

KINGS OF THE NORTH

Photographs and History of the Minnesota Vikings



by Chad Israelson

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to the following:

My parents, Isaac and Kit, who may not have understood the obsession but always supported it. Thank you for the Bills game, the Saints game, the football cards, and everything else.

My wife, Beth, who is a great editor, advisor, and an even greater partner. Thanks for all of your help and love.

My sons, Addison and Garrison, who have shared the Vikings' highs and lows with me and could not make a dad prouder. Addison, thanks for the memories that contributed to this project and your assistance on the last one. Garrison, thanks for finding *History of Heartbreak* and for your love of books.

My friends who I watched the games with and who also lived and died by the Vikings: Frank Harris, Pat Hogan, Paul Janikowski, and Russ Skifton. Also, Sal, Freddy, Hassenpfeffer, and Moosh Moosh.

The people who contributed in ways obvious or not, including Tom Graves, Scott Olson, Sam Ramsden, Mark Schnaedter, Jeff Taylor, and Chris Zobin.

The memories of Andy Anderson, Ron Butterfield, and Mark Allen.

INTRODUCTION

Even before the 1961 inception of the Vikings, Minnesota had multiple professional football teams. In the 1920s, the Duluth Kelleys, Duluth Eskimos, Minneapolis Marines, and Minneapolis Red Jackets all trod the gridiron in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. In 1959, the struggling Chicago Cardinals considered a transfer north and even played two games in Bloomington, but they left no lasting impression here. Instead, they eventually moved to Saint Louis (and then to Arizona).

In 1960, the American Football League (AFL), an upstart rival to the National Football League (NFL), almost beat the established league to Minnesota. A local ownership group that included Max Winter, H.P. Skoglund, and Bill Boyer was initially set to be one of the eight inaugural teams in the AFL. The owners paid the \$25,000 necessary for entry and even participated in the league's 1959 draft. Old-guard NFL owners, such as George Halas, despised the concept of a new league and sought to thwart the AFL. They proposed the addition of NFL teams in Dallas and Minneapolis. Whether an AFL expansion squad or an NFL franchise, Minnesota was poised to become the home of professional football.

In order to assemble the needed \$1 million for the (considerably more expensive) NFL entry fee, the ownership group expanded to include Saint Paul newspaper magnate Bernie Ridder and former Eskimos owner Ole Haugrud. But if there was going to be a Minnesota team in the NFL, it had to win acceptance from the other owners. That took some maneuvering from the league's new commissioner, Pete Rozelle. He convinced the NFL's 12 owners to change the requirements for expansion from a unanimous vote to 10–2.

In January of 1960, the Minnesota group pulled out of their arrangement with the AFL, and Minnesota joined the NFL, along with Dallas. The Cowboys began play later that year, but the Vikings had to wait one more season before being able to compete. (Oakland filled the vacancy left by Minnesota in the AFL, becoming the Raiders. The teams met in Super Bowl XI a decade and a half later.)

Bert Rose, a friend of Pete Rozelle, became the Minnesota franchise's general manager. It was Rose who ultimately chose the nickname "Vikings," due to Minnesota's Scandinavian heritage and the historic ferocity of the Norse peoples. The franchise also undertook the unusual move of naming the team for the entire state, rather than the city in which they played. At the time, no other professional football team had done this. (In 1971, the Patriots switched from Boston to New England.) It is speculated that Rose adopted the purple and yellow color scheme in honor of his alma mater, the University of Washington.

The Vikings began to assemble their team via the expansion draft, trades, and the college draft. These avenues landed them some of their greatest players, including Grady Alderman, Jim Marshall, and Fran Tarkenton. Norm Van Brocklin, fresh off quarterbacking the Philadelphia Eagles to the 1960 NFL Championship, became the franchise's first head coach. Initially, Bud Grant, head coach of the Canadian Football League's Winnipeg Blue Bombers, had also been a contender for the job, but he withdrew his name from consideration.

In September of 1961, the Minnesota Vikings were ready to begin their storied history on the football field.

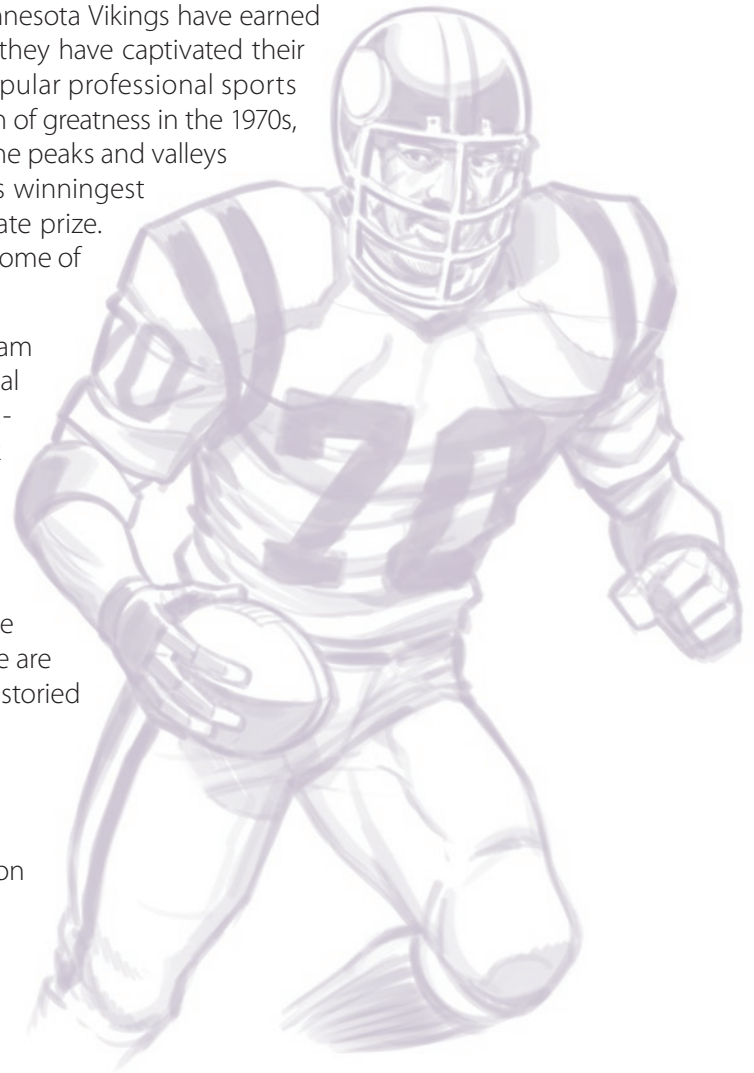
The ownership group controlled the team until 1998, when they sold the franchise to B.J. “Red” McCombs. He held the Vikings until 2005, when the title passed to Zygmunt “Zigi” Wilf and Mark Wilf.

Purple is widely considered the color of royalty, and the Minnesota Vikings have earned the title as “Kings of the North.” In good seasons and bad, they have captivated their Upper Midwest fan base, becoming Minnesota’s most popular professional sports franchise. From the early days of the 1960s to the purple reign of greatness in the 1970s, the rebuilding and restoration of the 1980s and 1990s, and the peaks and valleys of the 21st century, the Vikings have been one of the NFL’s winningest teams, even though they have not yet captured the ultimate prize. Through it all, the team has provided countless thrills—and some of the greatest players the NFL has ever seen.

In 1975, when I was five years old, the Vikings’ bug bit me. I am fortunate to have watched the original greats—my personal purple gods—as well as the amazingly talented modern-day players. From the Met to the Metrodome, TCF Bank Stadium to U.S. Bank Stadium, the Vikings have slogged through the mud and the snow and have put up aerial fireworks on turf and under a roof. The surroundings and style of play have changed over time, but our love of the Vikings has remained. Through the joy and the suffering, the Vikings have forged a bond of Nordic iron with their fans. We are passionate and loyal. So enjoy this book, and revel in the storied history of our team.

Skol!

—Chad Israelson



Jim Marshall played in every Vikings game through 1979.

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A BIT OF NFL HISTORY

From 1961 to 1966, the Minnesota Vikings were in the Western Conference of the National Football League (NFL) with six other teams. In 1967, the Western Conference was split into two divisions, and the Central Division became the home of four teams: the Chicago Bears, Detroit Lions, Green Bay Packers, and Minnesota Vikings. In 1970, the American Football League (AFL) merged with the NFL; the Vikings stayed in the Central Division but in the National Football Conference (NFC). From 1977 to 2001 the Central Division included a fifth team, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Since 2002, the Vikings have resided in the NFC's North Division with Chicago, Detroit, and Green Bay.

From 1961 to 1977 the NFL played a 14-game season. Beginning in 1978, a season became 16 games. The two exceptions were the strike years of 1982 (nine games) and 1987 (15 games).

AUTHOR'S NOTES

All-Pro: Determining which players are All-Pro in a given season is not as easy as it sounds. There are a number of sources that name an All-Pro team, and those sources change from year to year. I did my best to remain consistent by listing players who were first-team All-Pro according to one or more of these sources: Associated Press, Pro Football Weekly, Pro Football Writers of America, Sporting News, and United Press International.

Key Additions: I tried to take a scientific approach in determining what constitutes a key addition to the team, from length of service to statistical landmarks to Pro Bowls. Nothing worked. There were exceptions to every rule. Therefore, I left the Key Additions largely to my own subjectivity. It's possible I missed someone I shouldn't have missed or included someone I shouldn't have included, but it certainly was an interesting exercise in figuring out which players the Vikings picked up and when.

Sacks: Sacks did not become an official NFL statistic until 1982. The numbers cited in years prior are not official but were taken from the Vikings media guides.

Starting Lineups: The starting lineup for each season is a moving target. Lineups change from week to week, due to everything from game plan to player performance to injury. The starting lineups in this book are largely based on which players started the most games. In some cases, when it made sense to do so, I favored the team's statistical leaders. In other cases, I relied on information found in places like the team's media guides. While I did my best, the alignments may not be perfect. (For example, wide receivers might not be on their most typical sides of the field.) However, the starting lineups should give you a good idea of which players had the biggest impacts at their respective positions.

The franchise's inconsistent performances and streaky play continued in 2005. In fact, despite a respectable record, it's a season that many would like to forget.

The campaign is perhaps most infamously known for a scandalous party-boat cruise, dubbed the "Love Boat." During the team's bye week in October, some Vikings players rented a boat, hired adult dancers, and proceeded to shock the sensibilities of the boat's crew. The experience proved to be a humiliation to the franchise and gave the impression to some that head coach Mike Tice had lost control of the team.

On the field, the Vikings started 1-4. However, in one of the season's high points, Minnesota overcame a 17-point deficit to beat the Packers. Paul Edinger booted a 56-yard field goal—the longest three-pointer in franchise history—as time expired.

A week later, Minnesota got walloped by the Panthers, and they lost star quarterback Daunte Culpepper to a devastating knee injury. Brad Johnson, who returned to the Vikings as a free agent, was pressed into action. He answered by guiding the team on a six-game winning streak.

Despite the bad start, bad luck, and some very bad behavior, the Vikings found themselves in the playoff hunt at 8-5. But they lost to Pittsburgh and to Baltimore before finishing with a victory against Chicago.

Ownership fired head coach Mike Tice moments after the season-ending win. Tice's stint ended with a .492 winning percentage but only one losing season: his 6-10 mark in 2002, the first full-year he served as head coach. The Vikings made the postseason once with Tice at the helm. They replaced him by hiring Brad Childress during the offseason.

Safety Darren Sharper made the All-Pro team.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Koren Robinson (KR)
- Darren Sharper (S)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ Tampa Bay Buccaneers	13-24	0-1
⚡ @ Cincinnati Bengals	8-37	0-2
⚡ New Orleans Saints	33-16	1-2
⚡ @ Atlanta Falcons	10-30	1-3
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	3-28	1-4
⚡ Green Bay Packers	23-20	2-4
⚡ @ Carolina Panthers	13-38	2-5
⚡ Detroit Lions	27-14	3-5
⚡ @ New York Giants	24-21	4-5
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers	20-17	5-5
⚡ Cleveland Browns	24-12	6-5
⚡ @ Detroit Lions	21-16	7-5
⚡ St. Louis Rams	27-13	8-5
⚡ Pittsburgh Steelers	3-18	8-6
⚡ @ Baltimore Ravens	23-30	8-7
⚡ Chicago Bears	34-10	9-7

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	1,885	Brad Johnson
Rushing Yards	662	Mewelde Moore
Receiving Yards	604	Travis Taylor
Receptions	69	Jermaine Wiggins
Interceptions	9	Darren Sharper
Sacks	7.5	Lance Johnstone
Points	106	Paul Edinger

Key Additions:

N/A



*Kevin Williams was selected
first team All-Pro five times.*

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Brad Johnson	QB
Mewelde Moore	RB
Travis Taylor	WR
Marcus Robinson	WR
Jermaine Wiggins	HB
Jim Kleinsasser	TE
Bryant McKinnie	LT
Chris Liwinski	LG
Melvin Fowler	C
Adam Goldberg	RG
Mike Rosenthal	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Erasmus James	DE
Pat Williams	DT
Kevin Williams	DT
Darrion Scott	DE
E.J. Henderson	LB
Sam Cowart	LB
Keith Newman	LB
Brian Williams	CB
Antoine Winfield	CB
Corey Chavous	SS
Darren Sharper	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Paul Edinger	K
Koren Robinson	KR
Chris Kluwe	P
Mewelde Moore	PR

The 2006 season marked the beginning of another chapter in Vikings' history. Mike Tice was out as head coach, and Daunte Culpepper was gone at quarterback.

Tice was replaced by Brad Childress. Drafted in the second-round, Tarvaris Jackson was slated to become Culpepper's heir apparent.

The rookie watched and learned behind Brad Johnson (and started two late-season games). The Vikings envisioned Jackson hooking up on long passes with the prior year's first-rounder, the speedy wide receiver Troy Williamson. With Childress's reputation as an offensive guru, hopes were high that the Vikings would field a potent scoring attack.

The Vikings emerged victorious in Childress's first two games, and they worked their record to 4-2. One of the season's highlights came on Chester Taylor's franchise-record 95-yard touchdown run in a 31-13 victory on the road against Seattle.

After that offensive outburst, Minnesota's surprisingly sluggish offense caught up with them, and they suffered a four-game losing streak. In losses to the Patriots and 49ers, the Vikings' total scoring amounted to only a touchdown and a field goal. The team fared a little better in losses to the Packers and Dolphins, and they finally broke through with a 31-26 victory over the Cardinals. However, the team closed out the season with three losses to finish a disappointing 6-10.

Led by their stout defensive line, the Vikings gave up the league's fewest yards per rush. They achieved that success despite the absence of first-round draft pick Chad Greenway, who was lost for the season after suffering a knee injury in the team's first preseason game.

On-the-field success may have been limited in 2006, but the seeds were planted for a Purple resurgence. Steve Hutchinson made All-Pro in his first season with the Vikings, and defensive tackle Kevin Williams achieved the same status.

Pro Bowl participants included Hutchinson and Williams, along with their linemates Matt Birk and Pat Williams.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W @ Washington	19-16	1-0
W Carolina Panthers (OT)	16-13	2-0
L Chicago Bears	16-19	2-1
L @ Buffalo Bills	12-17	2-2
W Detroit Lions	26-17	3-2
W @ Seattle Seahawks	31-13	4-2
L New England Patriots	7-31	4-3
L @ San Francisco 49ers	3-9	4-4
L Green Bay Packers	17-23	4-5
L @ Miami Dolphins	20-24	4-6
W Arizona Cardinals	31-26	5-6
L @ Chicago Bears	13-23	5-7
W @ Detroit Lions	30-20	6-7
L New York Jets	13-26	6-8
L @ Green Bay Packers	7-9	6-9
L St. Louis Rams	21-41	6-10

Season Leaders




CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	2,750	Brad Johnson
Rushing Yards	1,216	Chester Taylor
Receiving Yards	651	Travis Taylor
Receptions	57	Travis Taylor
Interceptions	4	Sharper/Winfield/Smith
Sacks	5.5	Darrion Scott
Points	90	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Chad Greenway (draft)
Steve Hutchinson (free agent)

Starting Lineup

Travis Taylor  Fred Smoot 

Chester Taylor  Bryant McKinnie  Kenechi Udeze 

Steve Hutchinson  Pat Williams 

 E.J. Henderson

Brad Johnson 

Matt Birk 

 Napoleon Harris

 Darren Sharper

Tony Richardson 

Artis Hicks 

 Kevin Williams

 Dwight Smith

Marcus Johnson  Darrion Scott 

 Ben Leber

Jim Kleinsasser 

K Ryan Longwell

KR Bethel Johnson

P Chris Kluwe

PR Mewelde Moore

Troy Williamson  Antoine Winfield 

Pro Bowl Selections

- Matt Birk (C)
- Steve Hutchinson (G)
- Kevin Williams (DT)
- Pat Williams (DT)

Brad Johnson was with Minnesota in 1994–1998 and 2005–2006.



8-8 Second Place

In 2007, the Vikings improved slightly on their record from the previous year, but the big story proved to be first-round draft pick and NFL Rookie of the Year, Adrian Peterson. The running back rushed for over 1,300 yards and notched the two best rushing days in team history.

Prior to Peterson's arrival, Chuck Foreman owned the Vikings' only 200-yard rushing performance in a game (exactly 200 yards). Peterson eclipsed Foreman's record with a 224-yard outburst in a 34-31 win against Chicago.

Three weeks later, versus San Diego, Peterson surpassed every other running back in NFL history with a record-setting 296-yard performance. (See page 130.) The game, a 35-17 Vikings win, also saw Chargers defensive back Antonio Cromartie return a missed field goal 109 yards for the longest play in NFL history (tied in 2013 on a kick return against the Packers by the Vikings' Cordarrelle Patterson).

Despite Peterson's highlights, the offense continued to perform unevenly. The team's record stood at 3-6 before Minnesota strung together a five-game winning streak. It began with a victory against the Raiders. Chester Taylor, starting for the injured Peterson, gashed Oakland for 164 yards rushing and three touchdowns. The following week, the defense carried the Purple to victory as they returned three interceptions for touchdowns against the eventual-Super-Bowl-champion New York Giants. Peterson returned for a matchup versus the Lions. He rushed for 116 yards and scored two touchdowns as Minnesota crushed Detroit, 42-10. In the fourth victory of the Vikings' streak, the 49ers held Peterson to only three yards, but Taylor compensated with an 84-yard touchdown run. The team moved to 8-6 after a 20-13 victory over the Bears.

In the final two weeks of the regular season, Minnesota had a chance to clinch a playoff berth, but they lost both games: first to Washington, 32-21, and then to Denver, 22-19, in overtime.

Peterson joined Steve Hutchinson and Kevin Williams as All-Pro selections. They also earned Pro Bowl trips, along with Matt Birk, Tony Richardson, Darren Sharper, and Pat Williams.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W Atlanta Falcons	24-3	1-0
L @ Detroit Lions (OT)	17-20	1-1
L @ Kansas City Chiefs	10-13	1-2
L Green Bay Packers	16-23	1-3
W @ Chicago Bears	34-31	2-3
L @ Dallas Cowboys	14-24	2-4
L Philadelphia Eagles	16-23	2-5
W San Diego Chargers	35-17	3-5
L @ Green Bay Packers	0-34	3-6
W Oakland Raiders	29-22	4-6
W @ New York Giants	41-17	5-6
W Detroit Lions	42-10	6-6
W @ San Francisco 49ers	27-7	7-6
W Chicago Bears	20-13	8-6
L Washington	21-32	8-7
L @ Denver Broncos (OT)	19-22	8-8

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	1,911	Tarvaris Jackson
Rushing Yards	1,341	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	647	Bobby Wade
Receptions	54	Bobby Wade
Interceptions	4	Sharper/Smith
Sacks	5	Edwards/Leber/Udeze
Points	99	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Adrian Peterson (draft)
Brian Robison (draft)

Starting Lineup

Bobby Wade  Cedric Griffin 

Bryant McKinnie  Ray Edwards 

Steve Hutchinson  Pat Williams 

Matt Birk 

Anthony Herrera  Kevin Williams 

Ryan Cook  Kenechi Udeze 

Visanthe Shiancoe 

Robert Ferguson  Antoine Winfield 

 Chad Greenway

 E.J. Henderson

 Ben Leber

 Darren Sharper

 Dwight Smith

K Ryan Longwell

KR Aundrae Allison

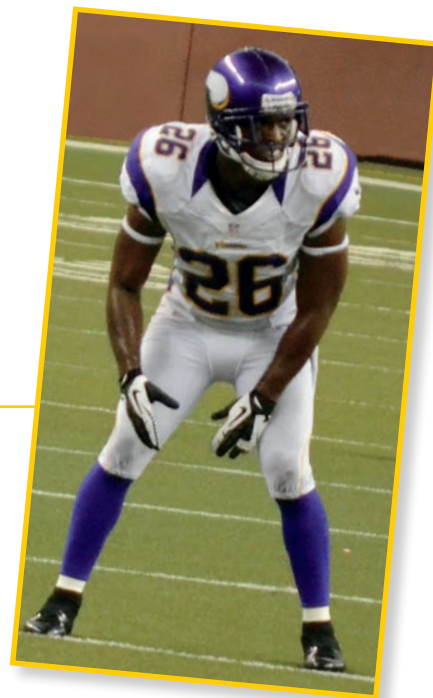
P Chris Kluwe

PR Bobby Wade

Pro Bowl Selections

- Matt Birk (C)
- Steve Hutchinson (G)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Darren Sharper (S)
- Kevin Williams (DT)
- Pat Williams (DT)

Antoine Winfield was with the Vikings for nine seasons.



In 2008, the Vikings continued their steady rise upward. After the team's 0-2 start, coach Brad Childress benched quarterback Tarvaris Jackson in favor of Gus Frerotte.

The Vikings played a ball-control offense, and Adrian Peterson shattered the team's single-season rushing record with 1,760 yards.

In October, Minnesota lost to the Bears, 48-41. The combined 89 points were the most ever in a game involving the Vikings.

After 10 contests, the Vikings were a .500 team. Then they went on a four-game winning streak. During that stretch, in their second matchup against the Bears, Frerotte connected with wide receiver Bernard Berrian for a 99-yard touchdown pass, tying the NFL record.

Frerotte got dinged up the following week and was replaced by Jackson. Back in the starting lineup, Jackson enjoyed a monster game against the Cardinals, with four touchdown passes. He helped guide the team into the postseason for the first time under Childress.

Although the Vikings won the division, offensive inconsistency doomed the squad in the first round of the playoffs. They lost, 26-14, to Philadelphia at the Metrodome.

Steve Hutchinson and Kevin Williams earned their third straight All-Pro designations. Peterson and Jared Allen were also All-Pro. Pat Williams and cornerback Antoine Winfield joined them as Pro Bowl players.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Jared Allen (DE)
- Steve Hutchinson (G)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Kevin Williams (DT)
- Pat Williams (DT)
- Antoine Winfield (CB)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers	19-24	0-1
⚡ Indianapolis Colts	15-18	0-2
W Carolina Panthers	20-10	1-2
⚡ @ Tennessee Titans	17-30	1-3
W @ New Orleans Saints	30-27	2-3
W Detroit Lions	12-10	3-3
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	41-48	3-4
W Houston Texans	28-21	4-4
W Green Bay Packers	28-27	5-4
⚡ @ Tampa Bay Buccaneers	13-19	5-5
W @ Jacksonville Jaguars	30-12	6-5
W Chicago Bears	34-14	7-5
W @ Detroit Lions	20-16	8-5
W @ Arizona Cardinals	35-14	9-5
⚡ Atlanta Falcons	17-24	9-6
W New York Giants	20-19	10-6
⚡ Philadelphia Eagles	14-26	0-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	2,157	Gus Frerotte
Rushing Yards	1,760	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	964	Bernard Berrian
Receptions	53	Bobby Wade
Interceptions	2	Leber/Sapp/Williams/Winfield
Sacks	14.5	Jared Allen
Points	127	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Jared Allen (trade)
John Sullivan (draft)

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Gus Frerotte	QB
Adrian Peterson	RB
Bobby Wade	WR
Bernard Berrian	WR
Visanthe Shiancoe	TE
Jim Kleinsasser	TE
Bryant McKinnie	LT
Steve Hutchinson	LG
Matt Birk	C
Anthony Herrera	RG
Ryan Cook	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Jared Allen	DE
Kevin Williams	DT
Pat Williams	DT
Ray Edwards	DE
Ben Leber	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Napoleon Harris	LB
Antoine Winfield	CB
Cedric Griffin	CB
Darren Sharper	SS
Madieu Williams	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Ryan Longwell	K
Maurice Hicks	KR
Chris Kluwe	P
Charles Gordon	PR

In 2016, Jared Allen had this to say about retiring as a Viking with a one-day contract:
 "I rooted in Minnesota, not just on the field but off the field. So that's why it was really important for me to go back and officially retire as a Viking. I can say now that I'm a Viking for the remainder of my time on Earth."



Jared Allen recorded nine or more sacks in nine of his first ten seasons.

Much like the 1998 season, 2009 proved to be another magical ride, and this time the source of that magic came not from a rookie but from veteran Brett Favre.

After rooting against Favre for 16 seasons, some Vikings fans felt at least a twinge of inner conflict. However, the quarterback appeared in purple and held the promise of taking the franchise to the Super Bowl.

Winning games caused great joy among the Vikings fanbase, but Purple loyalists also relished in the consternation that emanated from Wisconsin, as their former favorite quarterback led a Vikings team that dominated the Packers and won the division.

Against the 49ers in the season's third game, with time expiring, Favre zinged a pass to the back of the end zone. A tip-toeing Greg Lewis somehow snagged the reception for a miraculous game-winning touchdown. (See page 136.) It was one of six straight victories.

Later in the season, Minnesota won four more in a row, but a pair of losses ultimately proved key to their fortune. The first defeat came in a lackluster performance against a mediocre Panthers team, 26-7. The second was a 36-30 overtime loss at Chicago, just a few weeks after the Vikings had blown out the Bears, 36-10. Effectively, these games prevented Minnesota from capturing home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

In their divisional playoff game, the Vikings demolished the Cowboys, 34-3. But 11 years after becoming the first team to lose an NFC Championship in overtime, the Vikings became the first franchise to lose that way twice—as they fell, 31-28, to the Saints. The game later became controversially known as “Bountygate.” New Orleans players had allegedly been paid incentives to injure key Vikings stars, such as Favre.

During the season, Favre surpassed Jim Marshall's Iron Man record of 282 consecutive games played by a position player.

Jared Allen, Steve Hutchinson, Adrian Peterson, and Kevin Williams all repeated as All-Pro selections. Percy Harvin was honored as the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W @ Cleveland Browns	34-20	1-0
W @ Detroit Lions	27-13	2-0
W San Francisco 49ers	27-24	3-0
W Green Bay Packers	30-23	4-0
W @ St. Louis Rams	38-10	5-0
W Baltimore Ravens	33-31	6-0
L @ Pittsburgh Steelers	17-27	6-1
W @ Green Bay Packers	38-26	7-1
W Detroit Lions	27-10	8-1
W Seattle Seahawks	35-9	9-1
W Chicago Bears	36-10	10-1
L @ Arizona Cardinals	17-30	10-2
W Cincinnati Bengals	30-10	11-2
L @ Carolina Panthers	7-26	11-3
L @ Chicago Bears (OT)	30-36	11-4
W New York Giants	44-7	12-4
W Dallas Cowboys	34-3	1-0
L @ New Orleans Saints (OT)	28-31	1-1

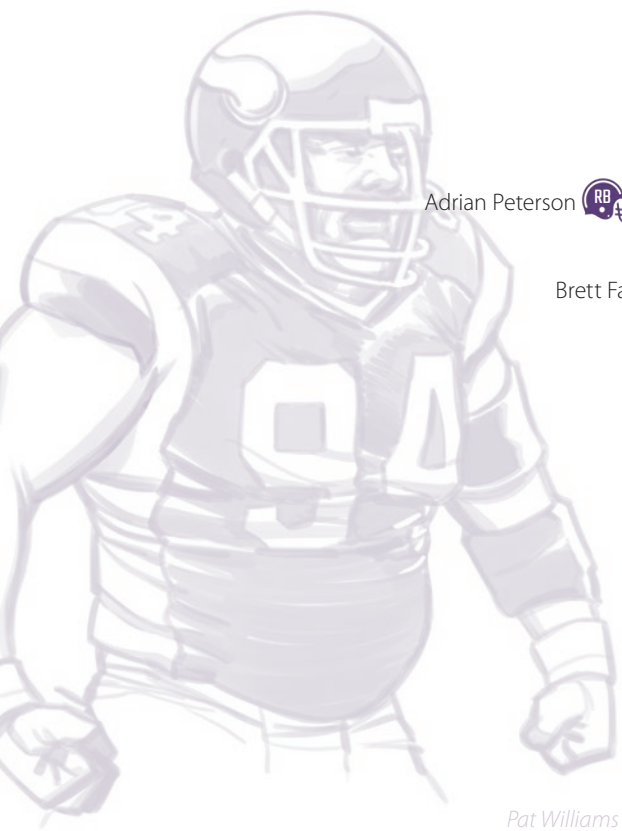
Season Leaders


CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	4,202	Brett Favre
Rushing Yards	1,383	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	1,312	Sidney Rice
Receptions	83	Sidney Rice
Interceptions	4	Cedric Griffin
Sacks	14.5	Jared Allen
Points	132	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Brett Favre (free agent)
Percy Harvin (draft)
Phil Loadholt (draft)

Starting Lineup



	Bernard Berrian 	 Cedric Griffin	
	Visanthe Shiancoe 		
Adrian Peterson 	Bryant McKinnie 	 Jared Allen	
	Steve Hutchinson 	 Kevin Williams	 Ben Leber
Brett Favre 	John Sullivan 		 Tyrell Johnson
	Anthony Herrera 	 Pat Williams	 Madiou Williams
	Phil Loadholt 	 Ray Edwards	 Chad Greenway
Jim Kleinsasser 			
	Sidney Rice 	 Antoine Winfield	
			K Ryan Longwell KR Percy Harvin P Chris Kluwe PR Darius Reynaud

Pat Williams made up half of the famed "Williams Wall" (with defensive tackle Kevin Williams).

Vikings Record

Most Career Combined Yards:

Adrian Peterson: 13,692 yards (2007–2016)

Pro Bowl Selections

- Jared Allen (DE)
- Brett Favre (QB)
- Heath Farwell (ST)
- Percy Harvin (KR)
- Steve Hutchinson (G)
- Bryant McKinnie (T)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Sidney Rice (WR)
- Kevin Williams (DT)
- Antoine Winfield (CB)



All-2000s Offense

QUARTERBACK: **Daunte Culpepper** (2000–2005). In what amounted to just over five full seasons, Culpepper threw for 20,162 yards and 135 touchdowns. Plus, he ran for another 2,470 yards and 29 touchdowns. He also made three Pro Bowl squads.

RUNNING BACKS: **Adrian Peterson** (2007–2009) and **Michael Bennett** (2001–2005). Peterson exploded onto the scene in his rookie year, rushing for more than 1,300 yards and breaking the NFL single-game mark with 296 yards on the ground. For the decade, he amassed 4,484 yards, 40 touchdowns, three Pro Bowls, and two All-Pro seasons. Bennett twice led the Vikings in rushing yards and tallied 3,174 yards, with an impressive average of 4.5 yards per carry. He earned a Pro Bowl berth in 2002.

WIDE RECEIVERS: **Randy Moss** (2000–2004) and **Cris Carter** (2000–2001). One of the most talented Vikings ever, Moss caught 425 passes for 6,416 yards and 62 touchdowns, while earning trips to three Pro Bowls along with two All-Pro nods. He led the Vikings in receptions three times and in receiving yards four times. Despite playing only two seasons, Carter still gained 2,145 yards on 169 catches and scored 15 touchdowns. He made the Pro Bowl squad in 2000.

TIGHT END: **Jim Kleinsasser** (2000–2009). A more explosive receiving threat, Visanthe Shiancoe could have made this list, as well, but he split his Vikings career between two decades. In comparison, Kleinsasser caught more balls in the 2000s, with 168 (for 1,523 yards receiving). More importantly, he provided punishing blocks and created matchup problems as a receiver who looked as if he could play on the offensive line.

CENTER: **Matt Birk** (2000–2008). Birk became the Vikings' starting center in 2000 and remained there until 2008, making 123 starts. He was named to six Pro Bowls, which is tied for the most all-time by a Vikings center.

GUARDS: **Steve Hutchinson** (2006–2009) and **David Dixon** (2000–2004). With four Pro Bowls, three All-Pro seasons, and 64 starts, Hutchinson performed at the top of his game every season in Minnesota. Dixon, a holdover from the All-1990s squad, started 77 games in the 2000s.

TACKLES: **Bryant McKinnie** (2002–2009) and **Chris Liwienski** (2000–2005). McKinnie, a first-round draft choice, made 115 starts and one Pro Bowl. After the tragic death of Corey Stringer, Liwienski filled in at tackle for two seasons before shifting to guard.

KICKER: **Ryan Longwell** (2006–2009). The most accurate kicker in team history, Longwell boomed 448 points through the uprights during the decade.

KICK RETURNER: **Percy Harvin** (2009). The Vikings had a revolving door at kick returner prior to Harvin's arrival. In his rookie year, he averaged 27.5 yards per return and took two all the way to the end zone.

—Data and statistics are for this decade only, unless otherwise noted.—

All-2000s Defense

DEFENSIVE ENDS: **Jared Allen** (2008–2009) and **Ray Edwards** (2006–2009). Coming from Kansas City in a trade, Allen only played two years in Minnesota during the decade—but they were outstanding. Both ended in Pro Bowl and All-Pro berths, as well as the team lead in sacks and three total safeties. Edwards logged 44 starts and 21.5 sacks as a member of a very talented defensive line.

DEFENSIVE TACKLES: **Kevin Williams** (2003–2009) and **Pat Williams** (2005–2009). Kevin Williams' impressive 2000s output included five Pro Bowls, five All-Pro campaigns, a spot on the NFL's All-Decade team, 110 starts, four interceptions, and 48.5 sacks (leading the team twice in that category). The other member of the famed "Williams Wall," Pat Williams earned three Pro Bowl berths and started 77 games, as the Vikings boasted the NFL's best run defense in the mid-2000s.

LINEBACKERS: **E.J. Henderson** (2003–2009), **Chad Greenway** (2006–2009), and **Ben Leber** (2006–2009). Henderson led the team in tackles three times, made 75 starts, and returned an interception for a touchdown. After missing his rookie season with a knee injury, Greenway led the team in tackles twice, intercepted five passes, and recorded 5.5 sacks. Leber started 48 games, and he registered four interceptions and 12 sacks.

CORNERBACKS: **Antoine Winfield** (2004–2009) and **Cedric Griffin** (2006–2009). Winfield arrived as a free agent from Buffalo. He led the team in interceptions once and shared the lead twice. His sure tackling and blanket coverage resulted in Pro Bowl berths in 2008 and 2009. He picked off 15 passes and scored four total touchdowns

as the Vikings' best corner of the decade. Griffin made 54 starts, grabbed seven interceptions (leading the team once), and provided physical corner play.

SAFETIES: **Corey Chavous** (2002–2005) and **Brian Russell** (2002–2004). Chavous started 64 games, intercepted 14 passes, returned two of the them for touchdowns, and made a Pro Bowl. Russell joined the Vikings as a free-agent rookie. His greatest impact came in his second year, when he led the NFL with nine interceptions. (He returned them for a total of 185 yards.) He started 34 games and caught 11 interceptions for Minnesota.

PUNTER: **Chris Kluwe** (2005–2009). Kluwe averaged an impressive 44.4 yards per punt over five seasons with the Vikings.

PUNT RETURNER: **Mewelde Moore** (2004–2007). Moore averaged an excellent 10.4 yards a return, and he brought two punts back for touchdowns during his stint with the Vikings.



Randy Moss ranks among the most talented wide receivers in NFL history.

Beginning in 2006, the Vikings had enjoyed a steady improvement of two wins per season. That, coupled with the team's success in 2009, had fans excited about the prospect of a 14-2 record. Instead, what transpired was one of the most disappointing regular seasons in Vikings history. It began on a Thursday night in New Orleans, when the team failed to exact revenge for the previous season's playoff loss. The following week at home, it became evident that the team would not repeat its wild success of 2009; they fell to a so-so Miami team, 14-10.

Hoping to jump-start the season after beginning 1-2, the Vikings reacquired Randy Moss in a trade with New England. Moss's second stint as a Viking proved infinitely less successful than his first. He lasted only four games before the team cut ties with him. However, in the first of his four games, he managed to catch Brett Favre's 500th career touchdown pass.

Even Favre suffered a miserable 2010. He missed the first start of his career (since becoming a starter) after suffering an injury against the Bills. That snapped his consecutive-game streak at 299.

In November, following a 31-3 debacle against Green Bay, the Vikings fired Brad Childress and replaced him with Leslie Frazier. To make matters worse, the Metrodome roof collapsed as the result of a December snowstorm, rendering the stadium unusable for the rest of the season. The Vikings moved a home game versus the Giants to Detroit's Ford Field and another against the Bears to the University of Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium—giving the Purple its first outdoor home game in 29 years.

The latter contest provided one of the great visuals in franchise history. The Bears game celebrated the franchise's 50th season by honoring the 50 greatest Vikings. In the snow and cold, players assembled in a carnival-like atmosphere as fans once again got to brave the elements. After the announcement of the all-time Vikings squad, former players carried Bud Grant, clad in a short-sleeved shirt, off the field.

Despite the incredible turmoil, interim head coach Leslie Frazier somehow coaxed the Vikings to three wins in six games.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ @ New Orleans Saints	9-14	0-1
⚡ Miami Dolphins	10-14	0-2
⚡ Detroit Lions	24-10	1-2
⚡ @ New York Jets	20-29	1-3
⚡ Dallas Cowboys	24-21	2-3
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers	24-28	2-4
⚡ @ New England Patriots	18-28	2-5
⚡ Arizona Cardinals (OT)	27-24	3-5
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	13-27	3-6
⚡ Green Bay Packers	3-31	3-7
⚡ @ Washington	17-13	4-7
⚡ Buffalo Bills	38-14	5-7
⚡ New York Giants	3-21	5-8
⚡ Chicago Bears	14-40	5-9
⚡ @ Philadelphia Eagles	24-14	6-9
⚡ @ Detroit Lions	13-20	6-10

Season Leaders




CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	2,509	Brett Favre
Rushing Yards	1,298	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	868	Percy Harvin
Receptions	71	Percy Harvin
Interceptions	3	Henderson/Abdullah
Sacks	11	Jared Allen
Points	81	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Everson Griffen (draft)

Starting Lineup

Percy Harvin  Asher Allen 

Adrian Peterson  Bryant McKinnie  Jared Allen 

Steve Hutchinson  Kevin Williams 

Brett Favre  John Sullivan  Pat Williams 

Anthony Herrera  Ray Edwards 

Phil Loadholt 

Visanthe Shiancoe 

Bernard Berrian  Antoine Winfield 

 Chad Greenway

 E.J. Henderson

 Ben Leber

 Husain Abdullah

 Madiou Williams

K Ryan Longwell

KR Percy Harvin

P Chris Kluwe

PR Greg Camarillo

Pro Bowl Selections

- E.J. Henderson (LB)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Kevin Williams (DT)
- Antoine Winfield (CB)

Brett Favre retired after the 2010 season.



In 2011, the Vikings again hit the reset button. Leslie Frazier was named Minnesota's official head coach, and the team added two new quarterbacks: veteran Donovan McNabb and rookie Christian Ponder.

The Vikings were an aging team whose Super Bowl window had slammed shut. In 16 games, Frazier's squad could only manage three wins, the same number they had posted in six contests under Frazier the previous year. They tied the 1984 team for the most losses in franchise history (but the level of debacle did not resonate to the same degree).

The 2011 campaign began with a bang; Percy Harvin returned the season's opening kickoff for a 103-yard touchdown. However, the Vikings lost that game to the Chargers, 24-17. They also dropped the next three before beating the Cardinals, 34-10. After another loss—a 39-10 thrashing by the Bears—veteran quarterback Donovan McNabb was benched in favor of rookie Christian Ponder.

Ponder looked like a potential franchise signal caller in his second start, a 24-21 victory over the Panthers. He posted a 102.7 quarterback rating and directed scoring drives late in the third and fourth quarters to overcome the Panthers' lead. However, a six-game losing streak followed.

Backup quarterback Joe Webb set a Vikings rushing record for the position with 109 yards in a loss to Detroit. Adrian Peterson suffered a significant knee injury late in the season that many feared would jeopardize his career.

Incredibly, on a team that rarely held the lead—so opponents did not need to pass as much—Jared Allen posted 22 sacks, which nearly broke Michael Strahan's NFL record (22.5) for a single season. Allen's prolific year earned him All-Pro honors.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Jared Allen (DE)
- Chad Greenway (LB)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ @ San Diego Chargers	17-24	0-1
⚡ Tampa Bay Buccaneers	20-24	0-2
⚡ Detroit Lions (OT)	23-26	0-3
⚡ @ Kansas City Chiefs	17-22	0-4
⚡ Arizona Cardinals	34-10	1-4
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	10-39	1-5
⚡ Green Bay Packers	27-33	1-6
⚡ @ Carolina Panthers	24-21	2-6
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers	7-45	2-7
⚡ Oakland Raiders	21-27	2-8
⚡ @ Atlanta Falcons	14-24	2-9
⚡ Denver Broncos	32-35	2-10
⚡ @ Detroit Lions	28-34	2-11
⚡ New Orleans Saints	20-42	2-12
⚡ @ Washington Redskins	33-26	3-12
⚡ Chicago Bears	13-17	3-13

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	1,853	Christian Ponder
Rushing Yards	970	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	967	Percy Harvin
Receptions	87	Percy Harvin
Interceptions	2	Jamarca Sanford
Sacks	22	Jared Allen
Points	104	Ryan Longwell

Key Additions:

Kyle Rudolph (draft)



Minnesota picked Kyle Rudolph in the second round of the 2011 draft.

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Christian Ponder	QB
Adrian Peterson	RB
Michael Jenkins	WR
Percy Harvin	WR
Visanthe Shiancoe	TE
Jim Kleinsasser	TE
Charlie Johnson	LT
Steve Hutchinson	LG
John Sullivan	C
Anthony Herrera	RG
Phil Loadholt	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Jared Allen	DE
Kevin Williams	DT
Remi Ayodele	DT
Brian Robison	DE
Erin Henderson	LB
E.J. Henderson	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Asher Allen	CB
Cedric Griffin	CB
Jamarca Sanford	SS
Husain Abdullah	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Ryan Longwell	K
Lorenzo Booker	KR
Chris Kluwe	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

Special Teams

During the Bud Grant era, one of the things that made the Vikings stand out was their tremendous special teams play. In the 1970s, the Vikings' penchant for kick-blocking contributed to their success. Matt Blair, Carl Eller, and Alan Page were the most likely to block a kick or punt, but perhaps the most famous block occurred in the 1976 NFC Championship, when Nate Allen blocked a field goal and Bobby Bryant returned it 90 yards for a score. The play helped put the team into another Super Bowl.

The Purple also enjoyed sustained success at the punter position with players like Bobby Walden, Greg Coleman, and Chris Kluwe.

In recent years, Minnesota's return men have shined. Marcus Sherels is the best punt returner in franchise history with five touchdowns. Cordarrelle Patterson ranks among the best kick returners—not just in franchise history but in NFL annals. He has the second-best yards-per-return average (29.8) in the history of the league, trailing only hall-of-famer Gale Sayers.

Percy Harvin is tied with Patterson with five total kickoffs returned for touchdowns, the most in franchise history. Harvin ranks tenth in NFL history in yards per return (27.2).





10-6 Second Place

The 2012 season represented one of the most pleasant surprises in team history. Worried about Adrian Peterson's 2011 injury was put to rest early, and he went on one of the most remarkable "runs" in NFL history. Playing on a reconstructed knee, he came within nine yards of breaking Eric Dickerson's single-season rushing record. Peterson finished with 2,097 yards. He carried home honors for NFL Most Valuable Player, NFL Offensive Player of the Year, and NFL Comeback Player of the Year.

The playoffs seemed like a long shot, but Peterson put the team on his back and carried them down the home stretch. He rushed for 154 yards and two touchdowns as the Vikings downed the Bears, 21-14. He steamrolled the Rams with 212 yards; Blair Walsh kicked five field goals, three of which were 50 yards or longer, as the Vikings beat Saint Louis, 36-22. The Texans held Peterson to a mortal 86 yards, but Walsh connected on three field goals, including a franchise-record-tying 56-yarder. Minnesota defeated Houston, 23-6. In the regular-season finale against Green Bay, Peterson smashed his way to 199 yards, including a 26-yard run with 24 seconds remaining to set up the game-winning kick. The Vikings won in dramatic fashion, 37-34.

Four straight wins earned the team a Wild Card berth. For the second time in history, the Vikings and Packers squared off in a playoff game. Joe Webb started at quarterback for the injured Christian Ponder. The offense sputtered, and the Vikings fell, 24-10.

Walsh—a rookie—set an NFL record by connecting on 10 field goals longer than 50 yards. Peterson and Walsh were named All-Pros, along with center John Sullivan.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Jared Allen (DE)
- Jerome Felton (FB)
- Chad Greenway (LB)
- Matt Kalil (T)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Kyle Rudolph (TE)
- Blair Walsh (K)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W Jacksonville Jaguars (OT)	26-23	1-0
L @ Indianapolis Colts	20-23	1-1
W San Francisco 49ers	24-13	2-1
W @ Detroit Lions	20-13	3-1
W Tennessee Titans	30-7	4-1
L @ Washington	26-38	4-2
W Arizona Cardinals	21-14	5-2
L Tampa Bay Buccaneers	17-36	5-3
L @ Seattle Seahawks	20-30	5-4
W Detroit Lions	34-24	6-4
L @ Chicago Bears	10-28	6-5
L @ Green Bay Packers	14-23	6-6
W Chicago Bears	21-14	7-6
W @ St. Louis Rams	36-22	8-6
W @ Houston Texans	23-6	9-6
W Green Bay Packers	37-34	10-6
L @ Green Bay Packers	10-24	0-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	2,935	Christian Ponder
Rushing Yards	2,097	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	677	Percy Harvin
Receptions	62	Percy Harvin
Interceptions	3	Smith/Winfield
Sacks	12	Jared Allen
Points	141	Blair Walsh

Key Additions:

Harrison Smith (draft)



Adrian Peterson came just nine yards short of the NFL single-season rushing record.

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Christian Ponder	QB
Adrian Peterson	RB
Jerome Felton	RB
Percy Harvin	WR
Michael Jenkins	WR
Kyle Rudolph	TE
Matt Kalil	LT
Charlie Johnson	LG
John Sullivan	C
Brandon Fusco	RG
Phil Loadholt	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Jared Allen	DE
Kevin Williams	DT
Letroy Guion	DT
Brian Robison	DE
Jasper Brinkley	LB
Erin Henderson	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Antoine Winfield	CB
Chris Cook	CB
Jamarca Sanford	SS
Harrison Smith	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Blair Walsh	K
Percy Harvin	KR
Chris Kluwe	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

5-10-1
Fourth Place

Vikings fans assumed that the team would build upon their 2012 success. Instead, what they got was a free fall. The Vikings began 0-3 and dropped to 1-7 at the midway point. The lone win came against the Steelers in a game played in London.

The second half of the campaign went a little better; the Vikings finished 4-3-1. Overall, the season proved to be a bust, as the defense ranked last in the league in points against and second to last in yards against.

The most noteworthy contest of the season came in the 11th game, at Green Bay. The Vikings led the Packers, 23-7, in the fourth quarter but surrendered 16 points to a team playing without starting quarterback Aaron Rodgers. In overtime, Green Bay kicked a field goal on their first possession, but new overtime rules (implemented in part due to the Vikings' loss to the Saints in the 2009 NFC Championship) allowed the Vikings a chance to tie or win. The Vikings added a field goal to knot the score at 26, which was how the game ended. The Vikings and Packers became the only teams since overtime was added in 1974 to tie each other twice (10-10 in 1978), and the Vikings became the first team in NFL history to not lose a game after surrendering points in overtime.

The 2013 season also produced one of the wildest games in franchise history. Playing in the snow, on the road in Baltimore, the Vikings trailed the Ravens, 7-6, at the start of the fourth quarter. From there, the teams combined for an additional 42 points (the most points in any quarter in franchise history), including 36 of them in the final 2:05. Of the five touchdowns in that span, there was a 41-yard run, a 77-yard kickoff return, and a 79-yard screen pass for a touchdown. The Ravens won on a nine-yard pass with four seconds to play.

Following the season, the Vikings parted ways with head coach Leslie Frazier. He finished in Minnesota with a .398 winning percentage.

Rookie wide receiver Cordarrelle Patterson flashed plenty of potential and earned All-Pro honors as a kick returner.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ @ Detroit Lions	24-34	0-1
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	30-31	0-2
⚡ Cleveland Browns	27-31	0-3
W Pittsburgh Steelers	34-27	1-3
⚡ Carolina Panthers	10-35	1-4
⚡ @ New York Giants	7-23	1-5
⚡ Green Bay Packers	31-44	1-6
⚡ @ Dallas Cowboys	23-27	1-7
W Washington	34-27	2-7
⚡ @ Seattle Seahawks	20-41	2-8
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers (OT)	26-26	2-8-1
W Chicago Bears (OT)	23-20	3-8-1
⚡ @ Baltimore Ravens	26-29	3-9-1
W Philadelphia Eagles	48-30	4-9-1
⚡ @ Cincinnati Bengals	14-42	4-10-1
W Detroit Lions	14-13	5-10-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	1,807	Matt Cassel
Rushing Yards	1,266	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	804	Greg Jennings
Receptions	68	Greg Jennings
Interceptions	3	Chad Greenway
Sacks	11.5	Jared Allen
Points	121	Blair Walsh

Key Additions:

Xavier Rhodes (draft)

Starting Lineup

Jerome Simpson  Josh Robinson 

Matt Kalil  Jared Allen 

Charlie Johnson  Kevin Williams 

John Sullivan  Letroy Guion 

Brandon Fusco  Brian Robison 

Phil Loadholt  Kyle Rudolph 

Greg Jennings  Chris Cook 

Marvin Mitchell 

Erin Henderson 

Chad Greenway 

Jamarca Sanford 

Andrew Sendejo 

K Blair Walsh

KR Jeff Locke

P Cordarrelle Patterson

PR Marcus Sherels

Adrian Peterson 

Christian Ponder 

Jerome Felton 

Pro Bowl Selections

- Cordarrelle Patterson (KR)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)



The Vikings offense averaged 24.4 points per game in 2013.





Quarterback Carousel

Matt Cassel was one of more than 25 quarterbacks to start a game for the Vikings between 1988 and 2018. From the time Tommy Kramer undisputedly held the spot in the early to mid-1980s, the Vikings struggled to find lasting consistency at the most important position in football.

Whether due to injuries, age, inefficient play, or a combination of these factors, more than two dozen signal callers saw their careers with the team derailed. Even when the quest for a field general appeared complete—with the emergence of players like Daunte Culpepper and Teddy Bridgewater—devastating injuries forced the Vikings to seek alternative plans. Talented stop-gap veterans such as Warren Moon, Randall Cunningham, and Brett Favre did not provide long-term solutions, nor did high draft picks like Tarvaris Jackson and Christian Ponder.

In 2020, Kirk Cousins became the team's first quarterback since Culpepper to start at least 14 games in three straight seasons.

Mike Zimmer became the Vikings' ninth head coach after Leslie Frazier's dismissal, and the team began playing their home games at the University of Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium as they awaited completion of U.S. Bank Stadium.

Zimmer began the rebuilding process by adding physical defensive players such as Anthony Barr through the draft and Linval Joseph via free agency. On the offensive side, Teddy Bridgewater joined Tommy Kramer, Daunte Culpepper, and Christian Ponder as the only quarterbacks drafted by the franchise in the first round. Bridgewater became the starter after Matt Cassel was injured in a Week 3 loss to the Saints.

Later in the season, the Vikings snapped long losing streaks against two franchises. A victory over the Buccaneers in overtime, on Barr's fumble-recovery return for a touchdown, marked Minnesota's first win versus Tampa Bay in 13 years. The Vikings also defeated the Jets in an overtime thriller, won on Jarius Wright's 87-yard touchdown reception. That victory broke a 39-year drought.

The second-to-last game of the season saw a wild fourth quarter finish. When it began, the Vikings led the Dolphins, 17-14. The teams traded scores, back and forth, until the Dolphins tied the game, 35-35, with just over a minute to play. The Vikings offense sputtered and was forced to punt. But the Dolphins blocked Jeff Locke's punt for a safety, which proved to be the winning score.

The Vikings played respectable football throughout 2014, even after losing All-Pro Adrian Peterson for 15 games due to a suspension under the NFL's personal-conduct policy. With coaching and personnel changes, the franchise laid the groundwork for greater success in the future.

Pro Bowl Selections

- None

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W @ St. Louis Rams	34-6	1-0
L New England Patriots	7-30	1-1
L @ New Orleans Saints	9-20	1-2
W Atlanta Falcons	41-28	2-2
L @ Green Bay Packers	10-42	2-3
L Detroit Lions	3-17	2-4
L @ Buffalo Bills	16-17	2-5
W @ Tampa Bay (OT)	19-13	3-5
W Washington	29-26	4-5
L @ Chicago Bears	13-21	4-6
L Green Bay Packers	21-24	4-7
W Carolina Panthers	31-13	5-7
W New York Jets (OT)	30-24	6-7
L @ Detroit Lions	14-16	6-8
L @ Miami Dolphins	35-37	6-9
W Chicago Bears	13-9	7-9

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	2,919	Teddy Bridgewater
Rushing Yards	570	Matt Asiata
Receiving Yards	742	Greg Jennings
Receptions	59	Greg Jennings
Interceptions	5	Harrison Smith
Sacks	12	Everson Griffen
Points	107	Blair Walsh

Key Additions:

Anthony Barr (draft)

Adam Thielen (free agent)

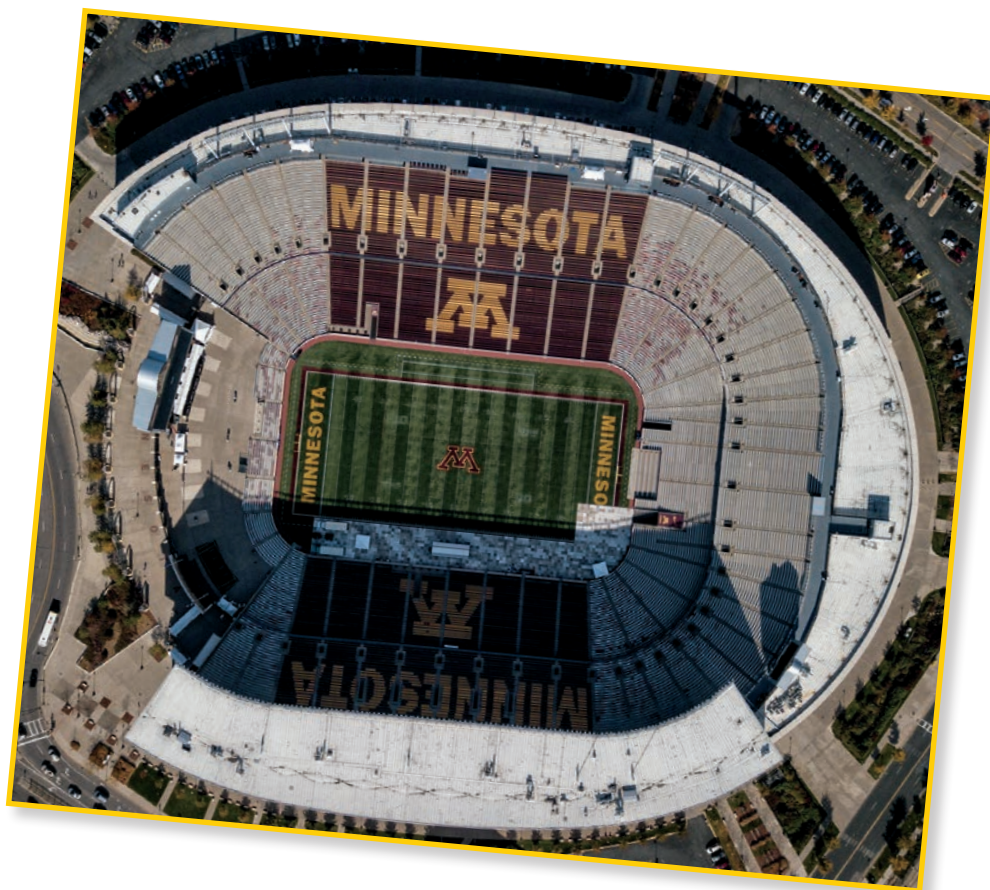
Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Christian Ponder	QB
Matt Asiata	RB
Cordarrelle Patterson	WR
Greg Jennings	WR
Kyle Rudolph	TE
Rhett Ellison	TE
Matt Kalil	LT
Charlie Johnson	LG
John Sullivan	C
Joe Berger	RG
Phil Loadholt	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Everson Griffen	DE
Sharif Floyd	DT
Linval Joseph	DT
Brian Robison	DE
Anthony Barr	LB
Jasper Brinkley	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Captain Munnerlyn	CB
Xavier Rhodes	CB
Robert Blanton	SS
Harrison Smith	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Blair Walsh	K
Cordarrelle Patterson	KR
Jeff Locke	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

Carl Eller commented on his experiences playing in winter conditions: "It was all Bud [Grant]'s idea. He said, 'You're going to be cold, so you've just got to play through it and not think about it! Physically, we were just as cold as [our opponents]. Psychologically, we'd rather not dwell on that. We had to win the game.'"



The Vikings called TCF Bank Stadium home in 2014 and 2015.

The Vikings took a sizable and somewhat unexpected leap forward in 2015, becoming NFC North champions in Mike Zimmer's second year as head coach.

After a sluggish start, the team enjoyed a five-game winning streak and then closed out the year with three wins in a row, including a division-clinching 20-13 victory in the season's final game at Green Bay.

However, the Vikings' season ended with a devastating loss to Seattle in the postseason. In brutal conditions, with wind chills that plunged to -25, the Vikings did battle. After three quarters, they held a 9-0 advantage. Seattle scored a touchdown early in the fourth, and they added a field goal following a fumble by Adrian Peterson. Just like that, midway through the fourth quarter, in a game the Vikings had dominated, they trailed, 10-9.

The teams traded punts a couple of times, and the Vikings took possession at their own 39-yard line with 1:42 to go. The offense put together an impressive drive, moving all the way to the nine-yard line with just 26 seconds left. Blair Walsh trotted onto the field, having connected on three kicks—two of which exceeded 40 yards. But Walsh missed the 27-yarder wide left, and the Vikings season ended with abruptness.

Under the guidance of Zimmer, a defensive wizard, Minnesota's remade defense (which ranked last in scoring in 2013) jumped to fifth best.

The Vikings drafted several players who made an early impact, including cornerback Trae Waynes in the first round, linebacker Eric Kendricks in the second, defensive end Danielle Hunter in the third, and wide receiver Stefon Diggs in the fifth.

Cordarrelle Patterson and Adrian Peterson made the All-Pro squad.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Anthony Barr (LB)
- Teddy Bridgewater (QB)
- Everson Griffen (DE)
- Adrian Peterson (RB)
- Harrison Smith (S)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
⚡ @ San Francisco 49ers	3-20	0-1
⚡ Detroit Lions	26-16	1-1
⚡ San Diego Chargers	31-14	2-1
⚡ @ Denver Broncos	20-23	2-2
⚡ Kansas City Chiefs	16-10	3-2
⚡ @ Detroit Lions	28-19	4-2
⚡ @ Chicago Bears	23-20	5-2
⚡ St. Louis Rams (OT)	21-18	6-2
⚡ @ Oakland Raiders	30-14	7-2
⚡ Green Bay Packers	13-30	7-3
⚡ @ Atlanta Falcons	20-10	8-3
⚡ Seattle Seahawks	7-38	8-4
⚡ @ Arizona Cardinals	20-23	8-5
⚡ Chicago Bears	38-17	9-5
⚡ New York Giants	49-17	10-5
⚡ @ Green Bay Packers	20-13	11-5
⚡ Seattle Seahawks	9-10	0-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	3,231	Teddy Bridgewater
Rushing Yards	1,485	Adrian Peterson
Receiving Yards	720	Stefon Diggs
Receptions	52	Stefon Diggs
Interceptions	3	Terence Newman
Sacks	10.5	Everson Griffen
Points	135	Blair Walsh

Key Additions:

Stefon Diggs (draft)
Danielle Hunter (draft)
Eric Kendricks (draft)

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Teddy Bridgewater	QB
Adrian Peterson	RB
Mike Wallace	WR
Stefon Diggs	WR
Kyle Rudolph	TE
Rhett Ellison	TE
Matt Kalil	LT
Brandon Fusco	LG
Joe Berger	C
Mike Harris	RG
T.J. Clemmings	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Everson Griffen	DE
Sharif Floyd	DT
Linval Joseph	DT
Brian Robison	DE
Anthony Barr	LB
Eric Kendricks	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Terence Newman	CB
Xavier Rhodes	CB
Andrew Sendejo	SS
Harrison Smith	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Blair Walsh	K
Cordarrelle Patterson	KR
Jeff Locke	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

"I want to fit our scheme to the players to the best of their abilities. Like I said before, it really does not matter if it is a three-four or a four-three [defense], and as far as my philosophy, I want to stop the run and I want to hit the quarterback."

—Mike Zimmer, 2014



Xavier Rhodes developed into one of the league's best cornerbacks.





Rushing the Passer

Minnesota has been blessed with outstanding pass rushers over the years. Few franchises can boast as many premier defensive linemen as the Vikings. Chris Doleman, Carl Eller, Alan Page, and John Randle are all hall-of-famers, and strong cases can be made for the inductions of Jared Allen, Jim Marshall, and Kevin Williams joining them inside those hallowed walls.

Eller holds the Vikings' standard for career sacks with 130, while Allen claims the single-season mark with 22. Randle led the team in sacks nine times, the most ever by a Viking.

Allen, Doleman, Eller, and Marshall attacked opposing quarterbacks from the defensive end position. Page, Randle, and Williams pursued signal callers from the interior defensive-tackle spots.

Keith Millard also terrorized opponents from the defensive tackle position. He posted 18 sacks in 1989—the year before a serious knee injury derailed his career. Doug Martin led the NFL in sacks in 1982.

In recent years, Everson Griffen and Danielle Hunter carried on the proud tradition as purple marauders, creating havoc for offenses. Hunter became the youngest player in NFL history to post 50 career sacks.

Before the 2016 season began, the Vikings suffered an agonizing loss. Quarterback Teddy Bridgewater sustained a devastating knee injury in practice.

A few days later, the Vikings—who many considered to be Super Bowl contenders—traded for quarterback Sam Bradford in hopes of salvaging their season. However, the injuries did not end with Bridgewater. Adrian Peterson and Matt Kalil both saw their seasons derailed by injuries in a Week 2 win against the Packers—the first game at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Several more offensive linemen went down, as well. Nevertheless, the Vikings surged to a 5–0 record with a takeaway-hungry defense.

Then, beginning with a loss to Philadelphia, the Vikings went into a tailspin, losing four in a row.

The team limped the rest of the way, seldom recapturing their stellar play from earlier. They dropped eight of their final 11 games and were out of the playoffs, despite the torrid start.

Bradford set an NFL record for completion percentage in a season, at 71.6. Xavier Rhodes set the Vikings' record for the longest interception return, with a 100-yarder in a victory against the Cardinals.

Cordarrelle Patterson was an All-Pro kick returner. Pro Bowlers also included Rhodes, Anthony Barr, Everson Griffen, Linval Joseph, and Harrison Smith.

After the season, Kalil, Patterson, and Peterson left as free agents, and Chad Greenway retired.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Anthony Barr (LB)
- Everson Griffen (DE)
- Linval Joseph (DT)
- Cordarrelle Patterson (KR)
- Xavier Rhodes (CB)
- Harrison Smith (S)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W @ Tennessee Titans	25–16	1–0
W Green Bay Packers	17–14	2–0
W @ Carolina Panthers	22–10	3–0
W New York Giants	24–10	4–0
W Houston Texans	31–13	5–0
L @ Philadelphia Eagles	10–21	5–1
L @ Chicago Bears	10–20	5–2
L Detroit Lions (OT)	16–22	5–3
L @ Washington	20–26	5–4
W Arizona Cardinals	30–24	6–4
L @ Detroit Lions	13–16	6–5
L Dallas Cowboys	15–17	6–6
W @ Jacksonville Jaguars	25–16	7–6
L Indianapolis Colts	6–34	7–7
L @ Green Bay Packers	25–38	7–8
W Chicago Bears	38–10	8–8

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	3,877	Sam Bradford
Rushing Yards	539	Jerick McKinnon
Receiving Yards	967	Adam Thielen
Receptions	84	Stefon Diggs
Interceptions	5	Xavier Rhodes
Sacks	12.5	Danielle Hunter
Points	56	Kai Forbath

Key Additions:

N/A

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Sam Bradford	QB
Jerick McKinnon	RB
Adam Thielen	WR
Cordarrelle Patterson	WR
Stefon Diggs	WR
Kyle Rudolph	TE
T.J. Clemmings	LT
Alex Boone	LG
Joe Berger	C
Brandon Fusco	RG
Jeremiah Sirles	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Everson Griffen	DE
Shamar Stephen	DT
Linval Joseph	DT
Brian Robison	DE
Anthony Barr	LB
Eric Kendricks	LB
Chad Greenway	LB
Terence Newman	CB
Xavier Rhodes	CB
Andrew Sendejo	SS
Harrison Smith	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Kai Forbath	K
Cordarrelle Patterson	KR
Jeff Locke	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

The Vikings moved into their beautiful new home, U.S. Bank Stadium, in 2016.



The 2017 season felt different, until it didn't. The Vikings were not a dominating force, although their defense finished first in yards, points, and third-down conversions allowed. Yet it somehow seemed as if this might finally be the year; it did not seem too good to be true.

The season began with one of Sam Bradford's finest performances as a professional quarterback in a convincing win over the Saints. The following week, a knee flare-up caused him to be a game-time scratch. The injury lingered; Bradford was not able to play effectively for the rest of the year.

From that point on, Case Keenum played in every game—and he played like one of the top quarterbacks in the NFL. His rags-to-riches ascent provided one of the best stories of the football season.

As the Vikings entered the playoffs, they seemed like a pretty good bet to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl. After racing to a 17-0 lead over the Saints in the divisional round, the Vikings found themselves trailing, 24-23, with 10 seconds to play. And then the Minneapolis Miracle happened. (See page 162.) Stefon Diggs caught Keenum's pass and scampered 61 yards to the end zone. The Vikings had finally won a big game in which they were on the winning side of the heartbreak.

The NFC Championship was a different story. After letting Minnesota march down the field to grab a 7-0 lead, Philadelphia (led by their own backup quarterback, Nick Foles) outscored the Vikings 38-0 the rest of the way. It was another crushing end to a promising season.

Everson Griffen, Xavier Rhodes and Harrison Smith were named All-Pro.

Pro Bowl Selections

- Anthony Barr (LB)
- Kyle Rudolph (TE)
- Everson Griffen (DE)
- Harrison Smith (S)
- Linval Joseph (DT)
- Adam Thielen (WR)
- Xavier Rhodes (CB)

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W New Orleans Saints	29-19	1-0
L @ Pittsburgh Steelers	9-26	1-1
W Tampa Bay Buccaneers	34-17	2-1
L Detroit Lions	7-14	2-2
W @ Chicago Bears	20-17	3-2
W Green Bay Packers	23-10	4-2
W Baltimore Ravens	24-16	5-2
W Cleveland Browns (@ London)	33-16	6-2
W @ Washington	38-30	7-2
W St. Louis Rams	24-7	8-2
W @ Detroit Lions	30-23	9-2
W @ Atlanta Falcons	14-9	10-2
L @ Carolina Panthers	24-31	10-3
W Cincinnati Bengals	34-7	11-3
W @ Green Bay Packers	16-0	12-3
W Chicago Bears	23-10	13-3
W New Orleans Saints	29-24	1-0
L @ Philadelphia Eagles	7-38	1-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	3,547	Case Keenum
Rushing Yards	842	Latavius Murray
Receiving Yards	1,276	Adam Thielen
Receptions	91	Adam Thielen
Interceptions	5	Harrison Smith
Sacks	13	Everson Griffen
Points	130	Kai Forbath

Key Additions:

Dalvin Cook (draft)

Starting Lineup

OFFENSE	POSITION
Case Keenum	QB
Lataavius Murray	RB
Adam Thielen	WR
Laquon Treadwell	WR
Stefon Diggs	WR
Kyle Rudolph	TE
Riley Reiff	LT
Nick Easton	LG
Pat Elflein	C
Joe Berger	RG
Mike Remmers	RT

DEFENSE	POSITION
Everson Griffen	DE
Tom Johnson	DT
Linval Joseph	DT
Danielle Hunter	DE
Anthony Barr	LB
Eric Kendricks	LB
Trae Waynes	CB
Xavier Rhodes	CB
Terence Newman	CB
Andrew Sendejo	SS
Harrison Smith	FS

SPECIAL TEAMS	POSITION
Kai Forbath	K
Jerick McKinnon	KR
Ryan Quigley	P
Marcus Sherels	PR

Minnesota's offense was powered by Stefon Diggs, Case Keenum, and Adam Thielen.



8-7-1 Second Place

The 2018 season began with very high expectations but ended with disappointment. The Vikings proved once again that pursuing the final “missing piece” of a championship-ready team is rarely as simple as it sounds.

The organization spent handsomely on free-agent quarterback Kirk Cousins, only to see subpar offensive line play—and overall inconsistency—derail what many believed would be a team that contended for the Super Bowl.

In the season’s second game, the Vikings posted their third tie against the Packers (the most that two opponents have tied each other since the NFL changed its overtime rules in 1974). Three missed field goals in the game—including two misses in overtime—led to the release of rookie kicker Daniel Carlson.

The heavily-favored Vikings suffered a disastrous loss to the Bills at home. The next week, they played in Los Angeles on a Thursday night matchup against the Rams. Quarterback Jared Goff scorched the Vikings for 465 yards passing and five touchdowns in a thrilling 38–31 victory over Minnesota.

A win against the Eagles, in a rematch of the previous season’s NFC Championship, kicked off a three-game winning streak to steady the ship.

The Vikings set a team record by sacking Detroit’s quarterback Matthew Stafford 10 times in their 24–9 mauling of the Lions.

Following a 24–17 win against the Packers, the Vikings fell to the Patriots and Seahawks—and scored a combined 17 points in the two games. This prompted the firing of offensive coordinator John DeFilippo.

The next week, the Vikings offense raced to 41 points and 418 total yards, with 220 of those coming on the ground. However, the Vikings continued their inconsistent play down the stretch and stumbled against the Bears, 24–10, in the season finale—a loss that kept the Purple out of the playoffs.

Cousins passed for 4,298 yards, the second-best mark in the franchise’s history. Adam Thielen’s 113 catches were the third-most in team history. Danielle Hunter was named All-Pro.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W San Francisco 49ers	24–16	1–0
T @ Green Bay Packers (OT)	29–29	1–0–1
L Buffalo Bills	6–27	1–1–1
L @ Los Angeles Rams	31–38	1–2–1
W @ Philadelphia Eagles	23–21	2–2–1
W Arizona Cardinals	27–17	3–2–1
W @ New York Jets	37–17	4–2–1
L New Orleans Saints	20–30	4–3–1
W Detroit Lions	24–9	5–3–1
L @ Chicago Bears	20–25	5–4–1
W Green Bay Packers	24–17	6–4–1
L @ New England Patriots	10–24	6–5–1
L @ Seattle Seahawks	7–21	6–6–1
W Miami Dolphins	41–17	7–6–1
W @ Detroit Lions	27–9	8–6–1
L Chicago Bears	10–24	8–7–1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	4,298	Kirk Cousins
Rushing Yards	615	Dalvin Cook
Receiving Yards	1,373	Adam Thielen
Receptions	113	Adam Thielen
Interceptions	3	Smith/Harris
Sacks	14.5	Danielle Hunter
Points	93	Dan Bailey

Key Additions:

Kirk Cousins (free agent)
Brian O’Neill (draft)


Starting Lineup

Adam Thielen  Trae Waynes 

Laquon Treadwell 

Riley Reiff  Everson Griffen 

Dalvin Cook 

Tom Compton 

 Sheldon Richardson  Anthony Barr

Kirk Cousins 

Pat Elflein 

 Anthony Harris

Mike Remmers 

 Linval Joseph

 Eric Kendricks

Brian O'Neill 

 Danielle Hunter

 Harrison Smith

Kyle Rudolph 

 Ben Gedeon

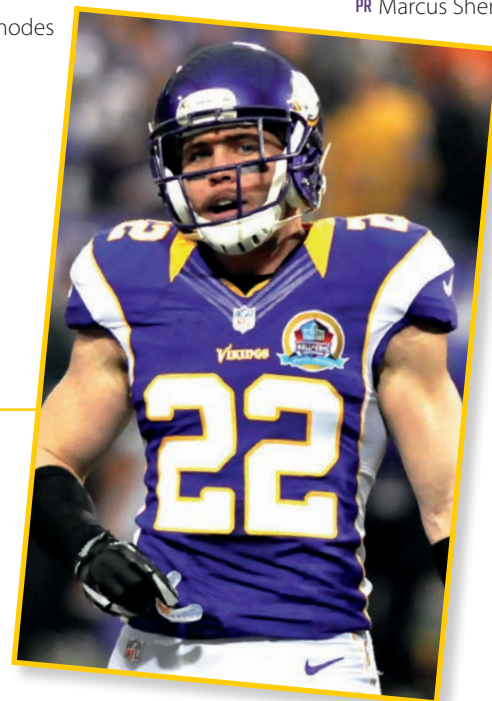
Stefon Diggs  Xavier Rhodes 

K Dan Bailey
KR Ameer Abdullah
P Matt Wile
PR Marcus Sherels

Pro Bowl Selections

- Anthony Barr (LB)
- Danielle Hunter (DE)
- Harrison Smith (S)
- Adam Thielen (WR)

Harrison Smith was named to the Pro Bowl in 2015–2019.



10-6 Second Place

The 2019 season got off to a mediocre start. After four games, the Vikings sat with wins against the Falcons and Raiders and ugly losses versus the Packers and Bears.

Minnesota then went on a four-game winning streak, raising their record to 6-2. They played .500 football for the remainder of the season and clinched a playoff berth.

In Week 11, the Vikings faced a Denver team that was 3-6. The Broncos dominated the first half on both sides of the ball and stormed to a 20-0 lead. But Minnesota controlled the second half, scoring touchdowns on all four of their possessions. The game came down to the final seconds. Denver, trailing 27-23, drove to the Vikings' four-yard line. But Minnesota's defense forced an incomplection as time expired, and the Vikings held on for the win.

When the regular season came to its conclusion, the 13-3 Saints—a team many Vikings fans wanted to avoid—became Minnesota's opponent in the Wild Card round.

After the Minneapolis Miracle two years earlier, most experts figured the revenge-seeking Saints would steamroll the Purple. However, the Vikings jumped to a 20-10 advantage. Of course, no fan thought the lead was safe. The Saints tied the score on a 49-yard field goal near the end of regulation. After the Vikings took possession of the ball in overtime, Cousins dropped a beautiful 43-yard pass to Adam Thielen that put the offense at the four-yard line. Two runs netted the Vikings minus two yards. On third down, Cousins hit Kyle Rudolph for a game-winning score. Minnesota ended the Saints' season for the second time in three years.

The following week in San Francisco, the 49ers manhandled the Vikings on both sides of the line of scrimmage and posted a 27-10 win.

Pro Bowlers for Minnesota included Dalvin Cook, Kirk Cousins, Everson Griffen, Danielle Hunter, Eric Kendricks, Xavier Rhodes, and Harrison Smith. Kendricks also received an All-Pro nod.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
W Atlanta Falcons	28-12	1-0
L @ Green Bay Packers	16-21	1-1
W Oakland Raiders	34-14	2-1
L @ Chicago Bears	6-16	2-2
W @ New York Giants	28-10	3-2
W Philadelphia Eagles	38-20	4-2
W @ Detroit Lions	42-30	5-2
W Washington	19-9	6-2
L @ Kansas City Chiefs	23-26	6-3
W @ Dallas Cowboys	28-24	7-3
W Denver Broncos	27-23	8-3
L @ Seattle Seahawks	30-37	8-4
W Detroit Lions	20-7	9-4
W @ Los Angeles Chargers	39-10	10-4
L Green Bay Packers	10-23	10-5
L Chicago Bears	19-21	10-6
W @ New Orleans Saints (OT)	26-20	1-0
L @ San Francisco 49ers	10-27	1-1

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	3,603	Kirk Cousins
Rushing Yards	1,135	Dalvin Cook
Receiving Yards	1,130	Stefon Diggs
Receptions	63	Stefon Diggs
Interceptions	6	Anthony Harris
Sacks	14.5	Danielle Hunter
Points	121	Dan Bailey

Key Additions:

Garrett Bradbury (draft)
Irv Smith, Jr. (draft)

Starting Lineup

Adam Thielen  Trae Waynes 

Dalvin Cook 

Riley Reiff  Everson Griffen 


Pat Elflein 

 Shamar Stephen

 Anthony Barr

 Harrison Smith

Kirk Cousins 

Garrett Bradbury 


 Linval Joseph

 Eric Kendricks

 Anthony Harris

C.J. Ham 

Josh Kline 

 Danielle Hunter

 Ben Gedeon

Brian O'Neill 

 Danielle Hunter

Kyle Rudolph 

K Dan Bailey
KR Ameer Abdullah
P Britton Colquitt
PR Mike Hughes

Stefon Diggs  Xavier Rhodes 

Pro Bowl Selections

- Dalvin Cook (RB)
- Kirk Cousins (QB)
- Everson Griffen (DE)
- C.J. Ham (RB)
- Danielle Hunter (DE)
- Eric Kendricks (LB)
- Xavier Rhodes (CB)
- Harrison Smith (S)

Kirk Cousins had a 107.4 quarterback rating in 2019.



7-9 Third Place

To paraphrase legendary head coach Bill Parcells, the Vikings' record was who they were. Some fans might look at the 7-9 record and see one-point losses to playoff teams Tennessee and Seattle, as well as a three-point loss to the Cowboys, and think the Vikings could have been 10-6. Other fans might look at the shaky wins against Carolina, Jacksonville, and Detroit and think the team could have been 4-12.

Minnesota experienced a significant personnel overhaul, cutting ties with a handful of defensive veterans and losing others for substantial portions of the season to injury.

The year's highlight was a 28-22 victory over Green Bay at Lambeau Field, which came when the Vikings were just 1-5. Dalvin Cook scored a franchise-record-tying four touchdowns in the game. The win spawned a hot streak, and the Vikings got to 6-6 with a victory over Jacksonville. But the team finished the season with three losses in four games.

The offense proved to be a revelation, with Dalvin Cook solidifying his status as one of the best runners in the game. He finished the season with 1,557 rushing yards (third most in franchise history) and 17 total touchdowns. He enjoyed a 206-yard rushing effort against Detroit, with 46 yards receiving that made it the fourth biggest yardage day in Vikings history.

Quarterback Kirk Cousins tossed the second-most touchdowns (35) in franchise history. His 4,265 passing yards ranked third behind his 2018 campaign and Daunte Culpepper's 2004 total.

Rookie defensive back Cameron Dantzler experienced a few growing pains but showed great promise in an overhauled secondary. The same could be said for defensive lineman D.J. Wonnum. Second-round pick Ezra Cleveland also flashed potential, starting nine games on the offensive line. But no newcomer did more than first-rounder Justin Jefferson, who grabbed 88 receptions for a (post-merger) rookie-record 1,400 yards.

Cook and Jefferson earned Pro Bowl honors. Cook was also All-Pro.

Schedule

OPPONENT	SCORE	RECORD
Green Bay Packers	34-43	0-1
@ Indianapolis Colts	11-28	0-2
Tennessee Titans	30-31	0-3
@ Houston Texans	31-23	1-3
@ Seattle Seahawks	26-27	1-4
Atlanta Falcons	23-40	1-5
@ Green Bay Packers	28-22	2-5
Detroit Lions	34-20	3-5
@ Chicago Bears	19-13	4-5
Dallas Cowboys	28-31	4-6
Carolina Panthers	28-27	5-6
Jacksonville Jaguars (OT)	27-24	6-6
@ Tampa Bay Buccaneers	14-26	6-7
Chicago Bears	27-33	6-8
@ New Orleans Saints	33-52	6-9
@ Detroit Lions	37-35	7-9

Season Leaders

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PLAYER
Passing Yards	4,265	Kirk Cousins
Rushing Yards	1,557	Dalvin Cook
Receiving Yards	1,400	Justin Jefferson
Receptions	88	Justin Jefferson
Interceptions	5	Harrison Smith
Sacks	5	Yannick Ngakoue
Points	108	Dalvin Cook

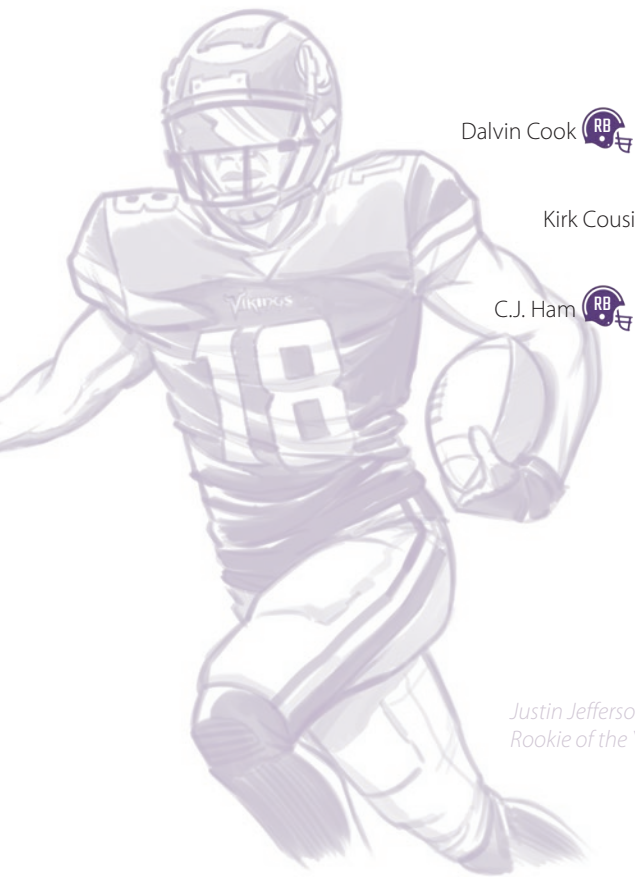
Key Additions:

Ezra Cleveland (draft)

Cameron Dantzler (draft)

Justin Jefferson (draft)

Starting Lineup



Dalvin Cook 

Kirk Cousins 

C.J. Ham 

Adam Thielen 

 Cameron Dantzler

Riley Reiff 


 Yannick Ngakoue

Dakota Dozier 

 Shamar Stephen

 Troy Dye

 Harrison Smith

Garrett Bradbury 

 Eric Kendricks


 Anthony Harris

Ezra Cleveland 

 Jaleel Johnson

 Eric Wilson

Brian O'Neill 

 Ifeadi Odenigbo

Kyle Rudolph 

K Dan Bailey
KR Ameer Abdullah
P Britton Colquitt
PR Chad Beebe

Justin Jefferson 

 Jeff Gladney

*Justin Jefferson finished second in
Rookie of the Year voting in 2020.*

Vikings Record

Most Consecutive 100-Yard Receiving Games:
Adam Thielen: 8 games (2018)

Pro Bowl Selections

- Dalvin Cook (RB)
- Justin Jefferson (WR)



All-2010s Offense

QUARTERBACK: **Kirk Cousins** (2018–2019). No Vikings quarterback achieved any sort of sustained success during the decade. In just two seasons, Cousins emerged as the best of a pack that included Teddy Bridgewater and Sam Bradford. Cousins passed for 7,901 yards and 56 touchdowns. He made the 2019 Pro Bowl.

RUNNING BACKS: **Adrian Peterson** (2010–2016) and **Dalvin Cook** (2017–2019). Peterson continued to dominate in the 2010s, racking up 7,263 rushing yards and 57 touchdowns. His accolades included four Pro Bowls, two All-Pro selections, one MVP, and a spot on the NFL All-Decade team. He led the team in rushing five times. Drafted to replace the irreplaceable Peterson, Cook did very well in his own right with 2,104 yards rushing, 17 touchdowns, one Pro Bowl, and the team lead in rushing twice.

WIDE RECEIVERS: **Adam Thielen** (2014–2019) and **Stefon Diggs** (2015–2019). Thielen grabbed 323 passes for 4,315 yards and scored 25 touchdowns. He appeared in two Pro Bowls, and he led the team in receptions twice and receiving yards three times. Pairing with Thielen as one of the NFL's top receiving duos, Diggs hauled in 365 balls, gaining 4,623 yards and scoring 30 touchdowns. He led the team in catches three times and in receiving yards twice. He scored the touchdown that became the Minneapolis Miracle.

TIGHT END: **Kyle Rudolph** (2011–2019). Rudolph tallied 425 receptions, 4,154 receiving yards, and 47 touchdowns. He also made two Pro Bowl appearances and earned MVP of the game once.

CENTER: **John Sullivan** (2010–2014). With 77 starts at center, Sullivan was the most prolific player at this position during the decade.

GUARDS: **Joe Berger** (2011–2017) and **Charlie Johnson** (2011–2014). Berger toggled back and forth between guard and center but made 34 starts at guard. Johnson also moved along the line, playing tackle initially before making 45 starts at the interior position.

TACKLES: **Phil Loadholt** (2010–2014) and **Matt Kalil** (2012–2016). Loadholt made 74 starts at right tackle before an injury brought his career to a premature end. Kalil earned Pro Bowl honors as a rookie and made 66 starts at left tackle.

KICKER: **Blair Walsh** (2012–2016). When Walsh was good, he was really good. Fans sometimes forget that Walsh was an All-Pro and Pro Bowler his rookie year, when he kicked 10 field goals of 50 yards or more. He scored 555 points while in purple during the 2010s.

KICK RETURNER: **Cordarrelle Patterson** (2013–2016). The greatest kick returner in franchise history, Patterson made the Pro Bowl twice, the All-Pro squad twice, averaged more than 30 yards per return, and scored five touchdowns.

—Data and statistics are for this decade only, unless otherwise noted.—

All-2010s Defense

DEFENSIVE ENDS: **Everson Griffen** (2010–2019) and **Danielle Hunter** (2015–2019). The Vikings have been home to outstanding defensive ends in every decade, and the 2010s were no exception. Griffen led the team in sacks three times, registered 74.5 sacks, and made four Pro Bowl squads with one All-Pro designation. Hunter earned two Pro Bowls and an All-Pro selection, while taking down the quarterback 54.5 times, forcing six fumbles, and scoring two touchdowns. He, too, led the team in sacks three times.

DEFENSIVE TACKLES: **Linval Joseph** (2014–2019) and **Tom Johnson** (2014–2018). Joseph earned Pro Bowl honors twice and ended the decade with 15 sacks, six forced fumbles, and two fumble recoveries, one of which he returned 64-yards for a touchdown. Johnson gets the nod over Shamar Stephen, although Stephen started 35 games to Johnson's 25. Johnson had better sack numbers, 20.5 to Stephen's two.

LINEBACKERS: **Eric Kendricks** (2015–2019), **Anthony Barr** (2014–2019), and **Chad Greenway** (2010–2016). Kendricks led the Vikings in tackles every season he played, while also contributing excellent pass defense. He made the Pro Bowl and All-Pro teams in 2019. Barr made 85 starts, earned four Pro Bowl nods, and recorded 15 sacks from his outside linebacker spot. Greenway earned Pro Bowl berths twice, made 97 starts, and sacked opposing quarterbacks 12.5 times.

CORNERBACKS: **Xavier Rhodes** (2013–2019) and **Trae Waynes** (2015–2019). Rhodes arrived as a first-round pick and became a full-time starter in his second season. He earned three Pro Bowls and an All-Pro designation. He led the team in picks once and made a total of 10

interceptions, while generally shadowing the other team's best receiver. Another first-rounder, Waynes started 53 games and grabbed seven picks.

SAFETIES: **Harrison Smith** (2012–2019) and **Andrew Sendejo** (2011–2019). One of the Vikings' best players of the decade, Smith garnered five Pro Bowl selections and an All-Pro season. He led or shared the lead in interceptions four times and picked off 23 passes during the decade. Sendejo holds off Anthony Harris, based on length of service. Sendejo started roughly twice as many games, 60 to 31. Sendejo had one fewer interception than Harris, eight to nine.

PUNTER: **Chris Kluwe** (2010–2012).

Although Jeff Locke punted for one more season, Kluwe averaged more than a yard per punt better, finishing the decade at 44.5 yards per boot.

PUNT RETURNER: **Marcus Sherels** (2010–2019). Sherels is the greatest at his position in franchise history. He finished the decade with a return average of 10.5 yards and scored five times.

Dalvin Cook was selected to Pro Bowls in 2019 and 2020.

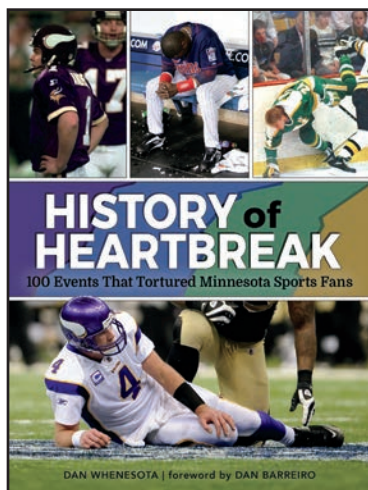


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Israelson grew up in La Crescent, Minnesota, and began following the Minnesota Vikings at five years old. He also developed an early love of history. Chad earned a BA from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. In 1995, he graduated with an MA from the University of Nebraska.

For the past 25 years, he has been a history instructor at Rochester Community and Technical College in southeast Minnesota, winning Outstanding Educator twice and serving as faculty president for six years. In addition, he taught history courses for Augsburg and Winona State universities.

Chad serves as a political analyst for KTTC, Rochester's NBC-affiliated television station, and he was a columnist for Rochester's *Post-Bulletin*. In 2015, Chad co-authored *The Political World of Bob Dylan*. He lives in Rochester with his wife of nearly 30 years. They have raised two sons together.



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- Schedules, starting lineups, and statistical leaders
- The author's picks for every all-decade team
- Full-color photography from throughout the Vikings' history



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