

ATLANTA FALCONS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 2024 • CAESARS SUPERDOME SAINTS GAME NOTES

- With the Saints' victory, they finish the regular season 9-8, which is the franchise's 18th winning season and their sixth in their last seven seasons.
- New Orleans finished the regular season with a 4-2 record in the NFC South.
- The Saints improve their regular season record against the Falcons to 55-54. They also improve their record against the Falcons at the Caesars Superdome to 26-21.
- New Orleans finished with their highest point total of the season and their highest since a 52-33 Christmas Day, 2020 win over Minnesota.
- New Orleans outgained Atlanta in total net yards, 400-389. The Saints accounted for 154 rushing yards and 246 passing yards.
- The Saints defense held the Falcons to 78 rushing yards.
- New Orleans won the time of possession battle 33:50-26:10, including a dominant first half with a margin of 20:09 to Atlanta's 9:51.
- The Saints had the edge in first downs, 27-14; 13 through the air, 12 on the ground and two by penalty.
- New Orleans recorded a season-high six touchdowns in the win, a season-high four passing and two rushing.
- The Saints offense was 4-of-6 (66.7%) in red zone touchdown scoring percentage and the defense held Atlanta's offense to 1-for-3 in the red zone, including 0-for-1 in a goal-to-go situation, making a successful second-half goal line stand.
- New Orleans outscored Atlanta in the second half 31-0. For the regular season, New Orleans outscored opponents 91-35 in the third quarter and 126-93 in the fourth quarter.
- QB **Derek Carr** earned his first win over Atlanta in his fourth try. Carr opened game 6-of-6 for 60 yards and a touchdown.
- Carr completed 78.6 percent of his passes as he was 22-of-28 for 264 yards and threw a season-high four touchdown passes.
- Carr's second touchdown pass of the game gave him 240 career passing touchdowns and is now in sole possession at No. 30 on the NFL's all-time list, surpassing Len Dawson to finish the day with a career-high tying four touchdowns for the seventh time in his career and the first time since vs. Cleveland on Sept. 30, 2018, as a member of the Oakland Raiders.
- Carr has thrown three or more touchdown passes in a game three times in 2023 and has done so in three of the last four games to finish the season with 25 scoring throws for the fourth time in his career.
- WR **A.T. Perry** had season-highs of 53 yards and two touchdown receptions on just three catches.
- Perry caught Carr's first touchdown pass of 18 yards to tie the game 7-7 and brought in Carr's fourth touchdown pass from six yards out to make the score 41-17.
- Perry finished with four receiving touchdowns on the season.
- WR/RS **Rashid Shaheed** has a team-leading 1,477 all-purpose yards in 2023 after registering 81 yards Sunday.
- Shaheed had three receptions for a team-high 65 yards and one 39-yard touchdown. He also added 16 punt return yards.
- Shaheed hauled in Carr's third touchdown pass of the day a 39-yard pass that made the score 31-17, Saints.
- Shaheed's touchdown reception was his fifth on the season to tie for the team lead with Chris Olave. Selected to the Pro Bowl as a return specialist, he tied for the team lead with six total touchdowns with RB **Alvin Kamara** and QB **Taysom Hill**.
- WR **Chris Olave** finished the game with three receptions as well and accounted for 56 yards and one touchdown.
- Olave's first reception was for 14 yards on third and seven. That catch brought his reception total to 85 for the season, joining him with WR Eric Martin, TE Jimmy Graham, WR Joe Horn, RB Reggie Bush, WR Marques Colston and WR Michael

Thomas as the seventh Saint with 85 receptions in a season.

- Olave brought in an acrobatic 26-yard touchdown pass to give New Orleans a 24-17 lead (Carr's second touchdown pass).
- With Olave's touchdown catch, he set a new career-best with five touchdowns in 2023, tying for the team lead with Shaheed and became the sixth Saint with 1,100 yards in a season. He finished the regular season with 1,123 receiving yards.
- RB **Kendre Miller** logged a career-day on the ground with 73 yards on 13 carries (5.6 avg.) and had a three-yard touchdown, adding a six-yard reception.
- Miller scored his first career rushing touchdown a second quarter three-yard run to tie the game, 14-14.
- Hill marked his fifth game with 50 or more rushing yards in 2023. He ended the day with six rushes for 51 yards. He finished the season ranked second on the team in rushing with 81 carries for 401 yards with four touchdowns
- Hill had a total of 79 yards from scrimmage, including 28 receiving yards on four receptions, finishing the regular season with a career-high 33 grabs for 291 yards with two touchdown grabs.
- RB **Jamaal Williams** scored his first touchdown as a member of the Saints in the fourth quarter on a one-yard run, rushing for 26 yards and catching three passes for eight yards.
- TE Juwan Johnson finished the with three receptions for 40 yards.
- K **Blake Grupe** became the club's rookie recordholder with a 24-yard field goal that put the Saints ahead 17-14 with 56 seconds remaining in the first half. Grupe finished the season with 30 field goals, leading the team with 130 total points.
- Grupe was six-of-six on extra point attempts and two-of-two on field goal attempts.
- G/T **James Hurst** played in his 150th regular season game.
- The New Orleans defense forced three turnovers, all in the second half and the offense did not turn the ball over. The Saints had two interceptions and recovered one fumble. They finished the regular season with 29 takeaways and a +11 takeaway ratio after finishing -11 in 2022.
- The Saints finished with 18 interceptions this season and Sunday was the fifth game in 2023 the Saints have had multiple interceptions in a game. New Orleans had only seven picks in 2022.
- DE **Cameron Jordan** played in his 209th regular season game on Sunday, putting him a tie for 33rd all-time among NFL defensive linemen with Pro Football Hall of Fame lineman Randy White.
- LB **Demario Davis** tied for the team-high with nine tackles, including five solo stops and two tackles for loss.
- S **Johnathan Abram** set a new season-high with nine tackles Sunday. He logged his previous season-high five tackles in the first half.
- S **Tyrann Mathieu** registered his 40th career takeaway, returning a fourth quarter interception 74 yards. It is the longest interception return of his career.
- Mathieu also added three tackles in the game.
- CB **Alontae Taylor** grabbed his second career interception, happening in the second consecutive week. Taylor returned the interception 16 yards to the Atlanta 25-yard line on the first possession of the second half Sunday.
- CB **Paulson Adebo** and S **Ugo Amadi** each tallied seven tackles. It was a season high for Amadi.
- DE **Payton Turner**, who was playing in his first contest since Week One, having spent 16 weeks on Injured Reserve recovering from a toe injury, recovered a fumble on an errant snap at the Atlanta 10-yard line. Turner also had two QB hurries in the win.
- DT **Nathan Shepherd** tallied his third sack of the season and was the lone sack in the game for the Saints.



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Opening Statement: "It was a good team win. I want to start off by apologizing to Arthur Smith and the Falcons. That was not a play that we intended to run down there to finish off the game. That's not who we are. That's not how we operate. We should have taken a knee, so I want to apologize to them. We have a good rivalry, and it's a heated rivalry, but there's a way we go about doing our business. I wasn't happy about that. Other than that, I was happy about a lot of things that happened in the game. I didn't like the way the game started, busted a couple of coverages, gave up a couple of explosive plays, which can't happen. We made some adjustments. Then, we played better from then on out. I thought our offense was awesome. I think they did a great job moving the ball down the field. We were able to capitalize a lot in the red zone. We were able to create some explosive plays. I thought Kendre Miller played well. I thought the receivers played well. A.T. Perry, I thought, did some good things in the game. I thought Derek (Carr) played well. There were a lot of good things that happened in the game, and I was proud of the way our guys came out and responded in a must-win situation."

(On the final Saints touchdown) "We should have taken a knee right there. They asked me about getting Jamaal (Williams) a touchdown there at the end. I said I wanted to take a knee. We put victory (formation) out there. The guys kind of wanted to give him a touchdown. They did that on their own. That's not acceptable."

(On Arthur Smith's frustration postgame) "He should be."

(On if the on-field exchange was regarding the touchdown) "That's what it was."

(On who made the call) "Look, I think there were a lot of guys who wanted to get Jamaal (Williams) his touchdown. Honestly, I'm not sure exactly what was going on behind that, other than they wanted him to score a touchdown. Let's move on. Let's go to something else."

(On assessing the season) "It's too early to assess the season in its totality. I think we will soak this one in a little bit, and then we will have time to reflect and see what we thought."

(On Derek Carr's performance) "I think (Carr) operated the offense (well). I think we had good tempo in and out. I think he got us into the right checks. I think he threw the ball accurately, particularly some of these deep throws. I think he operated the Saints offense like we expected him to operate (it).

(On the QB draw fitting into the game plan) "It's something you have in there. Obviously, nobody's expecting to see that with (Carr). Based on some of the looks we've seen, we thought we can make a play on it. Actually, made a play on us in practice the other day with the same play, and we weren't expecting that either. It's just part of the game plan. I think Pete (Carmichael) and those guys did a really good job putting together a game plan, and I thought our guys did a good job executing it."

(On the offense's improvement throughout the latter half of the season) "I think the offense really started to come around toward the latter part of the season. I think our quarterback being healthy was a big part of that. I think (Carr) played much better in the latter part of the season. As we do with everything, we're not going to make any snap judgements to anything. We're going to take a minute to reflect on everything from the season. Then, we're going to make any decision we feel like and I feel like are best for our team and our organization."

(On the defense's performance) "With the exception of the first couple of drives with a couple of mistakes, I thought we did a pretty good job up front controlling the line of scrimmage. I thought we made it difficult for them to throw the football. I think our guys kind of settled in after those first couple of explosive plays and played much better."

(On the conversation with Alontae Taylor, having him move out of the lineup for a while and his response) "I think (Taylor) responded well. It is never easy. That's hard to deal with, but it was a decision I felt like was best for our football team to give ourselves the best chance to win in this game. We made the move, and look, he came back in and responded. He made a big play in the game. I

think in the heat of the moment, he wasn't happy about it. Then, after having a little bit of time to let the game play out, he understood where we were coming from."

(On finishing the season strong) "I'm pleased with the way we finished the season. I'm not pleased with the way the record played out overall over a 17-game season. That's not what we aspire to be, but I was proud of the way our guys continued to respond and continued to fight back. I'm proud of the way they finished the season."

(On WR A.T. Perry) "It was good to see. (A.T. Perry)'s a good, young player. He's made some plays. I thought our receivers made some contested catches today, which that's a big part of this league and playing in this league. You're not always going to be wide open. Being able to make some plays in a contested environment, I thought was big. I think it was A.T. that got the pass interference call in the end zone, too. There were a lot of big plays that he made."

(On Perry's youth) "Part of the process is getting young players, drafting young players, developing young players, and it is a process. It's not an overnight occurrence. I was pleased with some of the things I saw him do."

(On if the Saints have gelled in the locker room across these last few games) "It is hard to say what the reasons why would be. I do feel like we have played better in this last little stretch of the season. I'm sure there's a lot of contributing factors to that. I felt like our guys had confidence in these last few weeks that they were going to go out there and play well, and they did."

(On the offensive keys to improvement over the last five games) "Again, I think a lot of it goes back to the health of the quarterback. I think the quarterback has been as healthy as (Derek Carr)'s been all season. I think we've seen what he can do when everything is operating the way it needs to operate – when he's healthy, when he's protected. When guys are making plays around him, he can play at a really good level. I think we saw that over the last part of the season. When your quarterback is playing well, your team is playing well. I think that was a big factor."

(On the offensive explosion to end the regular season) "About probably the same way it would feel if we had this type of explosion to start the season. It feels good. You like to see that, but it' is one game. We will feel good about that one. Then, we will see if we get another opportunity."

(On Kendre Miller's performance) "Hopefully that gives (Miller) some confidence. I know that gives me some confidence. He made a couple of guys miss today. That was really good to see. He ran really hard. He protected the football. Anytime you have young guys, particularly late in the season, and you have young guys that can step up and make plays, regardless of whether we get in or not, I think that gives us confidence as we move forward."



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(On the loss and the Saints scoring late in the game) "Obviously, nobody wants to end the season like that. Credit to them (the Saints). They made the plays, certainly in the second half. It got out of hand. Do whatever you want. I just gave them my opinion on it. It doesn't take away the fact that they beat us. That second half, they took advantage of us and they took some shots."

(On the Falcons interception on third down) "They were playing kind of two-man in trap coverage, obviously the guy was in there, (we) just lost sight of him and he made a play."

(On if he wants to remain with the team) "Sure, as I've said many of times, we know the industry that we're in. I love doing what I'm doing. Also, like I've told you many times, this is the industry that we are in. I love coaching. I would have loved to win today. Obviously, we didn't."

(On if he has received any indication of his job status for the future) "We just finished the game. I understand the question. I appreciate it. I love doing what I do."

(On if he has second thoughts taking a deep shot after a third and one, following the Saints taking the lead) "Obviously, hindsight is 20-20. At that point in the game, certainly we are going for it, looking at the numbers...Clearly, that was a big momentum shift. We took a risk and it didn't work."

(On his motivation to move forward with the franchise) "With any job, you have a lot of confidence. I'm not going to give a State of the Union right now on everything that has happened over the last three years. Like I said, the season just ended. Obviously, it was not the result that we needed today. Clearly, the second half got out of hand. Credit to New Orleans."

(On if Desmond Ridder's third quarter interception deflated the team) "I wouldn't call it deflated. (We) turned the ball over. We turned the ball over. It is never one person. Credit to them; they made a play. They had a contested catch on the pop up to (Chris) Olave. Then, they got another huge shot after that. Your question on the third and one and the momentum shift; those are two big explosive plays right there. They made the plays and made us pay off of the turnovers. That really was the story, certainly in the second half."

(On Taylor Heinicke not playing) "He wasn't going to be able to move well. That's all....He was in pain. (He) tried to go. We had the contingency plan, clearly, in the first half. (We) hit some plays, executed it. Credit to New Orleans, they held the ball a lot in the first half. The score was 17-17. We did not have the ball very long, so the defense was out there a long time. We turned the ball over a couple of times (and gave them) a short field, (with) an interception and a fumble. They turned it into points."

(On what he told the team after the game) "These guys have been such a privilege to work with these guys. They worked extremely hard all season. To clearly come up short (is hard). I appreciate the hall out of them. I love coaching this team."

(On if playing multiple quarterbacks impacted the season) "I was just trying to get Logan (Woodside) some reps (today). It wasn't a benching of (Ridder). I was just trying to get Logan some reps, (given) what the score was. (There) was a long interception return right there. Yeah, that's part of the journey (of the season), certainly. Credit to Des (Ridder). I thought that he came out and opened the game well. Those guys have been fun to coach."

(On how he would describe the season in words) "I'm not going to put it in one word. Any time that you clearly want to play in the postseason, and when you get in the postseason, you want to be the last team there. When you're not, 31 other teams are not going to win the Super Bowl. The goal when you get to camp, everyone wants to get to the postseason and wants a shot at it. When you don't do that, nobody feels great."

(On how Calais Campbell should be remembered by people if this is his last game) "He's a great player. Hopefully he gets called into Canton, Ohio. Certainly, he's a special player. (He is) awesome to work with."

(On his disappointment on the fourth and goal throw by Ridder) "No. It's a private conversation. We didn't execute, so, obviously, we came up short. We had plenty of opportunities before that."

(On frustration with late Saints touchdown) "They can do whatever they want. There are no rules against it. Like I said, we did not stop them in the second half. They can do whatever they want. It is what it is. Hat's off to them. They kicked our you know what in the second half. They made us play. They took advantage of turnovers. That's their prerogative (to try to score). It's my prerogative to tell them how I feel. Like that or not, oh well. Credit to them. They can do whatever they want there."

(On if there was a point this year where he thought that the season would not be what he wanted it to be) "Every season takes its twists and turns. Every week, you are trying to improve and trying to win the game, stay relevant, and get into the postseason. Obviously, we didn't do that."

(On his frustration with the offense being productive early in the season, and have more turnovers later in the year) "It happened too much this year. You see flashes of it. The job is to consistently do it; and, we didn't do it."



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S TYRANN MATHIEU

(On his interception that was almost a touchdown) "To be honest, I was just glad we won. Whether I made that interception or not, I liked the way our offense played today, how the dome was loud, and how we rallied on defense. I was good with just that. Obviously though, the interception felt good."

(On how he has been in the league for a while) "I got a lot of miles on my legs for sure. I still love it and it's still really fun, especially making plays like that."

(On defensive adjustments) "We didn't change anything, but we played tougher. We gave up that big play on the first drive for 50-60 yards, then Alontae (Taylor) and I missed the tackles for a big touchdown on the second drive. You take those two plays away, for the most part, we were making those guys earn it. I'm proud of the way we responded and bounced back."

(On how the team finished the last five games 4-1) "That's cool. We would have wanted to play like that earlier in the season so we wouldn't have to be in this situation, but we never gave up and we pushed through adversity. That's really all you can ask for."

WR A.T. PERRY

(On how he flat about his performance) "I had to get my get back to be honest. When we played them the first time, I had a fade ball and I made a false start. This time, I had a feeling DC (Derek Carr) was going to throw it so I had to be ready and I was."

(On his preparation made his success) "I stayed focused throughout the whole week. DA (Dennis Allen) talked to us this week and said it was a playoff game, so everybody had to dial in and do their job. I was just trying to make the most of my opportunities when they came to me, and I think everybody had the same mentality."

(On his connection with Derek Carr) "It's definitely grown over the weeks. He has trusted me more week after week. We always talk and make sure we are on the same page. He needs me to go out there and make plays, so that's what I try and do for him."

(On how the offense closed the season today) "It was great. It has been up and down throughout the season, but I still believe in all of our guys. Hopefully there is still some opportunity out there so we can have a chance to get to the postseason."

(On how his confidence is right now.) "My confidence has always been high. Everything for me starting in the NFL is like starting all over. You have to work hard, and you have to work even harder to make plays when it counts. I just try and make the most of my opportunities."

QB TAYSOM HILL

(On what sticks out about how the offense played today) "I haven't seen all the stats but we only had a couple of penalties today. We always moved the ball well, but we just had silly mistakes. It was a clean football game all around."

(On what the plan is for later on watching the games) "I have some family in town, so I'll just hang out with them and watch a couple of games closely."

(On if he thinks this is a playoff team) "Yeah, for sure. It is hard not to go back and think about some of the games that we lost. It is hard to be in a situation where you do not control your own destiny. We can't dwell on that stuff though, and DA (Dennis Allen) talked all week about controlling what you can control. I was really pleased and happy with the coaches and everyone about how we handled this week and game."

(On if he thinks they played better football down the stretch) "yes, definitely. It's hard to think about a game that was better than this one as a whole. It's a nice feeling to win like this, but it's tough that we need some help to get into the playoffs."

(On the growth of A.T. Perry) "First off, I'm just pumped for him. He made some great plays today, but I'm not surprised. This is what we have been seeing all camp and all year long. We always kind of talk about how there is no defense for a perfect pass, and when you have a receiver like him it's almost impossible for a defense."

QB DEREK CARR

(On how good it feels to finish the season on a high note) "It feels great. The last half of the year I think we were doing some really good things. We were building a lot of yards, getting better in the red zone, and converting our third downs. I felt like today was just the icing on top of the cake. There was so much hard work put in, and it all came together at one time today. The team wanted to give the fans a good send off if we didn't get another home game in the postseason."

(On his health during the year) "The only person that really knows how bad it was is my wife, and you guys don't have the chance to talk to her. It was the hardest year, physically, for me. You can't say that when you are going through it because then it looks really bad. Now that it's at the end, I do feel much better. The last few weeks I didn't get hit so I couldn't reinjure anything and the swelling is getting better. You hope to have another chance to play because I feel much better now, but if not now is the time to heal."

(On if there was anything else they did well during this 4-1 stretch) "We started building chemistry and started to lean each others' schedules. We had practice, and we would meet together outside of that too to get extra work in. We wanted to get this right away, but these things take time. There were things like just getting that extra bit of work in, even if it is one throw or one route. I also started to do this accuracy drill with DJ (Williams), one of our QB coaches that I used to do with my dad all the time. That definitely helped me throughout the last couple of weeks.

(On how it feels to have an explosion like today) "It feels great because it explains to everybody that the last two months weren't a fluke. We've proven we can get better and put out great performances. When you work at something with people that want to get better, it will get better over time. We all wanted it to look like this all the time and sooner, but it finally all clicked today.

(On how the rough times are on him and the team) "We are human and the rough times are hard. My foundation will always be who Christ says that I am. I never want to get too high or too low, but just stay in that medium steady state of mind. Keeping with the process, keep loving my teammates, the media, my coaches, and everybody that is around me. This last half of the year, just going out to dinner throughout the city and getting to know people. Seeing fans, seeing kids wearing my jersey, and all that kind of stuff is really cool to see. Now New Orleans is starting to feel like home."



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C/G CESAR RUIZ

(on the protection becoming better later in the season) "You start to get repetition and chemistry with all of the guys in there. You start to get in synch. That's really it. Everyone is getting comfortable getting the reads in. It is the repetition and the chemistry."

WR RASHID SHAHEED

(on how he'd view the season if they don't make the playoffs) "It would be a disappointment. We expect to make the playoffs every single year. That's the expectation. It would be tough, but we did what we needed to do today."

DE PAYTON TURNER

(on being back out on the field) "It was great. I love these boys and watching them work. Not being able to be out there in the season with them was tough. It all pays off. It was a blessing."

(on beating the Falcons) "That's a big rivalry. It's a great feeling to go out there and put an exclamation on the season. It's a great feeling."

(on playing the waiting game) "It's going to be a lot of anxiety waiting to see what happens with these next couple of games. We did our part. Coach said earlier...you make your bed, so you have to lay in it. We just have to wait and see what happens."

(on if it felt good) "I felt like a half step just being out of the game for a while. It's a blessing to be out there and be able to play after this long road. I'm just looking forward to the next opportunity."

DE CAMERON JORDAN

(on it being a nice way to go out) "We controlled our own destiny three games. We lost to the Rams and couldn't get that back. We beat Tampa who won the division handily (today in a shutout). Then, the Falcons came home to us and we locked them inside the gate."

(on this season as a whole) "There was so much potential. We started out fast and there was nobody who could deal with us. There were times when we got in our own way. Penalties got in our way. There were times where we were giving other teams energy. In those games that we didn't, you saw who we wanted to be. Games like the Patriots. A game like today. A game like last week. There were times when we captured our potential. We didn't live up to our potential this year. In my mind, we could have gone 15-2. We didn't. We are sitting here at 9-8. Three games ago we had every opportunity to capture our division and we didn't. We let somebody take our destiny from us. If we get in, then we will have so much hunger for these playoffs. If we don't get in, then we will kick ourselves in the butt because we know that we had the potential to be better than what we showed."



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(On when he found out he was starting) "(I) Think it was 10:30 whenever they made it (decision). We went out, did a workout, came back, said that I was going today. I have just been preparing all week as if I am the starter. Obviously that time came."

(On the first interception) "Yes, that's what we've been practicing on, getting our guys the ball and letting them get as many yards as they can. Like I said, we missed some opportunities with those guys making plays, but that was the gameplan."

(On how the season ended) "Obviously it's not the way anyone would want it to go. But there was a lot of good things to learn from. Both the good and the bad of the season. There are a lot of things that I can go back, learn from, correct, get better at and it is only going to help me in the long run. Things, like I said, didn't go the way we expected it to go, this season, this game, this year. But I think at the end of the day, we all learned and we all grew and we all got better."

(On what Arthur Smith means to him and if he would like to see him back) "Coach means the world to me. He's given me every opportunity to go out there and be myself. At the end of the day, that's the biggest thing is he wants everyone to just be themselves. He's a great coach, a great guy, and I'm excited for us."

(On the message to the team after the game) "Obviously it's tough. We didn't want to end the season that way, but like you said this is a resilient team. We're a team who never gives up, a team who never quits. Was never out of it. I said there's plenty of things that we could go back on offense, even special teams out of the entire year to not get us in this situation, not get us in this point that we could be better at."

(On if he wants Arthur Smith to be back) "At the end of the day, yeah. I'd love for coach to be back. I (would) love for everyone to be back on the same team. At the end of the day that is not in my control. That is not on anyone else's control, coaches control, we don't control that. We control what we can control and that's to show up to work every single day and get better."