDs. TE Jimmy Graham is the league's best pass-catching tight end. He's big (6-7, 265) and fast. He has a league-high 16 TD catches and is the only tight end with 1,000 receiving yards (1,215). ILB Mychal Kendricks probably will be matched up against Graham more than anyone.

**EDGE: SAINTS**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Saints released their longtime kicker, Garrett Hartley, 3 weeks ago and replaced him with 36-year-old Shayne Graham. Graham has converted just 72 percent of his field-goal attempts from 40-plus yards in 13 seasons. Punter Thomas Morstead is third in the league in net average (42.3) and has had just 24 of his 61 attempts returned. Darren Sproles is a solid return man, but his numbers are well below his career averages. Eagles punter Donnie Jones is ninth in net average (40.5) and has had just 12 of his last 45 punts returned. He's put a franchise-record 33 of his 82 attempts inside the 20. The Eagles are expected to get back one of their top coverage players — Colt Anderson. The Eagles are 11th in punt coverage and 19th in kickoff coverage.

**EDGE: EAGLES**

**INTANGIBLES**

If this game was going to be played in the Superdome, the Saints would be comfortable favorites. But it's not going to be. It's going to be played in frigid temperatures at the Linc. The Saints were unbeaten at home this season, but 3-5 on the road. They never have won a playoff game on the road. In Drew Brees' 13 seasons in the league, he is 3-7 as a starter in games played in temperatures below 40 degrees. He's never beaten a team with a winning record in temps below 40 degrees. The Saints' pass-heavy offensive style could struggle in the cold weather.

**EDGE: EAGLES**

**DOMOWITZ'S PREDICTION: EAGLES 38, SAINTS 34**

**STATSGLANCE**

A look at the factors driving Saturday's game.

**WHO'S HOT, WHO'S NOT**

**HOT**



**EAGLES**

**RB LeSean McCoy.** Rushed for 131 yards and caught a TD pass against the Cowboys. He's averaging 6.3 yards per carry in the last four games.



**SAINTS**

**OLB Junior Galette.** Has 12 sacks, six of which have come in the last four games.



**EAGLES**

**DE Fletcher Cox.** Has just two tackles in the last two games. Has no sacks and only six hurries in the last eight games.



**SAINTS**

**RB Pierre Thomas.** Averaging just 2.1 yards per carry and 5.1 yards per catch in the last five games.

**KEY MATCHUPS**

- Eagles ILB Mychal Kendricks vs. Saints TE Jimmy Graham:** Graham has a league-best 16 TD catches and is the only tight end with 85 or more catches (86) and 1,000-plus yards (1,215). Kendricks has the speed to stay with Graham, but is at an 8-inch size disadvantage. **Advantage: Saints**
- Eagles RT Lane Johnson vs. Saints OLB Junior Galette and DE Cam Jordan:** Johnson has had a pretty good rookie season, but has given up a team-high 10 sacks and 40 hurries. Galette and Jordan, who line up on different sides, have combined for 24.5 sacks. **Advantage: Saints**
- Eagles RB LeSean McCoy vs. Saints ILBs David Hawthorne and Curtis Lofton:** One of the Saints' top priorities will be trying to shut down the Eagles' inside zone runs. Nineteen of McCoy's last 82 carries have gone for double-digit yards. **Advantage: Eagles**

**BREAKING DOWN THE BIG PLAY**

Not only did the Eagles (98) lead the NFL in plays of 20-plus yards (excluding turnovers), but they had more such pass plays (79) than any other team's total (Broncos were 2nd with 77). The Panthers had the fewest 20-yard plays in the league (24) but made the postseason. Each playoff team's 20-yard play breakdown, by seed:

NFC	Plays	Run	Pass	TD	AFC	Plays	Run	Pass	TD
1. Seahawks	63	11	52	9	1. Broncos	77	9	68	20
2. Panthers	42	10	32	9	2. Patriots	61	12	49	8
<b>3. Eagles</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>21</b>	3. Bengals	62	5	57	13
4. Packers	76	11	65	10	4. Colts	56	11	45	10
5. 49ers	66	20	46	9	5. Chiefs	58	13	45	8
6. Saints	74	7	67	17	6. Chargers	66	7	59	11

**WHERE TEAMS RANK**

A look at where the Eagles and Saints rank:

	Offense			Defense		
	Total	Rushing	Passing	Total	Rushing	Passing
<b>Eagles</b>	2	1	9	29	10	32
<b>Saints</b>	4	25	2	4	19	2

**WEATHER REPORT**

Clear

20°