

# Early betting sets price at Pats -13.5

At the conclusion of the conference championship games on Sunday night here in Las Vegas, the New England Patriots opened as a 14-point Super Bowl favorite over the New York Giants with a total of 55. The line got quickly bet down to 13.5 and then to 13 within the first hour of wagering with indications it could drop further still, but even though this is the official opening-line movement, the Super Bowl point spread is really a whole season in the making.

Back in September, the Las Vegas Hilton's generic line for whichever teams reached the NFL's big game had the AFC -8 with a total of 48. By Week 6, with the Patriots running up the score on most opponents and after beating the Cowboys, the NFC's supposedly best team, by a score of 48-27, the line was up to AFC -10 with a total of 52.5.

After the Patriot's Week 9 win over the Colts, the AFC was up to -14.5 and continued to climb during the Patriots' bye week and after a 56-10 blowout on the road in Buffalo in Week 11 as it peaked at AFC -17. The Patriots then survived a few scares and didn't cover in narrow wins over the Eagles and Ravens in nationally televised games and the number started drifting down to a low of AFC -10 in early December. That didn't last long and was sitting at 11 by the start of the playoffs. It remained there until the Cowboys lost to the Giants in the divisional playoff round at which time the Hilton adjusted the number to AFC -13.5 with a total of 54.5. During the course of the week, the line got bet down to AFC -12 around town.

When Lawrence Tynes' 47-yard field goal soared through the uprights in Green Bay at 7:13 p.m. Vegas time to make the Super Bowl XLII matchup official, the sports books here were in a race to put up Super Bowl lines and start the biggest wagering event that this city sees every year. The Mirage put up the first line with the Patriots -13 and a total of 55.5, but when Wynn Las Vegas opened at 14.5 and every other book went with a flat 14, the Mirage line lasted less than five minutes and was moved to 13.5. Likewise, the Wynn didn't stay long at 14.5 and lowered it to 14, which is where the Hilton and Caesars chose to open.

By comparison, offshore giant Pinnacle opened at Pats -14 and CRIS went with 13.5 and the numbers started to drift downward. Within 20 minutes, at 7:33 p.m. Vegas time, 13.5 was the consensus line around town with the Mirage back to its opening number of 13. Early money continued to come in on the Giants and was as low as 12.5 at CRIS as of deadline.

As far as future-book odds go, at this time last year when the first odds went up for this Super Bowl, the Patriots were the 8-1 third

choice (behind the Colts and Chargers) while the Giants were 25-1.

With the off-season acquisitions of Randy Moss (plus other receiver Wes Welker and Donte Stallworth) on offense and Adalius Thomas on defense, the Patriots were

around 2-1 by the start of the season and have been odds-on since the middle of the season. Meanwhile, the Giants lost their first two games and were raised to 60-1 at the Hilton before turning their season around. Still, by the midpoint of the season, they were available at 22-1. After their 40-17 home loss to the Vikings in Week 12, they were back up to 75-1 but have been dropping ever since.

Basically, if using the money line, the Giants are now 4-1 to win the Super Bowl with the Patriots at 1-5.

## Conference championship game recaps from a Vegas (betting) perspective

**Patriots 21, Chargers 12:** The line on this game opened as low as 14.5 and as high as 16 in Vegas a week ago Sunday night with a total of 50. The point spread quickly met in the middle at 15 around town but then was lowered to 14 on Monday morning when it looked for certain that both Philip Rivers and LaDainian Tomlinson would play for the Chargers. During the course of the week, the total dropped to 48 while the spread moved back to 14.5 at several books before settling back at 14 at the close of trading.

The offenses were slow moving in the early going with the only scoring in the first quarter being a field goal by San Diego's Nate Kaeding. In proposition wagering, the first score of the game being a touchdown was a -220 favorite with "any other score" being +190, so those bettors cashed. Another prop asked if the Chargers would ever have the lead, so the "yes" cashed at -110.

The first touchdown wasn't scored until 13:48 left in the second quarter when New England's Laurence Maroney hit paydirt on a 1-yard run. Maroney was the 6-1 second choice to score the game's first TD (behind Moss at 4-1).

The first-half line on this game was the Pats -8 with a total of 24, so both were in doubt with the Pats leading 14-6 when the Chargers got the ball with 1:46 left before intermission (bettors who got the Chargers +8.5 at the Stratosphere were in great shape as only a defensive score could have beaten them). Most people were looking at a push, though there were some 7.5s out there that any Patriot backer would have loved to be holding at that point, but Kaeding booted a 40-yarder with :08 left to

## VIEW FROM VEGAS

By DAVE TULEY



**Laurence Maroney was 6-1 to score the game's first TD and rewarded his backers with a second-quarter Patriot touchdown.**

make it 14-9 and make winners of all the San Diego bettors but keep it barely under the total of 24.

The second-half line had the Patriots -7.5 and the total again at 24. The Chargers and the under again cashed with the Patriots only outscoring them 7-3 in the final 30 minutes of action.

Despite the Patriots being 18-0 and having a historic season, losses for New England bettors are actual nothing new. With the Patriots winning only 21-12, they've failed to cover the spread in eight of their last 10 games, including both playoff wins, after starting the season 8-0 against the spread.

**Giants at Packers:** This line opened at 7 and looked solid until it slowly rose to 7.5 as the weekend arrived. The total opened as high as 44 but was mostly dealt at 42 and

42.5 early in the week before dipping to 40 and then rising back up to 41 by gametime. The point spread also rose on Sunday with the Golden Nugget, Leroy's and Wynn going to 8.5 before dropping back to 8 by kickoff.

The first score, with "any other score" besides a touchdown being +155 in this contest, was again a field goal as the Giants drew first blood on a Lawrence Tynes 47-yarder just over 2.5 minutes into the game. The Giants were a -250 favorite to have the lead at some point in the contest. The second score was another Tynes field goal as the Giants led 6-0 with 11:41 left in the second quarter, but then Brett Favre hit Donald Driver with a 90-yard touchdown pass on the Packers next play from scrimmage. Driver was 8-1 to score this game's first TD and he eclipsed his over/under yardage prop of 61.5 on a single play.

The Packers were 4.5-point favorites in the first half with a total of 20.5. With the Pack now leading 7-6, the spread was in doubt as another TD would have given them the first-half cover, but they settled for a Mason Crosby field goal at the 1:30 mark to hold a non-covering 10-7 halftime lead as the third straight half on this Sunday went under.

The second-half line was Green Bay -3.5 and a total of 20.5. Not only did this half go over, but when Crosby's field goal tied the game 20-20 early in the fourth quarter, it guaranteed the game total would go over as well since even a safety would put the final points over the closing total of 41.

All season long, the Hilton has posted overtime lines when games go into added time and this game was no different. They put up Green Bay -140 before the coin flip with New York at +120 (which was much shorter than their +280 money line prior to the game). After the Packers won the flip, they were increased to -160 with the Giants at +140, but after Corey Webster intercepted Favre on the opening drive of OT and Tynes kicked through the game-winner, it was New York bettors cashing those tickets as well as the money line on the game and second-half wagers as they outscored the Pack 17-10 after halftime.

Dave Tuley's

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