

# Lady Lions sweep at Windthorst tourney



The Vernon Lady Lions were a perfect 4-0 in the Windthorst Tournament held last Thursday and Friday with wins over Paradise, Slidell, Henrietta and City View. Vernon's Cameron Garza (left) was named tourney Most Valuable Player. Vernon's Macy Flowers (right) was named to the all-tournament team. The Lady Lions will be in action at home this coming Friday.

Daniel Walker/Vernon Record

## NFL playoffs are set-- Texans open the action Saturday

New England's fall into a wild-card game for the NFL playoffs has landed the defending champions in prime time.

Tom Brady and the New England Patriots will be playing in the postseason a week earlier than usual this year.

The Patriots will host the Tennessee Titans next Saturday night on CBS in the second of the four weekend games. New England lost at home to Miami on Sunday and, combined with Kansas City's victory over the Chargers, slipped to the third AFC seed.

The playoffs open Saturday afternoon with the Buffalo Bills at the Houston Texans on ESPN/ABC at 3:35 p.m. Titans-Patriots is set for an 7:15.

Next Sunday, the 12:05 p.m. game features Minnesota at New Orleans on Fox. At 3:40 p.m., it's the Seattle Seahawks at Philadelphia Eagles on NBC.

Baltimore and Kansas City have the AFC byes. San Francisco and Green Bay have them in the NFC.

Those teams will host games in the divisional round. San Francisco will play at 3:35 p.m. on Jan. 11 on NBC, followed by Baltimore's AFC game on CBS at 7:15 p.m. On Sunday, Jan. 12, the hosts will be Kansas City at 2:05 p.m. on CBS, then Green Bay at 5:40 p.m. on Fox.

The Patriots (12-4) are the No. 3 overall seed in the AFC and will have to fix things in a hurry as they host Tennessee (9-7) next Saturday night.

"We've got a game next week, we've got to get ready to go," Patriots safety Devin McCourty said. "Nobody should feel sorry for us, we shouldn't feel sorry for ourselves. Our goal is to play in the playoffs. We got a shot next week at all of that."

San Francisco earned the No. 1 seed and home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs with a 26-21 victory at Seattle. Jimmy Garoppolo and the NFC West champion 49ers (13-3) held on and sent Russell Wilson and the Seahawks (11-5) on the road to open the playoffs in the wild-card round next Sunday at Philadelphia.

"It's a good step in the right direction," Garoppolo said. "We've got a long way to go, though."

The Titans clinched their spot by beating Houston 35-14, eliminating both Pittsburgh and Oakland in the process. All three teams had a chance at the playoffs, but Tennessee had the easiest path by needing to win — and got it against a Texans squad that rested several starters, including quarterback Deshaun Watson.

"I think it's great when you can determine whether you get to continue to play football,"

Titans coach Mike Vrabel said. "There was some great effort, but we're going to have to improve and play better. Everything gets harder from here on out."

The last time New England played on wild-card weekend, it lost at home to the Ravens. The Patriots have never made it to the Super Bowl with Brady and coach Bill Belichick while



playing in the opening round.

"We've got to move forward and get ready to go or the end of our season will be next week if we don't turn the page and

play good football, way better than today," McCourty said. "Nobody feels sorry for the Patriots not getting a first-round bye in the playoffs."

Meanwhile, the Chiefs (12-4) are the No. 2 seed and will be able to watch the opening round, along with the top-seeded Baltimore Ravens (14-2).

"We'll step back, the guys will come in tomorrow, we'll have a team meeting, I'll give them a schedule for what's going on the next week here during the bye week," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "The main thing is we get work done, but we rest up and get ready for whoever we might play."

Kansas City's victory also locked Houston into the No. 4 seed, and the Texans (10-6) will host the Buffalo Bills (10-6) next Saturday.

Despite resting several starters, including quarterback Lamar Jackson, running back Mark Ingram, guard Marshal Yanda and safety Earl Thomas, Baltimore cruised past Pittsburgh 28-10 to ride into the playoffs on a 12-game winning streak.

"It's the best team in football in the regular season this year, but that doesn't count for anything in the next season," coach John Harbaugh said. "In the next season, we have to obviously go to work this week and become a better football team."

Green Bay earned a first-round bye in the NFC playoffs with a 23-20 victory at Detroit, the Packers' fifth straight win.

"We're hot," quarterback Aaron Rodgers said. "But you've got to start all over in the playoffs and it's all great football teams now, so the margin of error is even smaller."

Rodgers and the Packers (13-3) lost out on home-field advantage with San Francisco's win, but have the No. 2 seed in

the conference.

"The NFC is wide open," Rodgers said.

New Orleans routed Carolina 42-10 to finish 13-3 in the regular season, but Drew Brees and Co. then had to wait for the result of the 49ers-Seahawks game to see what their playoff path would be.

The NFC South champions will be the No. 3 seed and will host Minnesota (10-6) in the wild-card round next Sunday.

Injury-ravaged Philadelphia (9-7) won the NFC East with a 34-17 win over the New York Giants, eliminating Dallas with the victory. The Eagles, with their second division title in three years, will host the Seahawks.

"This team, when it's crunch time this time of year, we get it done," Eagles defensive tackle Tim Jernigan said after his team finished the schedule with a four-game winning streak.

### TITANS HAVE POTENT OFFENSE

Mike Vrabel making his head coaching debut in the postseason against the team he won three Super Bowl rings with in New England will be the topic of the week.

A big reason the Titans are even in the playoffs with Vrabel getting the chance to face off against Bill Belichick and his friend Tom Brady is their very high-powered offense.

The Titans (9-7) clinched the AFC's No. 6 seed and the second wild-card slot with the NFL's rushing leader in Pro Bowl running back Derrick Henry and Ryan Tannehill, who came off the bench in mid-October after being traded away by Miami in March to lead the league with a career-high 117.5 passer rating.

Tennessee ranks fourth in the NFL, averaging 6.1 yards per play on fewer plays than Dallas, Kansas City or Baltimore.

Tannehill, who also led the league averaging 9.59 yards per pass attempt, said the Titans have weapons starting with Henry and the offensive line out to their receivers and tight ends.

"We have a bunch of guys that are talented and can make big plays for us, so it's tough to really kind of key in one person or one group," Tannehill said. "We have talent across the board that we feel good about."

Henry's return to the offense after a game off to rest his left hamstring showed just how dangerous Tennessee can be as the Titans finished with 467 yards total offense. They topped 400 yards six times this season for the first time since the Run 'n' Shoot days of 1991 for this franchise. They finished with 5,805 yards net offense — fourth in team his-

tory and the most since 1991.

The Titans had five plays of 23 yards or longer in their 35-14 win in Houston. Henry's 53-yard run to become the NFL's rushing leader for 2019 just edged out a 51-yard touchdown pass from Tannehill to rookie A.J. Brown. They also went smash-mouth at one point, running on all 10 plays of a TD drive in Houston.

"It just speaks volumes for us as an offense what we were able to accomplish as a whole," Henry said.

The Titans allowed only 14 points to Houston's backups, but the touchdowns came on drives of 15 and 16 plays apiece. The Titans go into the postseason 12th in the NFL allowing 20.6 points a game.

Both Tannehill and Henry turned in career years and are coming off strong performances. Yet Brown led all rookies with 1,051 yards receiving and eight TD catches. He ranked second in the NFL among qualifying players averaging 20.2 yards per catch, and he led all rookies with five 100-yard receiving games.

Brown also had four TD catches of at least 50 yards to be the fourth rookie since 1970 with at least four TD catches of 50 yards or longer, joining Randy Moss (five in 1998), Willie Gault (1983) and Isaac Curtis (1973).

### TEXANS RESTED AND READY

The Houston Texans got a bit of a break this weekend before Saturday's playoff game against the Buffalo Bills as several key starters rested against Tennessee with the team's playoff spot already secured.

After winning the AFC South in Week 16, Houston lost to the Titans 35-14 on Sunday in a game where Tennessee clinched a playoff berth.

Quarterback Deshaun Watson was active on Sunday, but coach Bill O'Brien started AJ McCarron instead. Watson was listed as questionable with a back injury this week but said he was OK. Receiver DeAndre Hopkins (illness) was also active, but did not play and several starters, including receiver Kenny Stills (knee), left tackle Laremy Tunsil (ankle) and nose tackle D.J. Reader, were inactive.

O'Brien said deciding to rest players on Sunday wasn't an easy decision, but he decided to do it after the earlier games were finished and he knew the Texans were locked into the No. 4 seed.

"Hopefully it's valuable, but it was a tough situation because there were guys that wanted to play," he said. "We always try to make decisions in the best interest of the team and once we saw what was go-

ing on with the earlier games we basically knew where we were and we wanted to give other guys an opportunity to play."

The Texans won the AFC South title for the second straight year and the fourth time in five seasons. The Colts beat Houston 21-7 in the first round last season.

O'Brien said he doesn't think what happened in that game has any bearing on Saturday's playoff game.

"We're a much different team," he said. "Anytime you play in a game like that obviously that's part of our memory but at the end of the day this is a very different team, a whole different year."

O'Brien was then asked if this is the best team he's had.

"In the six years that we've been here this is a very good team," he said. "But we had a team in 2016 that won a playoff game. So to say that this is the best team I wouldn't be able to say that, but I think this is a very good team that cares and tries to do things the right way and we've just got to continue down that path."

With so many people resting on Sunday it was tough to get a gauge of where the Texans are as they enter the playoffs. But O'Brien said on Monday that his team is about as healthy as any team can be at this time of year, which is a good sign to start the postseason.

The Texans have given up some long runs in the past two games, including a 53-yard touchdown dash by Derrick Henry on Sunday in a game where he finished with a season-high 211 yards rushing.

"We have to do a better job of setting the edge and building a wall tackling," O'Brien said. "That's going to be a big point of emphasis this week. We've got to be able to do that. We've done a good job of that at times throughout the year, most of the time, but over the last few games, it's been inconsistent."

DeAndre Carter had six catches for a career-high 65 yards against the Titans with many of Houston's receivers sitting out. Carter could give the Texans another option in the postseason as Watson looks to spread the ball around.

WR Will Fuller sat out on Sunday with a hamstring injury after he was hurt in Week 16. O'Brien said he's progressing, but that it was too early to say if he'll play on Saturday. O'Brien added that he wasn't sure when they'll activate DE J.J. Watt to the active roster. The three-time Defensive Player of the Year returned to practice last week after sitting out since October after tearing a pectoral muscle.