



## **NFC Championship**

**Sunday January 28, 2024**

### **Detroit Lions @ San Francisco 49ers**

**Game Time: 6:30pm ET**

**Pick: Lions +7**

The Detroit Lions magical season continues after a 31-23 defeat of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in front of the home crowd in the Divisional Round. This is their 2nd appearance ever in the NFC title game with the last one coming in 1991 and they are 1 of 4 franchises to have never won a Super Bowl.

The Lions come into this matchup with the 49ers as underdogs, which is a role that Dan Campbell and company are more than comfortable with. You better believe that a master motivator like Campbell will take full advantage of this underdog role to fire up his team. This truly is a rather disrespectful line considering both the Lions and 49ers have been the two best teams in the NFC all year long. It is a scary prospect giving a team like the Lions who believe in themselves, are playing with confidence, and have that “team of destiny” feel to them even more motivation to feed off.

Coming into this game there are some very interesting trends to be aware of. The Lions have been the best team ATS all season long with a 13-6 record while SF is only 9-9. Detroit is 7-2 ATS on the road and 2-1 ATS as a road underdog. Meanwhile the 49ers are only 3-6 ATS as home favorites and 5-6 ATS when at least 7-point favorites.

Sunday will be a big homecoming game for former Marin Catholic and Cal star Jared Goff who continues to lead an absolute juggernaut of an offense. The Lions are 3rd in Total Offense, 3rd in Passing Yards Per Game, 7th in Rush Yards Per Game, 8th in Passing First Down Percentage, and 10th in 3rd Down Conversion Rate. Weather forecast in Santa Clara for Sunday looks mint so I do not expect that to be a factor. An area in particular that I expect the Lions to exploit is the 49ers Run Defense. This is a unit that is currently ranked 15th in rush DVOA (defense adjusted value over average-It calculates a team’s success based on the down and distance of each play during the season, then calculates how much more or less successful each team is compared to the league average). The 49ers got gashed by Aaron Jones of the Packers for the tune of 100 yards on 18 carries. SF defense is also ranked 17th in Opponent Yards Per Carry at 4.2 yards. The Lions have the second-best offensive line according to Pro Football Focus and should be able to open up some nice holes for the two-headed backfield monster of Jamhyr Gibbs and David Montgomery. The Lions will furthermore be able to run some nice play action off of this expected success on the ground. Not to mention getting the ground game going will help keep the 49ers offense off the field. The 49ers defense has been worse at home compared to the road where they have given up more total points and points per game. On the other side of the ball the Lions defense is very strong against the run. This is a unit that is 2nd in Opponent Rush Yards Per Game, and 3rd in Opponent Yards Per Carry.

Being able to limit Christian McCaffrey will be crucial for success come Sunday. It's also worth noting that McCaffrey is dealing with a nagging calf injury.

The big headline as we get closer to this game is the health of 49ers star WR Deebo Samuel who left Saturday's game with an injury to the same shoulder that he had a hairline fracture in earlier this season. Initial x-rays have come back negative for a fracture and Adam Scheffer reports that he is currently 50-50 for Sunday's game. This is potentially a massive loss for the 49ers as they simply are not the same team without him as they lost all 3 games in a row that he was absent from to the Browns, Vikings, and Bengals back in Weeks 6, 7, and 8. Even if he does suit up it is safe to say that he will not be at 100% and that shoulder will be awfully vulnerable to being reinjured.

The Lions have a few injury concerns of their own, especially as it pertains to starting guard Jonah Jackson who injured his knee Sunday and is in danger of missing the game, something to monitor as the week goes on. Today the Lions signed TE Zach Ertz with plans to potentially elevate him to the active roster as a replacement for injured TE Brock Wright.

The fact of the matter here is the +7 line is too generous a price to be getting on the Lions. These are the two best teams in the NFC battling for the right to go to the Super Bowl, so I anticipate this will be a close and highly contested matchup. Our pick is for the Detroit Lions to cover the spread.

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Any questions or comments can be sent to: [wiz@wizardraceandsports.com](mailto:wiz@wizardraceandsports.com)

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