

SUPER BOWL LVI

Cincinnati Bengals vs. Los Angeles Rams • February 13, 2022 • 6:30 p.m. Eastern • SoFi Stadium, Inglewood, California



Why the Bengals will win



Bengals media pool photo

Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow prepares to throw during practice for Super Bowl LVI last week.



Why the Rams will win



Brevin Townsend | LA Rams

Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford prepares to throw during the NFC Championship Game against the San Francisco 49ers on Jan. 30.

Bengals will win ... I guarantee it!

BILL BURT
CNHI SPORTS BOSTON

There is something about Joe. Like another, young, "Super Bowl Joe," as in Joe "Willie" Namath. And it's not one thing. It's his confidence, which could be construed as arrogance. It's his play-making, especially late in games. It's his performance, lately, when it matters most. And, I have to be honest, those cigar pictures and videos exude something special. It's almost as if, I hate saying this, the Bengals have already won. It's a little strange. I get it. Burrow hasn't really done anything like the "miraculous" dude in Kansas City, Patrick Mahomes, with his dives, flings, side-angle chucks, etc. He just makes the proper amount of plays, usually when it matters most. And most of all, he seems to avoid that "killer" bonehead play 95% of quarterbacks make when the lights are at their brightest. Simply put, the best attribute of Burrow is everybody around him believes he is the chosen one, and by everybody I mean his

Bengals teammates and Bengals Nation. We have to put in perspective what Burrow is doing. He's literally taking a franchise from the ashes and turning it into a skyscraper. Sort of like Namath's Jets, which were facing off against the almighty Baltimore Colts. I can't tell you how it's going to happen, schematically, other than the fact the Bengals have an elite runner in Joe Mixon and an elite receiver in Ja'Marr Chase. Their defense allowed the Chiefs a measly field goal in the second half and shut out the Titans, the week before, in the fourth quarter of a 16-16 game. Which brings me back to Burrow. You don't go to Nashville and Kansas City in late January, without a leader leading. Again, Burrow didn't melt in the clutch, which is meaningful. And he didn't really do anything extraordinary, other than lead the final drive for the final points in both games, tied at the time. I believe the Rams are a one-and-done unit anyway. Burrow, on the other hand, is here for the long haul. The Bengals win. Burrow leads the way. I guarantee it!

Rams will win because they must

GEORGE BREMER
CNHI SPORTS INDIANA

The Los Angeles Rams were built to win this game. Literally. The all-in acquisition of quarterback Matthew Stafford and the addition of stars like wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr. and pass rusher Von Miller were all done with one goal in mind: To win Super Bowl LVI at L.A.'s gleaming new SoFi Stadium. The blueprint is similar to the one the Tampa Bay Buccaneers used in 2020 when quarterback Tom Brady and a collection of veteran stars surged to a world championship on their home field. The on-field blueprint will have to be similar, too. Tampa Bay's 31-9 domination of the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs included three sacks and nine official hits on quarterback Patrick Mahomes. The Bucs made the magician look mortal — hounding him into just 26 completions in 49 attempts and intercepting him twice without allowing a touchdown. Defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh led the charge to the quarterback for Tampa

Bay. Defensive tackle Aaron Donald must do the same for the Bucs. Getting to Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow will be essential for the Rams. But Burrow isn't easily affected. He shrugged off nine sacks in the divisional round against the Tennessee Titans to throw for 348 yards and lead a game-winning field goal drive at the end of the fourth quarter. The Chiefs only got to Burrow once in the AFC Championship Game as he erased a 21-3 deficit and again drove for the winning field goal in overtime. To combat the new "Joe Cool," L.A.'s stars must play like stars. Miller must help bring the pressure in the pocket, and cornerback Jalen Ramsey has to figure out a way to slow down rookie of the century Ja'Marr Chase. On offense, Stafford and wide receiver Cooper Kupp just have to keep doing what they do. In each of the past two games, the duo has made a game-changing play late in the fourth quarter. They'll do it again Sunday, and the Rams will hoist the Lombardi Trophy. They have no other choice.

Stars & Storylines

1 Ramsey vs. Chase

Two of the NFL's best players at their positions will face off — Rams cornerback Jalen Ramsey versus Bengals rookie receiver Ja'Marr Chase. Chase has averaged four receptions for 64 yards in Cincinnati's losses. In the Bengals' wins its six receptions for 106 yards. You see the correlation?

2 Stafford vs. bright lights

So far, Rams QB Matthew Stafford has passed some tests, going from perennial "loser" to winner. His two key passes in the final minute against Tampa Bay were the most important of his career. Stafford has not played in any games of this magnitude. He is prone to making big mistakes.

If he doesn't, the Rams will win. Period.

3 Rams' front four vs. Bengals OL

This, on paper, looks like a mismatch. DT Aaron Donald and OLB Von Miller, in particular, are hot right now. If the Bengals, despite their alleged woes on the OL, keep Joe Burrow upright and get Joe Mixon his 75-plus yards, the Bengals win. In other words, Donald needs to have an MVP-like game. Burrow was sacked 51 times. No other QB has been sacked more than 50 times and won a Super Bowl.

4 McVay vs. bright lights

Rams coach Sean McVay was embarrassed by Bill

Belichick three years ago. His prolific offense scored three points in the Super Bowl, tied for the fewest in the game's history. He made no discernible adjustments that February night. This is different. He has a better offense with better high-end talent at the skill positions. If his defense does its job, it will be on McVay to get to the high 20s or low 30s.

5 Field goals edge to Bengals

Bengals rookie Evan McPherson is 12-for-12 on field goal attempts in this postseason. Rams kicker Matt Gay has been solid in the playoffs, going 7-for-9. A low-scoring game favors the Bengals.

— Bill Burt, CNHI Sports Boston

Facts & Figures

- 29** Years since L.A. last hosted the Super Bowl. The Dallas Cowboys beat the Buffalo Bills 52-17 at the Rose Bowl in Super Bowl XXVII.
- 8** Super Bowls hosted in the City of Angels. Only Miami (11) and New Orleans (10) have played host more often.
- 1** Overall draft position for Rams QB Matthew Stafford (2009) and Bengals QB Joe Burrow (2020). It's just the second time QBs taken No. 1 overall will square off in the Super Bowl. Peyton Manning and Cam Newton did it in Super Bowl 50.
- 74** Combined ages of Rams head coach Sean McVay (36) and Bengals head coach Zac Taylor (38), the youngest in Super Bowl history. Taylor worked as a Rams assistant under McVay in 2017-18.
- 1,947** League-leading receiving yards for Rams WR Cooper Kupp. It's the fourth time the NFL's leading receiver has made it to the Super Bowl. The previous three won the big game.
- 6** The Bengals are one of six active franchises never to have won a Super Bowl, NFL or AFL championship. The others are the Minnesota Vikings, Atlanta Falcons, Carolina Panthers, Jacksonville Jaguars and Houston Texans.

— Compiled by George Bremer, CNHI Sports Indiana

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