

Two Tales of One City (The NFL on REO)

Power Rankings

I got some help this week for the NFL Power Rankings from fellow REO contributors Gowdy Cannon and Mike Lytle. I asked them to rank their top 15 teams. I then assigned a point value to each team based on where they were ranked and then added those points together to get the final product – The NFL on REO Top Ten. (Example for the ranking: A 1st place vote receives 15 points, a 2nd place vote receives 14 points, and a 15th place vote receives 1 point.) I've listed the total point value for each team so you can see how this all came together. For the tie-breakers, I listed the rationale for why one team was placed above the other.

1. New England – 45

Back when the Patriots were 2-2 with what was by far the last place team in defensive points given up, it looked like the rest of the league may have had a prayer of not having to deal with this constant playoff juggernaut this year. It was a testimony to how incredible the offense is that they were 2-2 since most teams would have been 0-4 giving up 38 points every week.

But as anyone could see coming, the Patriots turned it around on D. They have been the best team in the league on defense as far as giving up points for the last eight weeks and have a chance to do something very few teams have done the last 30 years – go nine straight games giving up 17 or less. They are now solidly a Top Ten defense in the league by this simple yet extremely important criteria. The 0 still deserves credit though – the Patriots give up a bunch of yards but recently had 94 straight drives by their opponents start in the opponent's territory. A record for the last 25 years. That is

a credit to NE not turning it over and moving the ball when they have it.

This team is still the champ and the favorite until something major changes. – Gowdy Cannon

2. Pittsburgh – 40 (The Steelers had two number 2 votes while the Eagles only had one.)

3. Philadelphia – 40

4. Minnesota – 36

Just by stats and the eye test this team seems elite and poised to make a run in January. They have a Top 2 defense by the most basic measures and a solid running game and, to this point, excellent quarterback play by Case Keenum and at least for a game or so, Sam Bradford. I know the NFL stereotype is that you have to have an elite QB to win it all and this would cause concern for the Vikings, no matter how well Keenum or Bradford are playing. But seeing as how half the of the last twelve Super Bowls were won by Eli Manning, Joe Flacco, two of Ben Roethlisberger's most mediocre seasons and a wooden dummy that looked like Peyton Manning, I think the standard belief is often wrong. And while Keenum isn't anywhere close to Russell Wilson, he could at least be as effective as Wilson was in 2013.

The bigger problem to me is Minnesota's history. I don't think it's by chance that Atlanta and Carolina didn't get it done the last two years. The NFL is very much the haves and the have-nots historically and it takes either a special QB like John Elway or Drew Brees or a historically great defense like Seattle to cut through years and years of losing and choking. – Gowdy Cannon

5. New Orleans – 33

Giving Drew Brees that running game has been the just what this team needed. Ingram and Kamara have both been impressive this season and they will give the Saints something they have

not had in some time – a strong running attack for bad weather games in the playoffs. – Phill Lytle

6. Seattle – 31

The Seattle Seahawks have been one of the top NFL teams for the last several years with two Super Bowl appearances and one win plus several other trips to the playoffs. Most of their recent success has been due to their league best defense and a strong running game. This season that script has been flipped. Their defense is still in the top 10, although much closer to 10 than 1. Their rushing offense ranks 21st in the league and many of those yards are from quarterback Russell Wilson. Wilson is currently accounting for over 80% of his team's offense. If he keeps up this pace he will set an all time record. Seattle may not be complete enough to challenge for a title this year, but with Wilson under center we would never count them out. – Mike Lytle

7. LA Rams – 27

I'm not sold. Sorry, I'm just not. I realize their offense has been historically good, but history shows us that great offenses don't always go far in the playoffs when faced with good defenses and bad playing conditions. Plus, while Goff has been good this season, and much better than his rookie season, this is a guy that has never really played in a big game in his life. His University of California teams were never that great and some of them were terrible. I'm just not convinced he will play up to his regular season standard when faced with a tough opponent in the playoffs. – Phill Lytle

8. Carolina – 21 (There was no difference in voting between these two teams – each had the same votes: 10,9, and 8. I listed them alphabetically.)

9. Jacksonville – 21

10. Tennessee – 20

It's a good, yet frustrating, time to be a sport's fan in Nashville

Today, December 6th, 2017, Nashville has a first-place team in two different sports. In the NHL, the Nashville Predators are leading the Western Conference, as well as the Central Division. In the NFL, the Tennessee Titans are in first place in the AFC South. Both fan-bases have a lot to be excited about with the results they are seeing. Both teams are winning at a high percentage. Both teams look poised to make it to the playoffs, though the Predators have a long way to go before that becomes a reality due to the length of the NHL season. But beyond that, the reactions to these two first-place teams could not be any more different. The Nashville Predators are the darlings of the city while the Tennessee Titans seem like the often maligned, step-child. How did we get here?

The 2017-2018 Nashville Predators are one of the best teams in the NHL. They are the defending Western Conference Champions and appear to have improved since their impressive playoff run last season. They play an exciting, action-packed style that leaves the fans happy and satisfied. They win and they win with style. Simply put, they are a joy to watch.

The 2017-2018 Titans have the third-best record in the AFC and are in place as the 3rd seed for the playoffs. They barely missed the playoffs last year, going 9-7 in coach Mike Mularkey's first full season. They continue to win games even though the product on the field leaves a lot to be desired. They are inconsistent and seem to play down to their competition. Simply put, they are a constant frustration to watch.

I find myself in a weird spot when discussing the Titans with other fans. I acknowledge that the team has been erratic. I realize that this team should not consistently be in close

games against many of their opponents. They should be able to handily beat a good number of the teams they have faced this season, but instead, they have struggled to put it all together until very late in many of these games. Their young, star QB, Marcus Mariota has been just as erratic and frustrating with his performance this season. Taken as a whole, the Titans have not made it easy for their fans to feel optimistic about this season.

Except for one thing: They just keep winning.

You can deduct style points all you want, but the truth of the matter is, the Tennessee Titans are 8-4. They are 4-1 in their division. They are one of only a handful of teams this season with a winning record against teams with records over .500. (They beat: 8-4 Seattle, 8-4 Jacksonville, and 7-5 Baltimore. They lost to 10-2 Pittsburgh.) The Titans find ways to win, week after week and at some point, the fans just need to accept them for what they are: A frustrating, erratic, hard-working, and successful team.

For all the fans of both teams out there, enjoy both kinds of winning. Enjoy watching the Nashville Predators dominate the ice. Titans' fans haven't seen that kind of dominance in a very long time. It reminds me a lot of the 2000 team that steamrolled through the regular season. Frankly, I have no idea what this year's Titans' team reminds me of. (Insert your own joke here.) What I do know is that they are winning and that they have a few more winnable games left this season and a great shot at hosting a playoff game. How awesome is that? So, get on board people. Enjoy the ride, even if it is unpredictable and occasionally bumpy. It's better than it has been in a very long time