

NFL PREGAME JOT DOTS

SFO @ RAM

San Francisco 49ers (SFO) @ Los Angeles Rams (RAM)
Thursday, September 10, 2026

- Game Breakdown
- Thursday Night Kickoff:** The San Francisco 49 ers (SFO) and Los Angeles Rams (RAM) open the 2026 NFL season on Thursday, September 10, at SoFi Stadium following identical 12-5 finishes in 2025.
 - Statistical Disparity:** Despite the matching records, the Rams entered the offseason with a superior +172 point differential (518-346) and 12.5 SRS, compared to the 49 ers' +66 differential (437-371) and 6.0 SRS.
 - Opening Act Rivalry:** This marks the fourth season opener between these clubs; SFO has won all three previous Week 1 matchups (28-0 in 2016, 28-25 in 2005, and 23-14 in 1955).
 - Recent Series Split:** The division rivals split their 2025 meetings, with SFO winning 26-23 in Los Angeles (October 2, 2025) and RAM taking a 42-26 victory in Santa Clara (November 9, 2025).
 - Historical Edge:** San Francisco holds a 79-72-3 lead in the all-time series across 154 meetings entering tonight's contest.
 - Postseason Finish:** Both clubs saw their 2025 campaigns ended by Seattle; SFO lost 41-6 in the Divisional round (January 17, 2026), while the Rams fell 31-27 in the NFC Championship (January 25, 2026).
 - High-Scoring Threshold:** In 2025, the Rams were 9-3 when scoring 25+ points, while the 49 ers were 8-1 in games where they reached that same mark.

- Team Identity – San Francisco 49 ers
- Working – Money-Down Passing:** Brock Purdy was the NFL's top qualified money-down QB in 2025 at +0.588 EPA (#1 of 50) with 8 TDs and 2 INTs on 79 non-red-zone attempts.
 - Working – Third-Down Engine:** SFO ran the league's best 3rd-down offense at +0.263 EPA (#2/32) with a 52.0% success rate (#2/32) on 227 plays in 2025.
 - Working – Coverage Anchor:** Fred Warner graded 83.8 overall – #1 of 720 qualified defenders – with a 74.3 coverage grade last season.
 - Not Working – Sacks:** SFO recorded just 20 sacks in 2025, the NFL's fewest (#32/32).
 - Not Working – Takeaways:** The defense produced only 6 interceptions in 2025 (#30/32), with no defensive score on the board.
 - Not Working – Goal-Line Finish:** 14 goal-to-go plays produced -0.189 EPA last season.
 - Scheme identity:** Zone-first shell – 69.7% zone to 30.3% man – with COVER-3 the most-used look at 26.8% of pass plays (167 attempts).
 - Coaching:** Kyle Shanahan (HC) carries an 82-67 career record; Klayton Adams (OC), Robert Saleh (DC), and John Lynch (GM/President of Football Operations) complete the front office.
 - Clubhouse:** A 12-5 wild-card season ending in a 41-6 loss at SEA in the NFC Divisional on January 17, 2026.
 - Road form:** SFO traveled 7-2 away (78%) against 5-3 at home in 2025.

- QB – Brock Purdy (SFO)
- 2025 Efficiency:** Purdy posted a 69.4% completion rate with 2,167 yards, 20 TDs, and 10 INTs on 284 attempts across 9 games before injury last season.
 - Money-Down Mastery:** Purdy led all 50 qualified NFL QBs in non-red-zone money-down efficiency last season, recording a +0.588 EPA with 8 TDs and 2 INTs on 79 attempts.
 - CPOE King:** The 5th-year starter graded at +5.1 Completion Percentage Over Expected (CPOE) in 2025, utilizing a 3.2-second average time to throw.
 - Career REG Ledger:** Through the start of the 2026 season, Purdy has 9,518 career REG passing yards and 64 career REG touchdown passes.
 - Pressure Split:** Purdy was the NFL's #1 standard-look QB (+0.262 EPA), but efficiency dropped to +0.021 EPA against the blitz, where he absorbed 4 sacks on just 59 dropbacks.
 - Shell Preference:** Purdy's highest 2025 production came against COVER-4 (+0.427 EPA on 24 attempts) and COVER-2 (+0.187 on 64 attempts).
 - Signature Strike:** Purdy's 2025 highlight was a 10.7-air-yard TD to Jake Tonges vs SEA (September 7, 2025), which carried a league-low 15% completion probability.

- Skill Matchups
- George Kittle vs. RAM Soft Zones:** Kittle (78.0 PFF Grade in 2025) targets a Rams defense that surrendered high completion rates to COVER-2 (71.2%) and COVER-3 (68.1%) last season.
 - Puka Nacua vs. SFO Deep Shell:** Nacua, the NFL's top-graded offensive player (86.1 PFF), faces a 49 ers COVER-3 look that allowed a 74.7% completion rate and +0.237 EPA in 2025.
 - Christian McCaffrey's Left-Side Lane:** McCaffrey finds his best efficiency in the Middle-Left lane (4.6 YPC on 67 attempts), running at RAM's Poona Ford (67.5 Run Def grade).
 - Davante Adams Perimeter Threat:** Adams joins the Rams after a 14-TD season; he lived on the boundary last year with a 13.5 ADOT and only a 14.3% slot rate.
 - Xavier Smith Slot Mismatch:** Smith led all 280 qualified NFL receivers with 5.38 yards per route run in 2025, primarily operating from a 76.6% slot rate.
 - Fred Warner vs. Kyren Williams:** Warner (83.8 PFF, #1 of 720 defenders) anchors the SFO front against Williams, who took 62.7% of RAM carries for 1,252 yards in 2025.
 - Kittle's Chunk Play Potential:** Kittle's Deep Out route was his most effective in 2025, producing a +1.259 EPA on 11 targets with a 72.7% catch rate.
 - Nacua's Two-Level Attack:** Nacua creates stress with 25 "Go" targets (25.0 ADOT) and 24 Hitch/Curl targets (6.1 ADOT), attacking both deep and intermediate windows.
 - Stafford vs. SFO Blitz:** If SFO brings heat, Stafford arrives with a 2025 answer of +0.285 EPA per play against the blitz (62.4% completion on 159 attempts).
 - Iron-Man Safety Matchup:** RAM safety Kamren Curl played 1,112 snaps (99.3%) in 2025, serving as the primary deterrent against Purdy's intermediate timing routes.

- Advanced Spotlights
- Nacua's efficiency:** 3.79 yards per route run ranked 4th best among 280 qualified receivers on a team-high 462 routes in 2025.
 - Kittle's route grade:** PFF Off 78.0 (8th best, #8/686) with a 77.4 route grade across 554 snaps – the healthiest and highest-graded pass-catch option in SFO's room.
 - Smith's slot outlier:** Xavier Smith's 5.38 yards per route run (No. 1 among 280 qualified receivers) is the cleanest slot-efficiency marker on the board.
 - Ballhawk pedigree:** Kamren Kinchens ranks 2nd among active NFL defenders in games with 2+ interceptions over the last 3 seasons (2 such games).
 - Roster contrast:** SFO carries 7 players with 8+ NFL seasons versus the Rams' 3; the Rams bring 6 rookies to SFO's 5 – both First-year names are undrafted additions.
 - QB tenure gap:** Brock Purdy enters his 5th NFL season (4 completed) opposite Matthew Stafford in his 18th (17 completed) – a 13-season experience gap under center.

- Notable Streaks
- SFO Week 1 streak:** The 49 ers enter tonight on a 3-game Week 1 winning streak, capped by a 17-13 win at SEA in 2025, a 19-32 win vs NYJ in 2024, and a 30-7 win at PIT in 2023 – the lone opener blemish came in 2022, a 10-19 loss at CHI.
 - LAR Week 1 split:** The Rams are 1-1 all-time in Week 1 openers, splitting a 9-14 win vs Houston in 2025 and a 20-26 loss at Detroit in 2024.
 - LAR defensive clamp:** When Los Angeles held an opponent to 20 or fewer points in 2025, it went 10-0.
 - One-score games contrast:** The Rams went 4-5 in one-score contests in 2025 while the 49 ers went 5-1.
 - Turnover success:** The Rams were 10-1 when winning the turn over battle in 2025; the 49 ers were 5-0 in those games.

- All Things to Watch
- Stafford's Milestone:** Matthew Stafford enters tonight with 59,871 career REG passing yards; he is 129 yards away from becoming the next member of the 60,000-yard club.
 - SFO Front-Seven Crisis:** The 49 ers' pass rush is severely compromised with Nick Bosa (knee), Keion White (groin), Osa Odighizuwa (elbow), and Romello Height (elbow) all Questionable, plus three defensive ends on IR.
 - Rams Edge Health:** Marquee defender Myles Garrett is a game-time decision (lower-body soreness), while starting left tackle Alaric Jackson is Questionable due to illness.
 - SFO Receiver Flux:** The 49 ers' perimeter depth is thin with Ricky Pearsall on IR (knee-PCL); veterans Mike Evans (quad), Christian Kirk (calf), and De'Zhaun Stribling (hamstring) are all Questionable.
 - Secondary Vacancy:** SFO safety Malik Mustapha is Questionable (hamstring), potentially leaving a void against a Rams attack that averaged 276.8 passing yards per game in 2025.
 - Kicking Reliability:** The 49 ers hold a statistical advantage with Eddy Pineiro, who converted 28/29 FGs (96.6%) last season, compared to RAM's Joshua Karty, who hit just 10/15 (66.7%).
 - Early-Down Dominance:** Watch the Rams' opening script; they led the NFL in 2025 with a 47.9% success rate on 1st down and a 57.0% success rate on 2nd down.
 - Ballhawk Watch:** RAM safety Kamren Kinchens ranks 2nd among all active NFL defenders in games with 2+ interceptions over the last three seasons (2 such games).

- Team Identity – Los Angeles Rams
- Working – Explosive Passing:** Stafford's 4,707 yards (#2/32) and 46 touchdowns against 8 interceptions in 2025, feeding Puka Nacua's league-best 86.1 PFF grade off a 129-catch season.
 - Working – Early-Down Machine:** LAR graded the league's best early-down offense with a top-ranked success rate on both 1st (47.9%, #1/32) and 2nd down (57.0%, #1/32).
 - Working – Pass Rush:** 47 sacks (#8/32) from a rotation with multiple 70+ pass-rush grades.
 - Working – Protect the Football:** Just 15 giveaways in 2025, with a plus-172 point differential best on this NFC West board.
 - Not Working – Red-Zone Finish:** The Rams ran 101 red-zone plays at only +0.003 EPA with a 40.6% success rate – the efficiency dip that broke an otherwise top-two profile.
 - Not Working – Two-Deep Coverage Windows:** The zone base surrendered 71.2% completion vs COVER-2 and 68.1% vs COVER-3 last season.
 - Coaching:** Sean McVay (HC) carries a 92-57 career record with one Super Bowl title in his 9th season at the helm; the GM role is not verified on tonight's roster sheet.
 - Clubhouse:** A 12-5 mark and wild-card seed, ending in a 27-31 loss at SEA in the NFC Championship on January 25, 2026 – one game short of the Super Bowl.
 - Home form:** LAR posted a 7-1 home record in 2025 (88%) versus 5-4 on the road.

- QB – Matthew Stafford (RAM)
- 2025 line:** 65.0% completion, 4,707 yards (#2/32), 46 TDs, 8 INTs on 597 attempts across 17 games.
 - Blitz answer:** Against the blitz last season, Stafford delivered a +0.285 EPA per play (62.4% completion on 159 attempts) – his sharper answer of the two looks.
 - Red-zone blemish:** Inside the 20, Stafford's money-down EPA dropped to minus-1.095 with an interception on 9 attempts in 2025.
 - Coverage lean:** Stafford was most productive against COVER-3, going 68.1% on 174 attempts with a +0.299 EPA – his best rate against any shell.
 - Career ledger:** The 18th-year signal-caller (17 completed seasons) enters the opener with 59,871 career REG passing yards, 377 career REG touchdown passes, and 1,356 career rushing yards.
 - Season peak:** Stafford threw for a season-high 457 yards and 3 TDs at SEA on December 18, 2025.
 - Human color:** The 18th-year veteran posted a career-rhythm 46 TDs in 2025 and added Davante Adams as the perimeter weapon for the encore.

- EPA & Situational
- SFO 3rd-down engine:** The 49 ers ran the league's best 3rd-down offense at +0.263 EPA (#2/32) with a 52.0% success rate (#2/32) on 227 plays in 2025.
 - LAR early-down machine:** The Rams graded the best early-down offense with a 1st-down EPA of +0.118 (#2/32) on a 47.9% success rate (#1/32) and a 2nd-down EPA of +0.162 (#2/32) on a 57.0% success rate (#1/32).
 - Red-zone split:** SFO converted at a 46.3% red-zone success rate on 82 plays inside the 20 at +0.030 EPA; LAR ran 101 red-zone plays at a 40.6% success rate with +0.003 EPA.
 - Goal-line contrast:** SFO's 14 goal-to-go plays produced -0.189 EPA; LAR's 3 goal-line plays sat at -0.107 EPA.
 - Drive conversion:** SFO scored on 47.4% of drives (81/171) in 2025, the best mark in this matchup pair; LAR scored on 47.0% (85 of 181 drives).
 - Personnel split:** RAM's best efficiency came out of 13 personnel (1 RB, 3 TE, 1 WR) at +0.238 EPA/play; SFO's best was 21 personnel (1 RB, 1 FB, 1 TE, 2 WR) at +0.176 EPA/play.
 - Play-action tell:** RAM's 16.3% play-action rate was the clearest scheme marker – nearly double SFO's 10.8% clip.

- Scheme & Coverage
- SFO coverage identity:** Zone-first shell – 69.7% zone to 30.3% man – with COVER-3 the most-used look at 26.8% of pass plays (167 attempts), followed by COVER-2 at 23.3% (145 attempts).
 - SFO COVER-3 leak:** SFO gave up a 74.7% completion rate and +0.237 avg EPA when opponents attacked COVER-3 – the sharpest EPA they allowed on any shell.
 - SFO man check:** The COVER-1 look (21.7% share) held opponents to 60.3% completion and +0.079 avg EPA – the tightest completion rate of any look they faced.
 - LAR coverage identity:** Zone-first back end at 65.5% zone against 34.5% man, with COVER-3 (26.7% of looks) as the base shell.
 - LAR shell splits:** COVER-2 surrendered 71.2% opponent completion, COVER-3 68.1%, and the COVER-1 man look held QBs to 60.8%.
 - Security blanket:** Kamren Curl played 1,112 defensive snaps (99.3%) last season as the Rams' iron-man safety anchor.
 - SFO back-end health:** Safety Malik Mustapha is Questionable (hamstring) for tonight, leaving the deep-middle rotation unsettled.

- Injuries & Availability
- Nick Bosa (DE, SFO):** Questionable – knee (ACL, surgery, right).
 - Mike Evans (WR, SFO):** Questionable – quadriceps strain.
 - Christian Kirk (WR, SFO):** Questionable – calf.
 - Malik Mustapha (S, SFO):** Questionable – hamstring strain.
 - Keion White (DE, SFO):** Questionable – groin (surgery).
 - Osa Odighizuwa (DT, SFO):** Questionable – elbow (surgery).
 - De'Zhaun Stribling (WR, SFO):** Questionable – hamstring soreness.
 - Kaelon Black (RB, SFO):** Questionable – thigh.
 - Romello Height (DE, SFO):** Questionable – elbow.
 - Ricky Pearsall (WR, SFO):** Injured Reserve – knee (PCL, right), season-ending designation.
 - Andrew Farmer II (DE, SFO):** Injured Reserve – back.
 - Mikail Kamara (DE, SFO):** Injured Reserve – knee.
 - Tanner McLachlan (TE, SFO):** Injured Reserve – undisclosed.

Cool Stats & Storylines

- **Stafford's 60 K chase:** Matthew Stafford enters at 59,871 career REG passing yards – 129 yards away from becoming the next member of the 60,000-yard club.
- **Nacua's grade:** Puka Nacua enters Week 1 as the NFL's top-graded offensive player (86.1, No. 1 of 686) off a 129-catch, 1,715-yard, 10-TD 2025 carrying a 29.3% target share.
- **Season peaks – SFO:** SFO's most points (48) and largest win (48-27, 21 points) both came at CLT on December 22, 2025.
- **Season peaks – RAM:** RAM's high-water mark was a 45-17 win (28-point margin) at CRD on December 7, 2025.
- **Season peaks – individual:** McCaffrey's season high on the ground was 140 yards/1 TD vs CHI on December 28, 2025; Nacua's season high receiving game was 12 rec/225 yards/2 TD at SEA on December 18, 2025.
- **Division race context:** Both clubs open 2026 as 12-5 NFC West co-leaders from a 2025 tie that turned on point differential – RAM at 518-346 (+172), SFO at 437-371 (+66) – with SRS rating RAM 12.5 to SFO's 6.0.
- **HIPPA – Rush volume:** Kyren Williams took 259 of the backfield's 413 carries (62.7%) at 4.8 YPC in 2025, with Blake Corum at 145 carries for 746 yards and 6 TDs (35.1% of carries).

Staff & Front Office

- **SFO Coaching – Kyle Shanahan:** Entering his 10th season with an 82-67 career REG record; aiming to snap a two-game skid against Sean McVay's Rams dating back to 2025.
- **SFO Front Office – John Lynch:** The GM/President of Football Operations prioritized perimeter rebuilding this offseason, adding veterans Mike Evans and Christian Kirk (both Questionable tonight) to support Brock Purdy.
- **SFO Defensive Staff – Robert Saleh:** Returns as DC to a unit that produced a league-low 20 sacks in 2025; faces a Week 1 crisis with four primary defensive linemen (Bosa, White, Odighizuwa, Height) listed as Questionable.
- **RAM Coaching – Sean McVay:** Carries a 92-57 career REG record into his 10th season; looking to build on the league's top-ranked early-down success rates (47.9% on 1st, 57.0% on 2nd) from 2025.
- **RAM Assistant – Mike LaFleur (OC):** Entering his 4th season as OC; oversaw a 2025 attack that ranked #2 in the NFL in passing yards (4,707) and pass EPA (150.5).

The continuity with Matthew [Stafford] and the growth of Puka [Nacua] gives us a foundation, but Week 1 is always about who can adjust to the new wrinkles the fastest. – Sean McVay · Team Press Conference · August 31, 2026.

- **William Bradley-King (DE, SFO):** Injured Reserve – undisclosed.
- **Alaric Jackson (OT, LAR):** Questionable – illness (starting left tackle).
- **Myles Garrett (DE, LAR):** Questionable – lower-body soreness (marquee edge).
- **Eddie Walls III (LB, LAR):** Injured Reserve – undisclosed.
- **Justin Dedich (G, LAR):** Out – hand.

On This Day

- **Season opener date:** Thursday, September 10, 2026, at SoFi Stadium – the Week 1 opener for both clubs.
- **Even rest:** No rest-edge or travel storyline is printed for either side – both clubs enter on a full offseason and even rest.
- **Thursday night setting:** The game is the Thursday night kickoff for Week 1 of the 2026 season.

Last Meeting & Recent Highlights

- **2025 split:** The Season Series went SFO 26-23 at RAM on October 2, 2025, then RAM 42-26 at SFO on November 9, 2025.
- **The Rams' 42 points** – were the most SFO allowed all season in 2025.
- **Playoff endings:** SFO was bounced 6-41 at SEA in the NFC Divisional on January 17, 2026; RAM fell 27-31 at SEA in the NFC Championship on January 25, 2026 – the Rams one game short of the Super Bowl.

Milestones

- **Matthew Stafford (RAM):** Enters tonight with 59,871 career REG passing yards – 129 away from becoming the next member of the 60,000-yard club.
- **Matthew Stafford (RAM):** With 377 career REG passing touchdowns, he is 23 away from 400; he averaged 2.7 TDs per game in 2025.
- **Brock Purdy (SFO):** Enters the opener with 9,518 career REG passing yards – 482 away from 10,000.
- **Brock Purdy (SFO):** Currently holds 64 career REG passing touchdowns – 36 away from 100; he produced 20 TDs in just 9 games during 2025.
- **Christian McCaffrey (SFO):** Sits at 6,703 career REG rushing yards – 297 away from 7,000; he totaled 1,202 yards in 17 games last season.
- **Tyler Higbee (RAM):** Enters tonight with 3,668 career REG receiving yards – 332 away from 4,000.
- **Davante Adams (RAM):** Joins the Rams with 109 career REG receiving touchdowns – 1 away from 110; his 14 TDs in 2025 led all players in tonight's matchup.
- **George Kittle (SFO):** With 6,831 career REG receiving yards, he is 169 away from 7,000; he averaged 57.1 yards per game in 11 appearances last season.