

biggest upsets in nfl playoff history

biggest upsets in nfl playoff history have captivated football fans for decades, showcasing moments when underdogs defied expectations and top teams fell in dramatic fashion. The NFL playoffs, known for their high stakes and intense competition, have produced numerous surprises that continue to resonate in sports lore. From wildcard teams toppling perennial powerhouses to low-seeded squads making improbable runs, these games highlight the unpredictability and excitement of postseason football. This article explores some of the most memorable and unexpected victories in NFL playoff history, examining the context, key plays, and lasting impact of each upset. By understanding these landmark games, fans gain insight into the nature of competition and the factors that contribute to such shocking outcomes. Below is a detailed table of contents to guide readers through the biggest upsets in NFL playoff history.

- Historic Underdog Victories
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Historic Underdog Victories

Throughout the NFL playoff history, several games stand out where underdog teams overcame significant odds to claim victory. These historic upsets often involved teams with losing regular-season records or lower playoff seeds defeating dominant opponents. The significance of these victories extends beyond the scoreboard, altering playoff trajectories and sometimes redefining franchises.

1980 Oakland Raiders vs. Houston Oilers

One of the earliest and most famous upsets occurred in the 1980 wild card round when the Oakland Raiders, as a wild card team, defeated the Houston Oilers. The Oilers had a better regular-season record, but the Raiders' experience and resilience propelled them to a 27-7 victory. This game showcased how playoff experience and strategic gameplay can overturn expectations, marking a significant point in NFL playoff lore.

2007 New York Giants vs. New England Patriots

The 2007 NFC Championship game is often cited as one of the biggest upsets in NFL playoff history. The New England Patriots entered the playoffs undefeated and were heavy favorites against the 10-6 Giants. However, the Giants executed a disciplined defensive game plan and pulled off a stunning 17-14 victory, culminating in the famous “Helmet Catch” by David Tyree. This upset halted the Patriots’ pursuit of a perfect season and became a defining moment in NFL postseason history.

Wild Card Wonders

Wild card teams have a unique place in NFL playoff history, often entering the postseason with lower expectations but sometimes emerging as formidable contenders. The biggest upsets in NFL playoff history frequently involve wild card squads defeating higher-seeded opponents, underscoring the unpredictable nature of playoff football.

2010 Green Bay Packers vs. Philadelphia Eagles

The 2010 wild card game between the Packers and Eagles was a classic example of a wild card team overcoming the odds. The Packers, led by quarterback Aaron Rodgers, dominated the Eagles 21-16. Rodgers’ performance was instrumental, and this victory marked the beginning of the Packers’ Super Bowl-winning playoff run that season.

2011 New York Giants vs. Atlanta Falcons

Another notable wild card upset was the Giants’ victory over the Falcons in the 2011 playoffs. The Giants, seeded fifth in the NFC, defeated the third-seeded Falcons 24-2. New York’s defense stifled Atlanta’s offense, and the Giants’ methodical approach exemplified how a wild card team can triumph through tactical discipline and resilience.

Super Bowl Shocks

While the Super Bowl often features the league’s best teams, it has also been the stage for some of the most unexpected champions in NFL history. These Super Bowl upsets are among the biggest upsets in NFL playoff history, where underdogs managed to capture the ultimate prize against all expectations.

Super Bowl III: New York Jets vs. Baltimore Colts

Perhaps the most legendary upset in NFL history occurred in Super Bowl III. The New York Jets, led by quarterback Joe Namath, faced the heavily favored Baltimore Colts. Namath famously guaranteed victory, and the Jets delivered with a 16-7 win. This upset changed the perception of the AFL and NFL merger and remains a benchmark for playoff surprises.

Super Bowl XLII: New York Giants vs. New England Patriots

Revisiting the Giants-Patriots matchup, the upset continued into the Super Bowl XLII. The Giants defeated the 18-0 Patriots 17-14, preventing a perfect season and cementing this game as one of the biggest shocks in NFL playoff history. The game's dramatic plays and strategic execution by the Giants are studied as examples of how an underdog can prevail on the biggest stage.

Key Factors Behind the Biggest Upsets

Analyzing the biggest upsets in NFL playoff history reveals common factors that contribute to these surprising outcomes. Understanding these elements helps explain how underdogs overcome seemingly superior opponents.

- **Turnovers:** Many upsets feature the favored team committing critical turnovers that shift momentum.
- **Defensive Dominance:** Strong defensive performances often stifle high-powered offenses and create scoring opportunities.
- **Special Teams Plays:** Key returns, blocked kicks, or unusual special teams contributions can change the course of games.
- **Coaching Strategy:** Innovative or adaptive game plans tailored to exploit opponent weaknesses play a crucial role.
- **Player Performances:** Exceptional individual efforts, especially by quarterbacks and defensive players, frequently influence outcomes.

Memorable Moments and Plays

The biggest upsets in NFL playoff history are often defined by iconic moments and plays that become ingrained in football culture. These moments not only symbolize the upset but also highlight the drama and intensity of playoff football.

The Helmet Catch

During the 2007 NFC Championship game, David Tyree's "Helmet Catch" stands out as a pivotal moment. Tyree caught a seemingly impossible pass against his helmet, extending the Giants' drive and setting up the winning touchdown. This play exemplifies how a single moment can change the trajectory of a playoff game and contribute to an unforgettable upset.

The Guarantee and the Jets' Victory

Joe Namath's guarantee before Super Bowl III added drama and confidence to the Jets' underdog status. His leadership and the team's execution delivered one of the most shocking upsets in NFL history, demonstrating how psychological factors and bold predictions can impact performance and legacy.

Key Interceptions and Defensive Stands

Many playoff upsets feature game-changing interceptions and defensive stands that halt opposing offenses. These plays often occur at critical junctures, swinging momentum and energizing the underdog team. Defensive resilience remains a hallmark of several biggest upsets in NFL playoff history.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is considered the biggest upset in NFL playoff history?

The biggest upset in NFL playoff history is often considered to be the 2010 Wild Card game where the Green Bay Packers defeated the top-seeded Dallas Cowboys 21-16, despite being a 10-point underdog.

Which team holds the record for the largest point spread upset in an NFL playoff game?

The New York Jets' victory over the heavily favored Indianapolis Colts in the 2010 AFC Championship Game is one of the largest point spread upsets, as the Colts were favored by about 12 points.

Have any wild card teams ever won the Super Bowl after an upset-filled playoff run?

Yes, the 2010 Green Bay Packers were a wild card team who upset several higher-seeded opponents and went on to win Super Bowl XLV.

What was the biggest upset in terms of seeding in NFL playoff history?

The 2007 New York Giants, as a 5th seed, defeated the top-seeded New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLII, ending the Patriots' perfect season and is considered one of the biggest seeding upsets.

Which underdog team defeated the defending Super Bowl champions in a playoff upset?

In the 2011 Wild Card round, the New York Giants defeated the defending Super Bowl champion Green Bay Packers, marking a significant playoff upset.

Has any team overcome a double-digit point spread to win an NFL playoff game?

Yes, the 1997 New York Jets won their AFC Wild Card game against the Jacksonville Jaguars despite being underdogs by 17 points, marking one of the biggest comebacks against the spread.

What was the most surprising upset in recent NFL playoff history?

The 2020 Wild Card game where the Cleveland Browns defeated the Pittsburgh Steelers was surprising, as the Steelers were favored, and the Browns had not won a playoff game in decades.

How often do lower-seeded teams win in the NFL playoffs?

Lower-seeded teams win approximately 30-40% of NFL playoff games, but some years see more significant upsets, especially with wild card teams advancing deep into the playoffs.

Which playoff upset had the biggest impact on NFL history?

The 2007 Giants' upset of the Patriots in Super Bowl XLII had a huge impact by preventing a perfect season and is considered one of the most significant upsets in NFL history.

Are there any notable upsets involving the Seattle Seahawks in the

playoffs?

Yes, the Seattle Seahawks' victory over the New Orleans Saints in the 2010 Wild Card round was an upset, as the Saints were favored, and the Seahawks went on to win Super Bowl XLVIII a few years later.

Additional Resources

1. *When Giants Fall: The Biggest NFL Playoff Upsets*

This book dives deep into some of the most shocking and unexpected victories in NFL playoff history. It explores the teams that defied the odds, the key moments that turned games around, and the players who rose to the occasion. Through detailed game analysis and behind-the-scenes stories, readers gain insight into what makes an upset truly unforgettable.

2. *Underdogs Unleashed: Legendary NFL Playoff Surprises*

Underdogs Unleashed chronicles the most improbable playoff triumphs in NFL history. From wild card teams to heavy underdogs, the book captures the spirit of determination and resilience. It highlights how these surprises reshaped the postseason landscape and left lasting legacies for players and fans alike.

3. *Shockwaves on the Gridiron: NFL's Greatest Playoff Upsets*

This compelling narrative examines the games that sent shockwaves through the NFL world. Featuring in-depth recounts and expert commentary, the book sheds light on how strategic brilliance and sheer willpower combined to topple favored teams. It's a must-read for anyone fascinated by the drama of playoff football.

4. *Against All Odds: The NFL Playoff Upset Chronicles*

Against All Odds tells the stories of teams that overcame overwhelming challenges to secure playoff victories. The book focuses on the emotional and tactical aspects that contributed to these stunning outcomes. Readers will appreciate the vivid storytelling and the celebration of unexpected triumphs.

5. *Miracle Matches: The Biggest Surprises in NFL Postseason History*

Miracle Matches captures the essence of the NFL's most astonishing playoff games. With detailed play-by-play accounts and player interviews, it offers a front-row seat to moments when the impossible became possible. The book honors the magic of football's greatest underdog stories.

6. *Playoff Shockers: The NFL's Most Unforgettable Upsets*

Playoff Shockers presents a thrilling compilation of the NFL's most unforgettable playoff upsets. It explores how emotions, momentum shifts, and critical plays changed the course of history. This book is perfect for fans who love the unpredictability and excitement of postseason football.

7. *David vs. Goliath: NFL Playoff Upsets That Changed the Game*

David vs. Goliath highlights the clashes where smaller, underestimated teams toppled powerhouse opponents in the playoffs. Through compelling narratives and tactical analysis, the book shows how these

upsets influenced team strategies and league dynamics. It celebrates the spirit of competition and the thrill of the game.

8. *Frozen Surprises: Cold-Weather NFL Playoff Upsets*

Frozen Surprises focuses on NFL playoff upsets that occurred in harsh, cold-weather conditions, where grit and endurance played a critical role. The book explores how weather factors contributed to surprising outcomes and tested the limits of teams. It offers a unique angle on the drama of postseason football.

9. *Last-Second Legends: NFL Playoff Upsets Decided in the Final Moments*

This book spotlights the NFL playoff games that were decided in the last seconds, producing some of the biggest upsets in history. With detailed accounts of heart-stopping finishes, it captures the tension and excitement that define playoff football. Readers will relive the unforgettable moments when destiny was decided on the final play.

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