

## Super Bowl History

For four decades after its 1920 inception, the NFL successfully fended off several rival leagues. However, in 1960, it encountered its most serious competitor when the American Football League (AFL) was formed. The AFL vied heavily with the NFL for both players and fans, but by the middle of the decade the strain of competition led to serious merger talks between the two leagues. Prior to the 1966 season, the NFL and AFL reached a merger agreement that was to take effect for the 1970 season. As part of the merger, the champions of the two leagues agreed to meet in a world championship game for professional American football until the merger was effected.

Lamar Hunt, owner of the AFL's Kansas City Chiefs, first used the term "Super Bowl" to refer to this game in the merger meetings. Hunt would later say the name was likely in his head because his children had been playing with a Super Ball toy, a vintage example of the ball is on display at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Although the leagues' owners decided on the name "AFL-NFL Championship Game," the media immediately picked up on Hunt's "Super Bowl" name, which would become official beginning with the third annual game. Roman numerals were first affixed for the fifth edition, in January 1971.

After the NFL's Green Bay Packers won the first two Super Bowls, some team owners feared for the future of the merger. At the time, many doubted the competitiveness of AFL teams compared with their NFL counterparts, though that perception changed when the AFL's New York Jets defeated the NFL's Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III in Miami. One year later, the AFL's Kansas City Chiefs

defeated the NFL's Minnesota Vikings 23–7 in Super Bowl IV in New Orleans, which was the final AFL-NFL World Championship Game played before the merger. Beginning with the 1970 season, the NFL realigned into two conferences; the former AFL teams plus three NFL teams (the Colts, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Cleveland Browns) would constitute the American Football Conference (AFC), while the remaining NFL clubs would form the National Football Conference (NFC). The champions of the two conferences would play each other in the Super Bowl.

The winning team receives the Vince Lombardi Trophy, named after the coach of the Green Bay Packers, who won the first two Super Bowl games and three of the five preceding NFL championships in 1961, 1962, and 1965. Following Lombardi's death in September 1970, the trophy was named the Vince Lombardi Trophy, and was the first awarded as such to the Baltimore Colts following their win in Super Bowl V in Miami.

The Super Bowl is currently played on the first Sunday in February. This is due to the NFL current schedule which consists of the opening weekend of the season being held immediately after Labor Day (the first Monday in September), the 17-week regular season (where teams each play 16 games and have one bye), the first three rounds of the playoffs, and the Super Bowl two weeks after the two Conference Championship Games. This schedule has been in effect since Super Bowl XXXVIII in February 2004. The date of the Super Bowl can thus be determined from the date of the preceding Labor Day. For example, Labor Day 2015 was September 7: therefore the next Super Bowl is scheduled exactly five months later on February 7, 2016.

Originally, the game took place in early to mid-January. For Super Bowl I there was only one round of playoffs. The addition of two playoff rounds (first in 1967 and then in 1978), an increase in regular season games from 14 to 16 (1978), and the establishment of one bye-week per team (1990) have caused the Super Bowl to be played later. Partially offsetting these season-lengthening effects, the season was started earlier.

## **Game History**

The Pittsburgh Steelers have won six Super Bowls, the most of any team; the Dallas Cowboys and San Francisco 49ers have five victories each, while the Green Bay Packers, New York Giants and New England Patriots have four Super Bowl championships. Thirteen other NFL franchises have won at least one Super Bowl. Nine teams have appeared in Super Bowl games without a win. The Minnesota Vikings were the first team to have appeared a record four times without a win. The Buffalo Bills played in a record four Super Bowls in a row, and lost every one. Four teams (the Cleveland Browns, Detroit Lions, Jacksonville Jaguars, and Houston Texans) have never appeared in a Super Bowl. The Browns and Lions both won NFL Championships prior to the Super Bowl's creation, while the Jaguars (1995) and Texans (2002) are both recent NFL expansion teams. The Minnesota Vikings won the last NFL Championship before the merger, but lost to the AFL champion Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl IV.

### **1960s**

The Green Bay Packers won the first two Super Bowls, defeating the Kansas City Chiefs and Oakland Raiders following the 1966 and 1967 seasons, respectively. The Packers were led by quarterback Bart Starr, who was named the Most Valuable Player (MVP) for both games. These two championships, coupled with the Packers' NFL championships in 1961, 1962, and 1965, amount to the most successful stretch in NFL History; five championships in seven years.

In Super Bowl III, the AFL's New York Jets defeated the eighteen-point favorite Baltimore Colts of the NFL, 16–7. The Jets were led by quarterback Joe Namath and former Colts head coach Weeb Ewbank, and their victory proved that the AFL was the NFL's competitive equal. This was reinforced the following year, when the AFL's Kansas City Chiefs defeated the NFL's Minnesota Vikings 23–7 in Super Bowl IV.

## 1970s

After the AFL–NFL merger was completed in 1970, three franchises – the Dallas Cowboys, Miami Dolphins, and Pittsburgh Steelers – would go on to dominate the 1970s, winning a combined eight Super Bowls in the decade.

The Baltimore Colts, now a member of the AFC, would start the decade by defeating the Cowboys in Super Bowl V, a game which is notable as being the only Super Bowl to date in which a player from the losing team won the Super Bowl MVP (Cowboys' linebacker Chuck Howley). Beginning with this Super Bowl, all Super Bowls have served as the NFL's league championship game.

The Cowboys, coming back from a loss the previous season, won Super Bowl VI over the Dolphins. However, this would be the Dolphins' final loss in over a year, as the next year, the Dolphins would go 14–0 in the regular season and eventually win all of their playoff games, capped off with a 14-7 victory in Super Bowl VII, becoming the first and only team to finish an entire perfect regular and post season. The Dolphins would repeat as league champions by winning Super Bowl VIII a year later.

In the late 1970s, the Steelers became the first NFL dynasty of the post-merger era by winning four Super Bowls (IX, X, XIII, and XIV) in six years. They were led by head coach Chuck Noll, the play of offensive stars Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, Lynn Swann, John Stallworth, and Mike Webster, and their dominant "Steel Curtain" defense, led by "Mean" Joe Greene, L.C. Greenwood, Ernie Holmes, Mel Blount, Jack Ham, and Jack Lambert. The coaches and administrators also were part of the dynasty's greatness as evidenced by the team's "final pieces" being part of the famous 1974 draft. The selections in that class have been considered the best by any pro franchise ever, as Pittsburgh selected four future Hall of Famers, the most for any team in any sport in a single draft. The Steelers were the first team to win three and then four Super Bowls and appeared in six AFC Championship Games during the decade, making the playoffs in eight straight seasons. Nine players and three coaches and administrators on the team have

been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Pittsburgh still remains the only team to win back-to-back Super Bowls twice and four Super Bowls in a six-year period.

The Steelers' dynasty was interrupted only by the Cowboys winning their second Super Bowl of the decade and the Oakland Raiders' Super Bowl XI win.

### **1980s and 1990s**

In the 1980s and 1990s, the tables turned for the AFC, as the NFC dominated the Super Bowls of the new decade and most of those of the 1990s. The NFC won 16 of the 20 Super Bowls during these two decades, including 13 straight from Super Bowl XIX to Super Bowl XXXI.

The most successful team of the 1980s was the San Francisco 49ers, which featured the West Coast offense of Hall of Fame head coach Bill Walsh. This offense was led by three-time Super Bowl MVP and Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Montana, Super Bowl MVP and Hall of Fame wide receiver Jerry Rice, and tight end Brent Jones. Under their leadership, the 49ers won four Super Bowls in the decade (XVI, XIX, XXIII, and XXIV) and made nine playoff appearances between 1981 and 1990, including eight division championships, becoming the second dynasty of the post-merger NFL.

The 1980s also produced the 1985 Chicago Bears, who posted an 18–1 record under head coach Mike Ditka; colorful quarterback Jim McMahon; and Hall of Fame running back Walter Payton. Their team won Super Bowl XX in dominating fashion. The Washington Redskins and New York Giants were also top teams of this period; the Redskins won Super Bowls XVII, XXII, and XXVI. The Giants claimed Super Bowls XXI and XXV. As in the 1970s, the Oakland Raiders were the only team to interrupt the Super Bowl dominance of other teams; they won Super Bowls XV and XVIII (the latter as the Los Angeles Raiders).

Following several seasons with poor records in the 1980s, the Dallas Cowboys rose back to prominence in the 1990s. During this decade, the Cowboys made post-season appearances every year except for the seasons of 1990 and 1997. From 1992 to 1996, the Cowboys won their division championship each year. In this same period, the Buffalo Bills had made their mark reaching the Super Bowl for a record four consecutive years, only to lose all four. After Super Bowl championships by division rivals New York (1990) and Washington (1991), the Cowboys won three of the next four Super Bowls (XXVII, XXVIII, and XXX) led by quarterback Troy Aikman, running back Emmitt Smith, and wide receiver Michael Irvin. All three of these players went to the Hall of Fame. The Cowboys' streak was interrupted by the 49ers, who won their league-leading fifth title overall with Super Bowl XXIX in dominating fashion under Super Bowl MVP and Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young, Hall of Fame wide receiver Jerry Rice, and Hall of Fame cornerback Deion Sanders; however, the Cowboys' victory in Super Bowl XXX the next year also gave them five titles overall and they did so with Deion Sanders after he won the Super Bowl the previous year with the San Francisco 49ers. The NFC's winning streak was continued by the Green Bay Packers who, under quarterback Brett Favre, won Super Bowl XXXI, their first championship since Super Bowl II in the late 1960s.

## **1997–2009**

Super Bowl XXXII saw quarterback John Elway and running back Terrell Davis lead the Denver Broncos to an upset victory over the defending champion Packers, snapping the NFC's 13 year winning streak. The following year, the Broncos defeated the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl XXXIII, Elway's fifth Super Bowl appearance, his second NFL championship, and his final NFL game. The back-to-back victories heralded a change in momentum in which AFC teams would win 10 out of 13 Super Bowls. In the years between 2001 and 2011, three teams – the Patriots, Steelers, and Colts – accounted for ten of the AFC Super Bowl appearances, with those same teams often meeting each other earlier in the playoffs. In contrast, the NFC saw a different representative in the Super Bowl every season from 2001 through 2010.

The year following the Denver Broncos' second victory, however, a surprising St. Louis Rams led by undrafted quarterback Kurt Warner would close out the 1990s in a wild battle against the Tennessee Titans in Super Bowl XXXIV. The tense game came down to the final play in which Tennessee had the opportunity to tie the game and send it to overtime. The Titans nearly pulled it off, but the tackle of receiver Kevin Dyson by linebacker Mike Jones kept the ball out of the end zone by a matter of inches. In 2007, ESPN would rank "The Tackle" as the 2nd greatest moment in Super Bowl history.

Super Bowl XXXV was played by the AFC's Baltimore Ravens and the NFC's New York Giants. The Ravens defeated the Giants by the score of 34–7. The game was played on January 28, 2001, at Raymond James Stadium in Tampa, Florida. The New England Patriots became the dominant team throughout the early 2000s, winning the championship three out of four years early in the decade. They would become only the second team in the history of the NFL to do so (after the 1990s Dallas Cowboys). In Super Bowl XXXVI, first-year starting quarterback Tom Brady led his team to a 20–17 upset victory over the St. Louis Rams. Brady would go on to win the MVP award for this game. The Patriots also won Super Bowls XXXVIII and XXXIX defeating the Carolina Panthers and the Philadelphia Eagles respectively. This four-year stretch of Patriot dominance was only interrupted by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' 48-21 Super Bowl XXXVII victory over the Oakland Raiders.

The Pittsburgh Steelers and Indianapolis Colts continued the era of AFC dominance by winning Super Bowls XL and XLI in 2005-06 and 2006–07, respectively defeating the Seattle Seahawks and Chicago Bears.

In the 2007 season, the Patriots became the second team in NFL history to have a perfect regular season record, after the 1972 Miami Dolphins, and the first to finish 16–0. They easily marched through the AFC playoffs and were heavy favorites in Super Bowl XLII. However, they lost that game to Eli Manning and the New York Giants 17–14, leaving the Patriots' 2007 record at 18-1.

The following season, the Steelers logged their record sixth Super Bowl title (XLIII) in a 27-23, final-minute victory against the Arizona Cardinals.

## **2010–present**

The 2010s have seen a return to dominance by NFC teams. Between 2010 and 2015, four of the six Super Bowl winners hailed from the NFC.

The Giants won another title after the 2011 season, again defeating the Patriots in Super Bowl XLVI. Prior to that Super Bowl victory, the New Orleans Saints won their first (XLIV) by defeating the Indianapolis Colts in February 2010, and the Green Bay Packers won their fourth Super Bowl (XLV) and record thirteenth NFL championship overall by defeating the Pittsburgh Steelers in February 2011. The Baltimore Ravens interrupted the NFC's streak by winning Super Bowl XLVII in a 34-31 nail-biter over the San Francisco 49ers.

Super Bowl XLVIII, played at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium in February 2014, was the first Super Bowl held outdoors in a cold weather environment. The Seattle Seahawks won their first NFL title with a 43-8 defeat of the Denver Broncos, in a highly touted matchup that pitted Seattle's top-ranked defense against a Peyton-Manning-led Denver offense that had broken the NFL's single-season scoring record.

In Super Bowl XLIX, the New England Patriots, the AFC champions, beat the NFC and defending Super Bowl champions, the Seattle Seahawks.

The Super Bowls of the 2000s and early 2010s are notable for the performances of several of the participating quarterbacks. During that era, Tom Brady (six Super Bowl appearances, four wins), Ben Roethlisberger (three appearances, two wins), Peyton Manning (three appearances, one win), Eli Manning (two appearances, two wins), Kurt Warner (three appearances, one win), Drew Brees (one appearance, one win), Aaron Rodgers (one appearance, one win), Joe Flacco (one



appearance, one win), and Russell Wilson (two appearances, one win) have all added Super Bowl championships to their lists of individual accomplishments.

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