

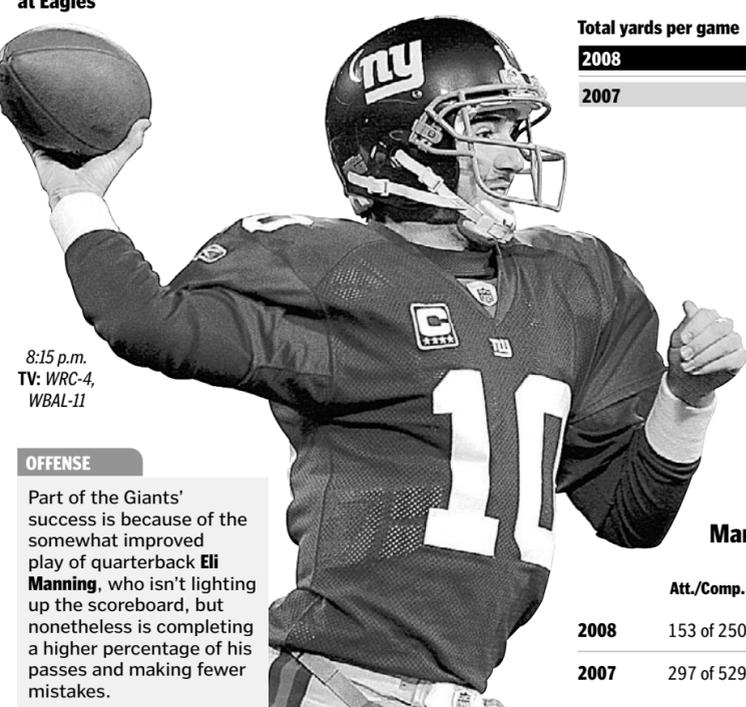
NFL Gameday

Compiled by Desmond Bieler, Matt Bonesteel, David Larimer and Gene Wang

1

Better Than Super

The Giants, seen by many as the best team in the NFL right now, are better than last season's Super Bowl-winning team in every major statistical category.



8:15 p.m.
TV: WRC-4,
WBAL-TV

OFFENSE

Part of the Giants' success is because of the somewhat improved play of quarterback **Eli Manning**, who isn't lighting up the scoreboard, but nonetheless is completing a higher percentage of his passes and making fewer mistakes.

DEFENSE

The defensive line has been a terror to opposing quarterbacks even without the retired Michael Strahan (nine sacks last season) and the injured Osi Umenyiora (13 sacks last season).

BY AL BELLO — GETTY IMAGES

Total yards per game

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|----|
| 2008 | 371.4 | NFL RANK | 5 |
| 2007 | 331.4 | | 16 |

Passing yards per game

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|----|
| 2008 | 208.8 | NFL RANK | 16 |
| 2007 | 197.1 | | 21 |

Rushing yards per game

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|---|
| 2008 | 162.6 | NFL RANK | 2 |
| 2007 | 134.3 | | 4 |

Points per game

| | | | |
|------|------|----------|----|
| 2008 | 28.2 | NFL RANK | 2 |
| 2007 | 23.3 | | 14 |

Manning's Stats

| | Att./Comp. | Comp. pct. | Yards per game | TDs | INTs | Passer rating |
|------|------------|------------|----------------|-----|------|---------------|
| 2008 | 153 of 250 | 61.2% | 216.9 | 12 | 5 | 89.7 |
| 2007 | 297 of 529 | 56.1% | 208.5 | 23 | 20 | 73.9 |



BY AL BELLO — GETTY IMAGES

Total yards allowed per game

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|---|
| 2008 | 260.4 | NFL RANK | 3 |
| 2007 | 305 | | 7 |

Passing yards allowed per game

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|----|
| 2008 | 175 | NFL RANK | 2 |
| 2007 | 207.3 | | 11 |

Rushing yards allowed per game

| | | | |
|------|------|----------|---|
| 2008 | 85.4 | NFL RANK | 7 |
| 2007 | 97.7 | | 8 |

Points allowed per game

| | | | |
|------|------|----------|----|
| 2008 | 16.1 | NFL RANK | 4 |
| 2007 | 21.9 | | 17 |

Sack Specialists

The Giants are averaging 3.8 sacks per game (2nd in the NFL after the Steelers) and have three players who are on pace to get 10 sacks each, something that hasn't happened since 2000. None of the six teams to have featured such trios previously has made the Super Bowl.

1 Justin Tuck
2008: **8.5** (on pace for 17)
2007: **10**

2 Mathias Kiwanuka
2008: **5.5** (on pace for 11)
2007: **4.5**

3 Fred Robbins
2008: **5.5** (on pace for 11)
2007: **5.5**

2 New Orleans at Atlanta

1 p.m.
Saints QB Drew Brees leads the league in passing yards (2,563 total, 320.4 per game), completions of 20 yards or more (34) and completions of 40 yards or more (11). No quarterback has attempted more passes (304), and only one, the Cardinals' Kurt Warner, has completed a higher percentage (and it's a matter of percentage points, Warner's 69.9 percent to Brees's 69.1). Brees is averaging 8.4 yards per attempt, which is second only to the Chargers' Philip Rivers (8.7 yards per attempt). His 101.6 passer rating is fourth in the league.

This game also will showcase the player many believe has all but sealed up rookie of the year honors: Atlanta QB Matt Ryan. He was named the NFC's offensive player of the week after completing 17 of 22 passes for 220 yards and two touchdowns in a win over the Raiders last Sunday. Ryan is 3-0 at home this season, with 3 touchdown passes, 0 interceptions and a 121.9 passer rating.



BY JED JACOBSON — GETTY IMAGES
Matt Ryan is 3-0 at home in his rookie season for the Falcons, who host Drew Brees and the Saints today.

Tennessee at Chicago

1 p.m.
Some surprises about the Bears.
Surprise No. 1: The Bears, who over the last couple of years have garnered a reputation as a defensive force, rank only 18th in the league in total defense at 329.5 yards per game.
Surprise No. 2: That's actually an improvement over last season, when they allowed 354.7 yards per game to rank 28th in the league.
Surprise No. 3: According to the Chicago Sun-Times, the Bears "have allocated a higher percentage of their salary cap to that area [defense] than all but one other team."
Surprise No. 4: The Bears' Devin Hester, who returned seven punts and four kickoffs for touchdowns in his first two seasons, has none this season.
Surprise No. 5: Hester's 20.9-yard average on kickoff returns is nowhere close to the league lead among those with at least 10 kick returns (The Patriots' Ellis Hobbs is averaging 29.3 yards per return). Hester is averaging only 6.2 yards per punt return; last year he averaged 15.5.



BY RICKY CARIOTI — THE WASHINGTON POST
Ike Taylor and the Steelers defense shut down the Redskins on Monday night and will try to do the same against the Colts today in Pittsburgh.

Buffalo at New England

1 p.m.
Patriots C Dan Koppen, LG Logan Mankins and LT Matt Light all made the Pro Bowl last season, and each has started all eight games this season. So why have the Patriots allowed 29 sacks this season, third most in the league behind the 49ers (34) and Bengals (30)?

It's not going to get much easier for New England after this weekend. After today's game against the Bills, who have only 13 sacks, the Patriots face the Jets (29 sacks, third in the league), Dolphins (18 sacks, 12th in the league) and Steelers (an NFL-best 32 sacks).

Meanwhile, after consecutive nine-point losses to division opponents, the Bills' "bandwagon has gone careening off the rails," as Jerry Sullivan of the Buffalo News put it. They didn't sack Jets QB Brett Favre in Sunday's loss, and their one big defensive play — Jabari Greer's interception return for a touchdown — was caused by Favre's truly rancid pass. The Bills have only eight sacks in their last seven games.

Indianapolis at Pittsburgh

4:15 p.m., WUSA-9, WJZ-13
Peyton Manning and the Colts' well-documented troubles getting their passing game in sync have been getting most of the headlines, but there's one other, perhaps more meaningful tidbit that's just starting to garner some attention: The Colts' running game is an utter mess and could be something of a historic mess if they keep up their current pace.
As Mike Chappell points out in the Indianapolis Star, the Colts' have the league's worst rushing attack at 70.1 yards per game. If that number holds up after the second half of the season, it would be second-lowest average in team history.
The Steelers allow the same amount of rushing yards per game, 70.1, as the Colts gain. Only that ranks Pittsburgh's defense No. 3 in the league. The Steelers held the Giants, who have the No. 2 rushing attack in the league, to 83 rushing yards, 80 yards fewer than their average. Pittsburgh held the Redskins, owners of the No. 5 rushing attack, to 60 rushing yards, 85 fewer than their average.

3

Baltimore at Houston

1 p.m., WUSA-9, WJZ-13
Rookie QB Joe Flacco is rewarding Ravens coaches who praised his poise even before he gave them results.

During Baltimore's current three-game winning streak, Flacco is 46 for 76 passing for 620 yards with four touchdowns and no interceptions. Over the same span, the Ravens scored 93 points, compared with 78 in their first five games. The Texans again will turn to Sage Rosenfels at quarterback after Matt Schaub was lost two to four weeks with a knee injury last week against the Vikings. Rosenfels led the Texans to a 4-1 record in five starts last season.

Jacksonville at Detroit

1 p.m.
No team has given consecutive opponents their first wins so late in an NFL season. So Jacksonville, this is your shot at history against the 0-8 Lions. The Jaguars' recent performances suggest they just might achieve the dubious distinction. An expected playoff contender, Jacksonville (3-5) has not only failed to rebound from its 0-2 start to the season, it has backslid during what figured to have been a soft portion of its schedule. Coming off their bye in Week 7 with games against the then-2-4 Browns and 0-8 Bengals, the Jaguars lost twice.

Green Bay at Minnesota

1 p.m., WTTG-5
RB Adrian Peterson has returned to his form of 2007, rushing for 371 yards and three touchdowns in his last three games. He has also carried the Vikings in the Metrodome, with 487 yards in four games at home, where his team is 3-1. While the Packers have won in four of their last five trips to Minneapolis, their run defense ranks 27th overall, allowing 146.4 yards per game. Peterson gained 103 yards on 19 carries in Green Bay's 24-19 victory in Week 1. The Packers have lost four of six after a 2-0 start and, including next week's matchup with Chicago, enter a stretch crucial to their playoff hopes.

San Francisco at Arizona

Tomorrow, 8:30 p.m., ESPN
The Cardinals are 5-3 for the first time in 24 years. The offense ranks first in the NFL with 29.2 points per game and third with 386.9 yards. And they enter the Monday night showcase at home, where they average 34 points and have won six straight games and nine of 11 under Coach Ken Whisenhunt. As for the 49ers, it's pretty much a countdown to see how long it takes for one of Coach Mike Singletary's postgame news conferences to be repurposed into a beer commercial.

4

Seattle at Miami (1 p.m.):

The Dolphins' defense has forced 12 turnovers in the past three games, and the team is plus-nine in turnover margin, second best in the NFL. LB Joey Porter remains a terror with a league-high 11½ sacks. He also leads the league in silly media-disseminated verbal cat fights, so in the interest of not padding his total, let's move on. But move on to what, another summation of how beat up the Seahawks are? There is this sliver of hope: QB Matt Hasselbeck was cleared to practice after missing four games with a bulging disk in his back that weakened his right leg, but he won't be back until next week at the earliest. So what's left to discuss? Coach Mike Holmgren, for one, seems out of ideas.

St. Louis at N.Y. Jets (1 p.m.): The Jets have won three of their last four since a bye week, moving them into a tie for first in the AFC East and giving them four more wins than they had at this point last season. It's largely thanks to their coveted acquisition. No, we're not referring to QB Brett Favre, who has been scuffling during the stretch, throwing three touchdowns to eight interceptions. It's Kris Jenkins. The 360-pound nose tackle, traded from Carolina in the offseason, has clogged running lanes and occupied blockers, freeing up the Jets' pass rush. Jim Haslett, the Rams' interim coach, is another of Jenkins's fans. "From what I've seen on film, I think he's one of the best players, or at least most dominant guy, that I've seen on film this year in the National Football League," Haslett said.

Carolina at Oakland (4:05 p.m., WBFF-45): If the Panthers hope to break out of a two-game skid on the road, they'll need to move better on offense. In defeats at Tampa Bay and Minnesota in which they were outscored 47-13, Carolina gained a total of 87 rushing yards. QB Jake Delhomme had no touchdowns and five turnovers in those games. Help is on the way today, as starting T Jeff Otah, who missed four games with a sprained ankle, and starting C Ryan Kalil, who missed three with a sprained ankle, are both expected to be back. The Raiders allow 373.9 yards passing per game, 28th in the NFL, an astonishing number considering how starting CB Nnamdi Asomugha renders his side of the field a no-fly zone for opposing teams.

Kansas City at San Diego (4:15 p.m.): Dumb penalties, poor tackling and turnovers deep in their territory doomed the Chiefs against the Bucs. QB Tyler Thigpen, however, was not completely at fault. After failing to compile a passer rating higher than 68.8 in his first four games, Thigpen has played well in his last two, completing 64 percent of his passes while throwing three touchdown passes and no interceptions. Now he gets to face a reeling Chargers pass defense that ranks last in the league (265.1 yards per game) and has given up 14 passing touchdowns, which is tied for second worst in the league.

Bragging Rights The NFL Gameday crew picks their locks of the week, listed with this year's record:

New York Giants (+3) over PHILADELPHIA
I am not one of those prognosticators who thinks the Giants are due for a loss. I'm one who thinks the Giants are the NFC's best team, and won't falter against a division foe.
— David Larimer (6-2-1)

NEW ENGLAND (-3½) over Buffalo
I'm guessing Bill Belichick will run up the score to his little black heart's content after his rather bumbling coaching performance last week. Plus, the Bills are cratering.
— Matt Bonesteel (6-3)

Carolina (-9½) over OAKLAND
The bright side for Oakland is that DeAngelo Hall won't be around to rack up killer personal fouls while yapping at Steve Smith. The dark side for Oakland is... very dark.
— Desmond Bieler (5-4)

The Sunday Line

The guys' expanded previews and picks of every game are posted online each week beginning on Thursdays at views.washingtonpost.com/theleague/sundayline