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**Bengals** 

**QUESTIONS** 

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**LA Rams** 

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ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY 3 P.M., TUESDAY FEB. 15TH		

#### Upset minded Bengals take aim at Rams in Super Bowl LVI

by CHRIS SIERS
sports@t-g.com
he 2021-2022 NFL
season was arguably
one for the ages.
At no point during the
season was there ever a
truly dominant team in
either the AFC or NFC.

As a result, fans were delighted to some of the best playoff football games in decades.

Two years ago, Joe Burrow orchestrated one of the best, if not the best, single season a college quarterback has ever put forth.

forth.
In that magical season,
he won the Heisman Trophy
and a national champion-

ship while at LSU. That led the Cincinnati Bengals to draft Burrow at the No. 1 pick in the 2020

Burrow's impact was felt immediately as he transformed the Bengals into a competitive club, despite not managing to create a winning record.

In Week 11, Burrow tore his ACL, effectively ending his rookie season.

A year later, Burrow has established himself as one of the top quarterbacks, not just in the AFC, but in all of the NFL.

Burrow led the Bengals to a AFC North division title with a 10-7 record.

That record was good enough to land the Bengals a No. 4 seed.

During the regular season, Burrow was as efficient as a quarterback could be, completing 70% of his

passes. He averaged nearly nine yards per attempt and threw for over 4,600 yards. He had 34 touchdowns against just 14 interceptions.

His top target was LSU teammate Ja'Marr Chase, who had 1,455 yards as a rookie, and had 13 grabs.

The Bengals' offense was balanced as Joe Mixon led Cincinnati on the ground. He averaged 4.1 yards per carry and totaled 1,205 yards on the ground with 13 touchdowns.

During the Wild Card round, the Bengals had to outlast the Las Vegas Raiders after only mustering up six points in the second half.

That win put Cincinnati on a collision course with No. 1 AFC seed Tennessee in Nashville.

While the headlines surrounding Tennessee were the return of Derrick Henry, it was the Cincinnati defense that put the Bengals in the AFC championship.

Burrow posted a modest, 348 passing yards and completed 28-of-37 attempts, but didn't have a passing touchdown.

The Cincinnati defense picked off Titan quarterback Ryan Tannehill three times and Evan McPhearson kicked a 52-yard field goal as time expired to send the Bengals to Kansas City.

Like the divisional game against the Buffalo Bills, the Bengals forced overtime.

Trailing 21-3 in the second quarter, the Bengals

scored 11 unanswered points and led late in the fourth quarter before Harrison Butker kicked a 44-yard field goal as time expired to force overtime.

But it was once again the Cincinnati defense that picked off Chiefs gunslinger Patrick Mahomes and McPhearson once again delivered on a 31-yard field goal to stun the Chiefs and send the Bengals to the Super Bowl for the first time since 1989.

While the Bengals found their franchise quarterback with the No. 1 draft pick from 2020, the Rams went after another quarterback who has been stuck in football purgatory for the bulk of his career.

Matthew Stafford was drafted by the Detroit Lions as the No. 1 pick in 2009.

While Stafford has become a reliable quarter-back who was able to post big numbers week in and week out, the Lions have never been able to sustain the success and translate it into postseason runs.

In fact, during Stafford's 11 years with Detroit, the Lions made the playoffs just twice.

So in the 2021 preseason, the Rams made a deal to trade quarterback Jared Goff to Detroit and give Stafford his fresh start.



He rewarded the Rams by leading them to a 12-5 overall record and winning a competitive NFC West division title.

The high-flying Rams offense got its man under center as Stafford completed over 67% of his passes in 2021 and averaged 8.1 yards per attempt.

He threw for 4,886 yards and had 41 touchdowns against 17 interceptions.

On paper, the NFC West looked as competitive of a league in the NFL as any division.

San Francisco returned a large portion of its defense from a year ago, remained loaded at every skill position and featured arguably the best game manager in the NFL with Jimmy Garoppolo at quarterback.

The Cardinals brought back Kyler Murray and loaded up on offensive weapons that were poised to contend against any defense in the league.

And Russell Wilson and Pete Carroll can never be counted out.

In the end, it was the star studded roster of the Rams that locked up the division title over Arizona, who finished 11-6.

Cooper Kupp led the loaded receiving corps with 1,947 yards and 16 touchdowns.

Woods, who was another key target for Stafford, tore his ACL during practice in November and set Kupp up in prime position

to be the top playmaker on offense.

Out of the backfield, it was a combination of Sony Michel and Darrell Henderson Jr. that led the way with a combined nine rushing touchdowns.

In the postseason, however, it's been Cam Akers that's done the bulk of heavy lifting out of the backfield.

During the Wild Card round, the Rams opened the postseason with a convincing 34-11 win over the Cardinals.

By offensive standards, it was a low-performing day for the LA offense.

Defensively, the Rams picked off Kyler Murray twice and secured the 23-point win to advance to the divisional round, where Tom Brady and the defending world champion Buccaneers waited.

Having to go on the road and face the defending Super Bowl champions, the Rams couldn't have asked for a better start.

By halftime, LA built a 20-3 lead and sat in firm control of the game's momentum and extended the advantage to 27-3 mid-way through the third quarter.

But one can never count out Tom Brady.

Brady rallied the Bucs

from a 24-point deficit and Tampa Bay scored 24 unanswered to tie the game at 27 apiece on a Leonard Fournette run with 42 seconds left in regulation.

With the game and a trip to the NFC Championship on the line, Stafford delivered two darts downfield in the final minute to set Mat Gay up for a game-winning 30-yard field goal, which effectively ended Tom Brady's career.

Like the Bucs did a week prior, the Rams rallied in the second half against San Francisco and scored 13 unanswered points in the fourth quarter, including a game-winning field goal with 1:46 left to send the Rams to the Super Bowl.

While the Buccaneers were the first team to play in a Super Bowl in their home stadium a year ago, the Rams join that club in 2022, although LA isn't officially the "home" designation.

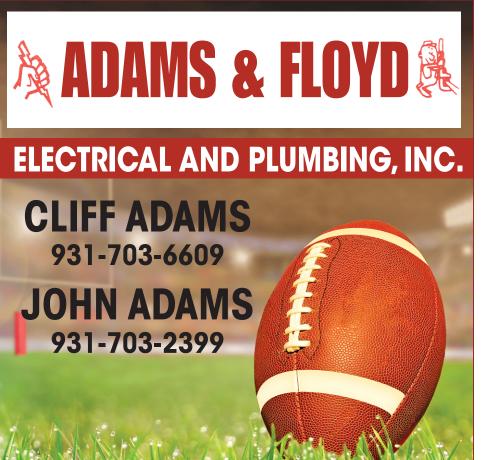
Every year, the home team alternates between the NFC and AFC champion.

The storylines couldn't have been scripted any better during a year.

Burrow enters the Super Bowl a year after tearing his ACL and the Bengals limping to a 4-11-1 record.

Stafford finally finds himself fighting for a championship after so many disappointing years in Detroit.

In a postseason ripe with close games, overtimes, game winning field goals and heartbreak, it seems to reason that Super Bowl LVI will continue the trend of close games, much to the delight of fans.







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## Super Bowl facts

- 8 million pounds of guacamole is consumed on Super Bowl Sunday
- 14,500 tons of chips are eaten along the Guacamole
- The average cost of a 30-second commercial has ranged from \$37,500 in Super Bowl I to \$2.2 million in Super Bowl XXIV and to \$4.5 million in Super Bowl XLIX.
- Around 12.5 million pizzas will be eaten on **Super Bowl Sunday.**
- Following Thanksgiving, Super Bowl Sunday is the second-largest food consumption day in the U.S.
- In 2023, the Super Bowl will be held at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona
- Matthew Stafford was drafted in 2009 and spent 11 seasons with the Detroit Lions. In his first year with the LA Rams, he has made the Super Bowl.
- Tom Brady and Peyton Manning are the only two quarterbacks to have won a Super Bowl with two different franchises. Brady has wins with New England and Tampa Bay, while Manning had wins with Indianapolis and Denver.
- Since 1941, footballs featured in the Super Bowl have been made in Ada, Ohio, at the Wilson Football Factory.
- An estimated 1.25 billion chicken wings will be eaten on Super Bowl Sunday.

- Tickets for Super Bowl I cost \$12. The cheapest tickets for Super Bowl LVI are \$7,000, while some tickets have cost over \$10,000.
- Super Bowl LIII was the lowest score ever when the New England Patriots beat the LA Rams, 13-3.
- Super Bowl XLIV became the mostwatched event in history when it beat out the M\*A\*S\*H finale.
- The Detroit Lions, Cleveland Browns, **Houston Texans and Jacksonville Jaguars** have never played in a Super Bowl.
- Miami has hosted the Super Bowl the most with 11. New Orleans is second, having hosted 10.
- Cal has produced the most quarterbacks, with five. Alabama, Notre Dame and Purdue have each produced three.
- While Super Bowls are typically held in warm climates, Super Bowl IV was held at **Tulane Stadium in New Orleans and regis**tered a frigid 39 degrees on the thermometer.
- The Lombardi Trophy is made each year by Tiffany & Co. and is valued at about \$50,000.
- No quarterback has won the Heisman, national title and Super Bowl. Joe Burrow can become the first to do it in three years.

### League loses its star, yet Brady's legacy lives on in NFL

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Pro Football Writer

Tom Brady's retirement at age 44 leaves the NFL without its iconic quarterback, best player, biggest star and fiercest competitor.

With Brady deciding to focus on his family instead of football, the league loses a giant who flourished in a perfe storm of rules changes designed to protect passers, an increased focus on nutrition and personal offseason training and a dogged determination to thwart both logic and time.

Brady only got better with age and redefined greatness in an unparalleled career that seemed like it might go on

And yet, it some ways he's not leaving us at all.

You'll see his imprint on the NFL whenever you tune into a football game, beginning with the Super Bowl on Feb.

Like other young quarterbacks including Patrick Mahomes, Josh Allen, Justin Herbert, Dak Prescott and Lamar Jackson, Cincinnati's Joe Burrow came of age in the shadow of Brady's brilliance. "And I guarantee you these young

guys, they all admired something in Tom Brady that they attempted to put into their own game," said Brady's former teammate and cornerback Aqib Talib. "Whether it was his throwing motion, his competitiveness or how he took care of his body, some aspect of their game has something to do with Tom Brady.

"If you're an NFL quarterback anywhere from 20 to 30 years old right now, man you got a piece of Tom Brady in you, guaranteed."

That's why "the NFL is itself is going to be fine," concurred Hall of Famer Champ Bailey, whose 100-yard interception return handed Brady his first loss in 11 playoff games back in 2006.

"But I think what we're gonna miss is that level of consistency, professionalism, and nobody did it better," Bailey said. "I think a lot has to do with how he was raised. You know, it was him as a kid, his mindset, being around Bill Belichick and his mindset.

"And it's crazy how he had an MVP season and he's retiring. It's almost like Kobe hitting 60 and going out."

The last NFL player born in the 1970s went out on top — he's the defending Super Bowl champion until the Bengals or Rams hoist the Lombardi Trophy in two weeks.

Just think, Brady could already have a bust in Canton had he retired in his late 30s like his chief rival Peyton Manning did. But Brady went 70-24 in his 40s, winning his sixth Super Bowl with the Patriots and seventh one with the Buccaneers.

Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdown throws (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but the Buccaneers lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional

While the young quarterbacks try to forge their own legacy with Brady no longer in their way, it's a safe bet none will come close to his seven Super Bowl rings because there are so many good quarterbacks in his wake.

"I really do believe he's above the standard," Bailey said. "I don't see how a quarterback in the future would be more

accomplished than he is. But the NFL will be fine. We got some great young talent and I'm sure Tom Brady would even say it himself. That divisional round was an unbelievable weekend of football.

"And it just goes to show you the quarterback talent is still there and probably even better than before," Bailey said. "And the funny thing is these guys all grew up watching Tom Brady. If these dudes do half of what he did it's a tremendous career."

It's not like it was all give and no take with Brady, who also took something from the vanguard of young quarterbacks coming into the league the last few years.

He embraced social media and endorsement opportunities he shunned earlier in his career, showing the public a softer, humorous, often sarcastic side that endeared him to millions who had always associated him with the scowling

He became more beloved across the league much like Manning had in the twilight of his career that featured an epic 17 matchups with Brady.

"I think everybody enjoyed the old

Tom Brady more than the young one," Bailey said. "What he did toward the end of his career was he engaged his fans. I think that's what was missing from a young Tom Brady. He was in this box and he never really came out.

"Now, I think that made him who he was, but his engagement level with fans increased 1 million percent in the past few years. And people really got to know him, saw he was hilarious at times. People appreciate you more when they can see you relaxed and having a good time."

Like when he tossed the Lombardi Trophy from one boat to another boat in the Bucs' Super Bowl celebration last

"I always knew Tom Brady was like that. He's sarcastic just like his social network was. That's his real personality. Yeah, just super sarcastic, super fun," Talib said.

"If you wanted to create the ultimate football player, you would create him just like Tom Brady."

## A Hall of Fame feast for homegating fans

#### (Family Features)

Gathering your team to plan for a truly memorable game day at home starts with almost everyone's favorite part of the festivities: the food. From meaty meals and zesty appetizers to sweet, long-lasting snacks, fuel your crowd with recipes that keep them coming back from kickoff to overtime.

One superstar of the menu at many homegating parties is salsa, whether it's used as a finishing touch in recipes or as a standalone snack to enjoy with chips, veggies or other pairings. In fact, according to the Game Day Eats Report from Fresh Cravings, 22% of guests would insist on running out to pick up salsa if it wasn't available for the feast; 18% would even be devastated and consider leaving.

Chef Anthony Serrano recommends these all-American recipes he makes for his family on game day. Pulled Beef and Slaw Sliders are perfect for piling high with delicious toppings before hitting the couch just in time for kickoff. Snacking

throughout the action is a preferred approach for many fans, making Cast-Iron Smoked Queso Dip and Hummus Deviled Eggs go-to options for armchair quarterbacks.

These crowd-pleasers make game day worth celebrating, especially if you use a salsa with high-quality ingredients like vine-ripened tomatoes, crisp vegetables, zesty peppers and spices found in Fresh Cravings Salsas. Their flavor-packed, vibrant recipe offers a homemade-tasting alternative to the softer, duller blends of jarred salsa.

To find more championshiplevel game day recipe inspiration, visit FreshCravings.com.

#### **Pulled Beef and Slaw Sliders**

Recipe courtesy of chef **Anthony Serrano** 

Pulled Beef: 2 pieces (about 3 pounds each) beef chuck roast

2 tablespoons taco season-

ing or barbecue rub 1 cup beef bone broth



#### **Pulled Beef and Slaw Sliders**

16 ounces Fresh Cravings

#### Chunky Mild Salsa

**Salsa and Queso Slaw:** 

16 ounces Fresh Cravings Chunky Mild Salsa

1 teaspoon salt

16 ounces broccoli slaw

1/4 cup green onions, sliced

1 cup crumbled queso fresco

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard 1/2 cup mayo

2 tablespoons apple cider

2 tablespoons cilantro (optional) slider buns Fresh Cravings Salsa

barbecue sauce pickles jalapenos

sliced cheese

roasted peppers onions

To make pulled beef: Season both sides of beef with taco seasoning. Wrap with plastic wrap and place in fridge 2-12 hours before cooking.

Place meat, beef bone broth and salsa in pressure cooker; seal according to pressure cooker directions. Cook on high 60 minutes. Once pressure cooker is safe to open according to instructions, open and let meat rest in liquid 15 minutes.

Remove meat from liquid and place in large bowl. Carefully shred meat. Pour liquid, up to half, over meat while shredding to keep it juicy.

To make salsa and queso slaw: In large bowl, mix salsa, slaw blend, green onions, salt, queso fresco, Dijon mustard, mayo, apple cider vinegar and cilantro, if desired. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until needed.

To assemble sliders, place pulled beef and salsa and queso slaw on buns. Top with salsa, barbecue sauce, pickles, jalapenos, sliced cheese, roasted peppers and onions.

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**TRIVIA QUESTIONS** 

See entry form on page 1.

## BIG GAME TRIVIA

- 1. Which quarterback has the record for most passing yards in a Super Bowl?
  - A) Tom Brady
  - B) Dan Marino
  - C) Peyton Manning
  - D) Troy Aikman

- 2. Who did the LA Rams face in their last Super Bowl appearance?
  - A) Denver Broncos
  - B) LA Chargers
  - C) Houston Texans
  - D) New England Patriots
- **3.** Which of the following teams have never been to a Super Bowl?
  - A) Tennessee Titans
  - B) Baltimore Ravens
  - C) Detroit Lions
  - D) Carolina Panthers

- 4. Where will Super Bowl LVII be held?
  - A) Glendale, Arizona
  - B) Charlotte, North Carolina
  - C) Nashville, Tennessee D) Detroit, Michigan
- 5. When did the Cincinnati Bengals last appear in a Super Bowl?
  - A) 1990 B) 1989
  - C) 1993
  - D) 1995

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- **6.** Who did the Rams defeat during Super Bowl XXXVI?
  - A) Tennessee Titans
  - B) New England Patriots
  - C) Denver Broncos
  - D) Miami Dolphir
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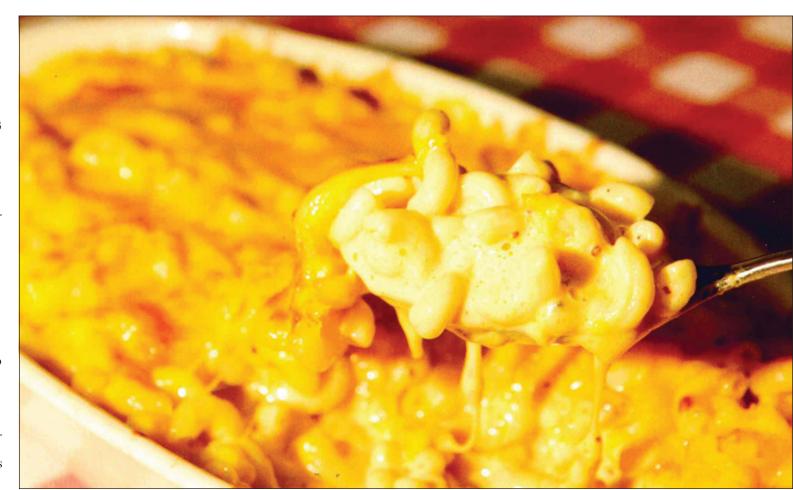
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### Homemade mac and cheese tailor-made for the big game

osting a Super Bowl party for friends and family is a big responsibility. Each year, well over 100 million people watch the championship game of the National Football League. In fact, according to Nielsen, 111.3 million people in the United States tuned in to watch the New England Patriots' thrilling and historic comeback victory in Super Bowl LI in 2017.

While people anxiously anticipate watching the NFL's biggest game of the year, many are equally excited to attend Super Bowl parties, where they can watch the game with loved ones while enjoying delicious food and drink. Some Super Bowl party hosts may prefer to have their parties catered, while others enjoy getting in the kitchen to prepare some homemade foods for their guests. Hosts among the latter group can prepare familiar crowd favorites that are sure to please, such as this easilyprepared recipe for "Crusty Mac and Cheese" from Neal Corman's "Virgil's Barbecue Road Trip Cookbook" (St. Martin's Press).



Some Super Bowl party hosts may prefer to have their parties catered, while others enjoy getting in the kitchen to prepare some homemade foods for their guests. Hosts among the latter group can prepare familiar crowd favorites that are sure to please, such as this easily-prepared recipe for "Crusty Mac and Cheese" from Neal Corman's "Virgil's Barbecue Road Trip Cookbook" (St. Martin's Press).

#### **Crusty Mac and Cheese**

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 pound elbow macaroni 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1/2 cup chicken stock
- 3/4 cup heavy cream 1/2 tablespoon Worcestershire
- sauce 1/2
  - 1/2 tablespoon hot sauce
  - 1/2 tablespoon Creole mustard
- 11/4 cup Cheese Wiz 8 ounces sharp cheddar
- cheese, shredded
- 1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
- Grease a 2-quart baking dish.
- 2. Boil the macaroni in a 2-quart saucepan filled with water, until it is al dente, or still has some snap when you bite it. Strain the pasta and rinse thor-
- oughly with cold water. Set aside.
  3. Combine the remaining
- ingredients, except for the shredded cheese, in a medium saucepan over medium heat. The mixture should be barely simmering. Whisk periodically. Cook for 7 to
- 10 minutes.

  4. In a large mixing bowl, combine the cheese sauce with
- the pasta and about one-third of the shredded cheese. Transfer to the baking dish, covering with the remaining shredded cheese, and bake covered for 10 minutes.
- 5. Uncover and bake for 15 minutes more, or until the top is golden brown. -METRO