

SUPER BOWL LIX

5 STATS TO WATCH



SEAHAWKS

- Despite blitzing among the lowest in the NFL (23.1%), 'Hawks had fourth-highest pressure rate (38.9%) on pass plays.
- QB Sam Darnold is red-hot in the playoffs, posting a 122.4 passer rating in two games, fourth-highest in NFL history.
- WR Jaxon Smith-Njigba had MVP numbers in the regular season, with 119 receptions, 1,793 yards and 10 TDs. Also led the NFL with 16 receptions of 20-plus yards.
- Seattle's stout defense lacks in one category, ranking 14th overall in QB rushing yards allowed.
- Darnold's passing under duress was not good (69.4 passer rating) with 6 TDs and 6 interceptions. Only five quarterbacks were worse.



PATRIOTS

- Defense ranked sixth in the NFL in rushing yards allowed per game (101.7), but even better in the playoffs — No. 1 — allowing 71.3 net rushing yards per game.
- QB Drake Maye has been sacked 15 times in three playoff games, equaling a three-game stretch in late October and early November.
- Patriots red zone rushing defense ranks 26th in the NFL.
- RB TreVeyon Henderson's playoff slump: 57 yards rushing, 7 yards receiving
- OLB K'Lavon Chaisson is a playoff MVP with 3 sacks, 1 forced fumble and 3 tackles for loss.



Star-spangled celebration

While attention has been focused on halftime performer **Bad Bunny**, the Super Bowl LX pregame ceremonies will celebrate the country's 250th anniversary: **► Brandi Carlile** will sing "America the Beautiful" **► Coco Jones**, daughter of former NFL player Mike Jones, will sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" **► Charlie Puth** will sing the national anthem, concluding with a historic joint U.S. Air Force/U.S. Navy combined flyover

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New England head coach Mike Vrabel, left, and Seattle head coach Mike MacDonald, right, have led their teams to Super Bowl LX.

MIKE vs. MIKE

Seattle's MacDonald, New England's Vrabel two different roads, one similar method to greatness

By Hector Longo

» CNHI Sports Boston

They are mavericks in their own ways, defensive guys reaching the pinnacle in a National Football League hungry to find the next offensive mastermind.

Mike Vrabel and Mike MacDonald are bucking the trend, leading their teams to the NFL's most hallowed turf, Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, for Super Bowl LX.

It's a matchup few if any might have conjured back in September: New England's Vrabel, in his trademark coaching vest, leading the franchise with which he picked up three Super Bowl rings as a player (2001, '03, '04) from the ashes of a 4-13 2024 season, and MacDonald inheriting one of the game's most erratic quarterback enigmas in Sam Darnold and taking the Seahawks from solid

to spectacular in just his second year at the helm.

But who are these guys?

Vrabel is brash, brutally honest and thoroughly heartfelt. He's just not going to lie to you, no matter how much the truth hurts. His players, still trembling from a rugged year under Jerod Mayo in 2024, felt the culture change instantaneously.

Vrabel wasn't about to tell you what you wanted to hear. He tells you what you need to hear ... for your own good and for the good of the team.

"I think he does a great job of kind of relating to us, being able to talk as a player and now as a coach," says Patriots quarterback Drake Maye. "Just being able to kind of hit home at spots or moments this season that we can relate back to. I remember we talked about it at the beginning of the season, talking about

our stories and what hopes we had. Our hopes were to win the big game and win the Super Bowl, and look where we're at now."

Vrabel oozed character as a cornerstone of those great Patriots' Super Bowl defenses. With three rings on your resume, you carry instant cache into the room.

Seattle's MacDonald has not been able to ride the same kind of wave. If Vrabel the player propped open the door on the path to coaching greatness for him, MacDonald had to kick it in.

The 38-year-old, who was born in Boston but grew up in Georgia, put the helmet on for the last time in high school. While at the University of Georgia, he coached high school football.

After a short stint at Georgia as a grad assistant and then a lower-level assistant, he picked up an internship with John Harbaugh's

Baltimore Ravens.

Almost two decades since he first blew the whistle and after a long ride up the ladder, he is on the precipice.

The Seahawks replaced their lone Super Bowl champion coach, Pete Carroll, with MacDonald, a move many questioned.

Not the boss in Seattle.

"With Mike, it was the clarity ... this clear, thoughtful, intense, intelligent messaging," said Seattle General Manager John Schneider, now in his 16th year with the Seahawks.

"He's done an amazing job already, talking with people who have been through it. His messaging is awesome. He's very clear. He can go right at it."

MacDonald, like Vrabel, is a no-nonsense leader with an unmatched drive. He can't share similar on-field experiences with his players, and yet, he hits home.

Legacies on the line

Quarterbacks had a similar start, different journeys to matchup in Santa Clara

By Bill Burt

» CNHI Sports Boston

Sam Darnold and Drake Maye arrived to the NFL under remarkably similar circumstances.

Both were gifted athletes and No. 3 overall picks in their respective drafts.

And both got their butts beaten as AFC East rookie quarterbacks with the New York Jets and New England Patriots, respectively.

Darnold's 2018 Jets were 4-12. Maye's 2024 Patriots were 4-13.

Both entered their sophomore seasons with new head coaches, Adam Gase and Mike Vrabel.

From there their careers took off in different directions, as in 180 degrees.

Maye, 23, almost magically became a top-tier MVP candidate, remarkably leading the NFL in completion percentage (72.0) and yards per attempt (8.9), and now 60 minutes from a Super Bowl title.

His big plays with his feet, similar to Josh



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seahawks quarterback Sam Darnold, left, and Patriots quarterback Drake Maye, right, entered the NFL with high expectations.

Allen, have become a regular occurrence. Despite his passing struggles in the AFC title game, he ran for six first downs and a touchdown.

While Darnold's journey as a "sophomore" improved very slightly — the Jets were 7-9 — it fell off the rails as the AFC's worst, 2-14, in Year 3. The Jets moved on, drafting Zach Wilson with the second overall pick, and Darnold became a journeyman.

It started in Carolina, with 17 starts (8-9) over two seasons; then San Francisco as Brock Purdy's backup; then a big rebound season in Minnesota (14-3), finishing 10th in MVP voting with 34 TDs versus only 12 interceptions. Yet the Vikings opted to let him go in favor of their injury-prone kid QB, J.J. McCarthy.

But the Seahawks believed, letting Geno Smith leave for the Raiders, while signing



JAIME CAMPOS

Darnold to a three-year, \$100 million contract, which essentially was a two-year, \$55 million guarantee.

While Maye was a legit MVP threat with Matthew Stafford since early November, Darnold's 25 TDs versus 14 interceptions and now, 16 wins preceding the Super Bowl deserves recognition.

It could be argued that Darnold's playoff run — 70% completions, 4 TDs and just one turnover — has trumped Maye's uneven passing game in January.

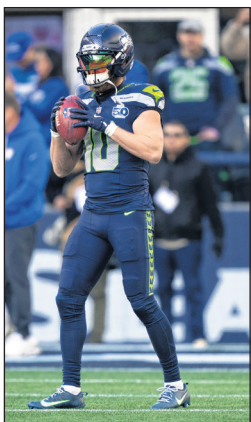
Maye, it appears, is more important to the Patriots offense, but Darnold consistency and the Seahawks offense has been superior in the playoffs.

It's a great story. Two promising star quarterbacks navigating their way, one a Yellow Brick Road and the other a roller coaster, will meet with some big-time legacy up for grabs.

All-time Super Bowl MVP winners

- I:** Bart Starr, QB, Green Bay
- II:** Bart Starr, QB, Green Bay
- III:** Joe Namath, QB, New York Jets
- IV:** Len Dawson, QB, Kansas City
- V:** Chuck Howley, LB, Dallas
- VI:** Roger Staubach, QB, Dallas
- VII:** Jake Scott, S, Miami
- VIII:** Larry Csonka, FB, Miami
- IX:** Franco Harris, RB, Pittsburgh
- X:** Lynn Swann, WR, Pittsburgh
- XI:** Fred Biletnikoff, WR, Oakland
- XII:** Harvey Martin & Randy White, DL, Dallas
- XIII:** Terry Bradshaw, QB, Pittsburgh
- XIV:** Terry Bradshaw, QB, Pittsburgh
- XV:** Jim Plunkett, QB, Oakland
- XVI:** Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco
- XVII:** John Riggins, RB, Washington
- XVIII:** Marcus Allen, RB, Los Angeles Raiders
- XIX:** Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco

- XX:** Richard Dent, DE, Chicago
- XXI:** Phil Simms, QB, New York Giants
- XXII:** Doug Williams, QB, Washington
- XXIII:** Jerry Rice, WR, San Francisco
- XXIV:** Joe Montana, QB, San Francisco
- XXV:** Ottis Anderson, RB, New York Giants
- XXVI:** Mark Rypien, QB, Washington
- XXVII:** Troy Aikman, QB, Dallas
- XXVIII:** Emmitt Smith, RB, Dallas
- XXIX:** Steve Young, QB, San Francisco



Now with Seattle, Cooper Kupp was the MVP of Super Bowl LVI as a member of the Rams.

- XXX:** Larry Brown, CB, Dallas
- XXXI:** Desmond Howard, KR, Green Bay
- XXXII:** Terrell Davis, RB, Denver
- XXXIII:** John Elway, QB, Denver
- XXXIV:** Kurt Warner, QB, St. Louis
- XXXV:** Ray Lewis, LB, Baltimore
- XXXVI:** Tom Brady, QB, New England
- XXXVII:** Dexter Jackson, CB, Tampa Bay
- XXXVIII:** Tom Brady, QB, New England
- XXXIX:** Deion Branch, WR, New England

- XL:** Hines Ward, WR, Pittsburgh
- XLI:** Peyton Manning, QB, Indianapolis
- XLII:** Eli Manning, QB, New York Giants
- XLIII:** Antonio Holmes, WR, Pittsburgh
- XLIV:** Drew Brees, QB, New Orleans
- XLV:** Aaron Rodgers, QB, Green Bay
- XLVI:** Eli Manning, QB, New York Giants
- XLVII:** Joe Flacco, QB, Baltimore
- XLVIII:** Malcolm Smith, LB, Seattle
- XLIX:** Tom Brady, QB, New England

- L:** Von Miller, LB, Denver
- LI:** Tom Brady, QB, New England
- LII:** Nick Foles, QB, Philadelphia
- LIII:** Julian Edelman, WR, New England
- LIV:** Patrick Mahomes, QB, Kansas City
- LV:** Tom Brady, QB, Tampa Bay
- LVI:** Cooper Kupp, WR, Los Angeles Rams
- LVII:** Patrick Mahomes, QB, Kansas City
- LVIII:** Patrick Mahomes, QB, Kansas City
- LIX:** Jalen Hurts, QB, Philadelphia