

# Super Bowl Preview

By Joe Flaherty

Super Bowl 48 will pit the NFL's most potent offense against the league's stingiest defense for the first time since 1991. With a league so heavily predicated in offense, one could easily assume that the Denver Broncos and their record-setting offense would have a clear upper hand next week in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

But if you go back and read that last sentence, you'll find the exact reason why I'm picking against the Broncos: the game is going to be played in New Jersey. Not in some sunny slice of heaven in Florida, or some comfy, climate-controlled dome, but outdoors at Metlife Stadium.

According to weather.com, the forecast calls for temperatures near 30 degrees and a 50% chance of a "wintry mix" falling from the sky right around kickoff. The thermometer will surely read lower than 39 degrees, which is the current record low mark for a Super Bowl.

Since Roger Goodell wanted to prove a point by hosting the game's biggest spectacle in a cold climate, he essentially put the nail in the coffin for the Broncos.

I'm not trying to take anything away from the Seattle Seahawks here, and I honestly believe that if this matchup was to take place on a neutral site where climate wasn't a factor, we'd be in for one of the most entertaining and evenly matched Super Bowls of all time.

But with Old Man Winter crashing the party, that adds another advantage for the Seahawks, tipping the scales in their favor.

Why? Two reasons:

First, the Seahawks are tailor-made to succeed in cold weather. Historically, when the weather plummets, teams will heavily base their offensive attack on the ground game.

Chilly temperatures, wind gusts and any other winter weather factor makes the passing game too much of a crapshoot. Bears fans should know exactly what I'm talking about, witnessing first-hand how they built a stout defense and an offense based on the ground game for decades in order to succeed in the cold winters of the Midwest.

That strategy panned out for the Bears in 1985, and it'll definitely pay dividends for the Seahawks (a team with many similarities to the '85 Bears, but that's another story).

Not only did they have the league's fourth best rushing offense, piling up nearly 2,200 yards on the ground, they also had a historically good run-stuffing unit on the other side of the ball.

The Seahawks let up less than 1,700 rushing yards all season, ranking seventh in the NFL. The real jaw dropping stat is the amount of rushing touchdowns they allowed. You can count them on one hand. There were only four.

That's only two more than the NFL record set by the Vikings way back in the Purple People Eater days of the 1970's.

The Seahawks clearly have the ability to win by leaning on their rushing attack headlined by Marshawn Lynch, who will surely be loaded up on Skittles and primed to go into Beast Mode. They can also shut opponents down when they try to do the same thing.

The Broncos clearly don't base their offense on the running game... *in normal conditions*. Which brings me to my second reason: the Broncos aren't the same football team in the cold.

It's not only Peyton Manning who sees his production drop with the temperature. Yes, Manning has struggled in the three games the Broncos have played this year in temperatures 37 degrees or below. His completion percentage is nearly 7% lower, he throws for nearly 80 yards less per game, and his touchdown to interception ratio is nearly 1.5 times worse.

But just as quarterbacks aren't the sole reason for winning games, Manning wasn't the only reason the Broncos dropped two of their three cold weather matchups. The defense allowed nearly a full touchdown more per game in the cold (30 pts/gm vs. 24 pts/gm). When you're asking your offense to score four touchdowns just to stay close, you're asking for trouble.

The one group that does shoulder more of a load in the cold is, you guessed it, the running backs. Makes sense, right? Broncos running backs had just over 30 carries per game in the cold and averaged 151 yards per game, 42 yards above their warm-weather output.

The only problem is the Seahawks simply don't allow teams to beat them on the ground. Seattle's strong suite will neutralize any cold weather advantage on the ground Denver hoped to have, and the weather will go a long way in stopping Peyton Manning from being Peyton Manning.

And if the weather wasn't enough to throw Manning off of his game, Richard Sherman and the Legion of Boom surely will.

I've painted a dreary outlook for the Broncos, but I'm still expecting them to keep the game close. If you follow any of our web content for Phoenix Sports, you know all about my opinion that Peyton Manning is the greatest quarterback of all time, regardless of a second ring.

The great ones always put up a fight, even with the deck stacked solidly against them.

But any which way you slice it, the Seahawks have the upper hand. And if you're wondering if they've had any success in the cold, the answer is yes. They pitched a shutout against the New York Giants at Metlife Stadium, winning 23-0 a few weeks ago.

And don't forget it wasn't much warmer in Seattle when they took out the San Francisco 49ers in the NFC Championship game.

My prediction in this one: Seahawks edge the Broncos 28-21 in a thriller. Manning will throw for all three touchdowns and will be leading a late game-tying drive before getting picked off by none other than Richard Sherman.