NFL · SEPTEMBER 19, 2026

Vikings at Bears, Week 2 of 2026: Full Preview of the NFC North's First-Place Game

Minnesota visits Chicago on Sunday 20 September 2026 with both teams 1–0. The Vikings start Carson Wentz for the concussed Kyler Murray, while Chicago's 59-point, 291-yard rushing opener meets Brian Flores' 78.3% blitz rate. The Bears are 4.5-point favourites, and no outlet's majority picks Minnesota.

19 min read · 24 sources · Updated Sep 19, 2026

2026 season | NFC North | injury report | quarterback competition | schedule preview | spread | week 2

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Two teams that could not have won more differently in Week 1 meet at Soldier Field on Sunday, and the winner leaves Week 2 alone atop the NFC North. Minnesota needed 29 unanswered points and a backup quarterback to beat Green Bay; Chicago scored 59 and still managed to worry its own coaching staff about the defence.

The game's organising principle is simple: the NFL's most aggressive defensive coordinator against the NFL's most aggressive offensive head coach, with a rusty starter under centre for the visiting side. It is

the fifth time Caleb Williams has faced a Brian Flores defence, the seventh instalment of Johnson-versus-Flores, and the Vikings' sixth attempt in a row at Soldier Field.

Bears -4.5	47.5–48	65.6%	78.3%	1 p.m. ET
Spread	Total	ESPN FPI for Chicago	Vikings' Week 1 blitz rate	Kickoff, FOX
BetMGM and DraftKings, 17–18 Sept	`47.5 DK, 48 BetMGM`	`by an average of 4.5`	no other team above 52%	

The game at a glance

Kickoff: Sunday, 20 September 2026, 1 p.m. ET / noon CT. **Venue:** Soldier Field, Chicago. **Television:** FOX, with Joe Davis on play-by-play, Greg Olsen as analyst and Pam Oliver on the sideline. Streaming is available on FOXONE, NFL Sunday Ticket and RedZone [6].

The market opened and has largely stayed with Chicago. BetMGM had the Bears at **-4.5 with a total of 48** as of Thursday 17 September, with the moneyline at **Bears -210 / Vikings +175** [6]. ESPN quoted DraftKings at **Bears -4.5, 47.5** [3]. Vikings Territory logged a slightly steeper **Chicago -5.5 with a 48.5 total** on 16 September, suggesting the line was up at some books earlier in the week before settling [15]. ESPN's Football Power Index gives the Bears a **65.6% win probability, by an average of 4.5 points** [3].

Weather will not be neutral

The forecast is the kind that tilts a game toward the running team and the kicker with the stronger leg. Fantasy Nerds has Soldier Field at a **high of 70°F, a low of 65°F, a wind-chill of 68°F and wind at 14 mph**, with rain [18]. Sportsbook Review, using NFLWeather.com data, reports **70°F, cloudy, a 30% chance of rain, a 12 mph north-east wind and projected gusts over 20 mph**, and flags that conditions "could affect both passing games in the Windy City" [19].

Bring Me The Sports, which had a reporter at Friday's rainy Vikings practice, put it more bluntly: there is "a chance of rain, and it could be heavy at times. Winds could also gust up to 30 mph" [20]. Vikings head coach Kevin O'Connell had his team practising in a drizzle on Friday in preparation for exactly that [4]. A soggy field and a crosswind argues against the deep shots Williams takes so well and towards the between-the-tackles run game Chicago just used to hang 291 yards on Carolina.

What is at stake

Both clubs are 1–0, so Sunday is effectively an early referendum on the division. The winner is alone in first place in the NFC North after two weeks; the loser drops into a four-way logjam in a division where all four teams finished 2025 with a winning record [6].

For Chicago it is also the 2026 home opener — and the first time the Bears have played at Soldier Field since the **divisional-round overtime loss to the Los Angeles Rams on 18 January 2026**, when Caleb Williams threw a game-tying touchdown with 18 seconds left and then a third interception in overtime[16]. The Bears were **11–6 in 2025, won the NFC North for the first time since 2018**, and beat Green Bay 31–27 in the wild card round after trailing 21–3 at halftime, their first playoff win since 2010[16].

Minnesota's 2025 went the other way: a **4–8 start**, elimination from playoff contention in Week 15, and a 9–8 finish built on a five-game winning streak that arrived too late. Not a single Viking made the Pro Bowl. General manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah was fired on 30 January 2026, and Seattle assistant general manager **Nolan Teasley was hired as his replacement in late May**[17].

- 18 Jan 2026 — **Bears lose divisional round in OT**
  Rams 20–17 in Chicago, the last game at Soldier Field before Sunday.
- 30 Jan 2026 — **Vikings fire their GM**
  Kwesi Adofo-Mensah out after a 9–8 season; Nolan Teasley hired from Seattle in May.
- 13 Sep 2026 — **Both teams win openers**
  Chicago 59–37 at Carolina; Minnesota 39–22 over Green Bay at home.
- 20 Sep 2026 — **First place on the line**
  Bears home opener, noon CT, FOX.

The Bears in Week 1: 59 points and a warning sign

Chicago's 59–37 win at Carolina was the **highest-scoring season opener in NFL history**, and the first 59–37 final score the league has ever produced[2][10]. The raw numbers are almost absurd: **552 total yards, 291 rushing yards, eight touchdowns, and points on nine of 14 drives** — eight touchdowns, a field goal, two punts, a fumble and a turnover on downs[7].

The run game did the damage. **D'Andre Swift ran 18 times for 124 yards and three touchdowns** and was named NFC Offensive Player of the Week, while **Kyle Monangai added 10 carries for 100 yards and a score**[10][9]. **Caleb Williams completed 21 of 29 passes for 269 yards and two touchdowns, with no interceptions, and added 65 rushing yards and two more scores**[1][10]. Kalif Raymond caught eight passes for 84 yards; Cole Kmet caught two for 35 and a touchdown[1][2].

The 291 rushing yards were Chicago's most in a game since Walter Payton's offence ran for 302 in Week 2 of 1984, and **154 of those yards came outside the tackles**[1][5]. It was also the fourth time this decade any team has scored 59 or more in a game[5].

The problem is the other side of the ball. Chicago **allowed 478 yards and 37 points** to Carolina, the third-worst defensive yardage total in the league in Week 1, with Bryce Young posting near-perfect

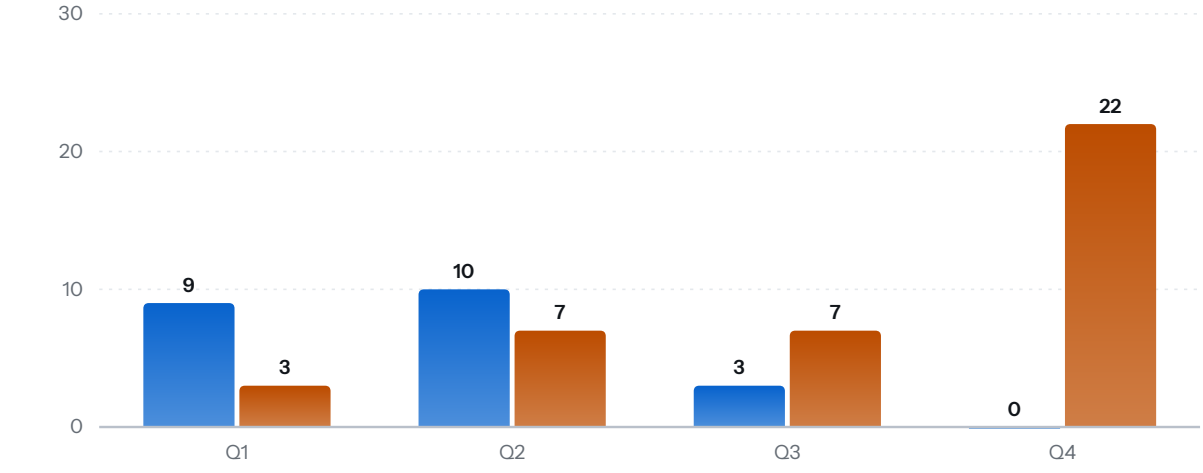
efficiency numbers[12]. The Bears did force three turnovers and got a late stop, but the shape of the team after one week is an elite offence and a defence that will need to outscore people[12].

The Vikings in Week 1: 29 unanswered points

Minnesota's opener is the strangest box score of the young season. The Vikings **trailed 22–10 in the third quarter, then scored the game's final 29 points** to win 39–22 — while being **outgained 419 to 239**[8]. Jordan Love threw for 387 yards and the Packers averaged 6.3 yards a play to Minnesota's 3.9, and it did not matter[8].

The reasons were situational. Minnesota **converted four of four red-zone trips into touchdowns** while Green Bay managed one of four. The Packers went **3 of 12 on third down and 0 of 2 on fourth down**, and committed **12 penalties for 98 yards** to Minnesota's three for 15[8]. Green Bay also lost a fumble and threw a fourth-quarter interception after a failed fourth-and-one sneak, and the Vikings converted both into points[8].

Carson Wentz, in relief, completed 12 of 19 for 133 yards, three touchdowns, no interceptions and a 123.5 passer rating[1][8]. **Justin Jefferson caught eight passes for 92 yards and two touchdowns** plus a two-point conversion; T.J. Hockenson added a 16-yard score; Aaron Jones Sr. and Jordan Mason each ran one in[8].



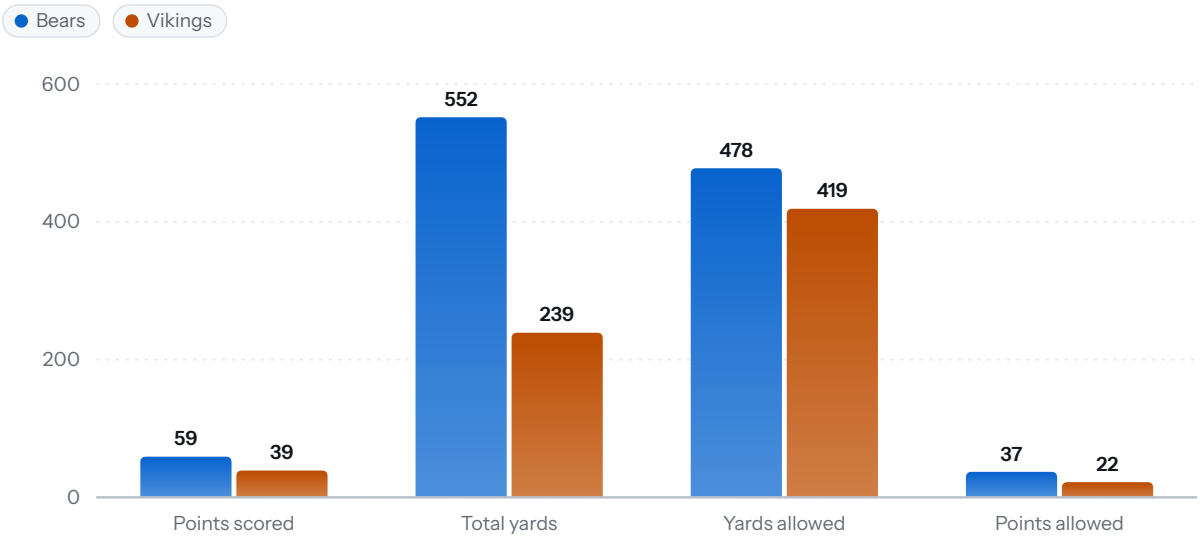
Source: ESPN box score via Football Nation. Minnesota scored the final 29 points.

Defensively, **Dallas Turner produced a sack and a career-high seven quarterback hits** — the most by any player in a game since Chris Jones recorded eight for Kansas City in Week 15 of 2018[2]. The Athletic counted **ten pressures** for Turner, while PFF logged **nine total pressures including one**

sack; the club and AP figures differ on how pressures are tallied, but nobody disputes the volume[2][14]. Jordan Love was pressured on roughly half his dropbacks and sacked four times in the second half[2][5].

According to Stats Perform, Minnesota became the **first team in NFL history to win by 17 or more points after trailing by 12 or more with less than 20 minutes left in regulation**[2].

Week 1 output: two offences, two very different days



Sources: NFL.com game centre, ESPN, Football Nation, On Tap Sports Net.

Quarterbacks: Murray out, Wentz in for his 100th start

Kyler Murray, who won the starting job in training camp and made his Vikings debut in Week 1, is **out in the concussion protocol**[4]. He was injured on his **11th play** against Green Bay and lay motionless on the field; multiple teammates said his body was in the fencing position, a common post-concussion response[11]. He had completed **3 of 5 passes for 18 yards and thrown an interception** before leaving[8].

O'Connell said the Vikings would monitor Murray day by day and that "the protocol is kind of the guiding light"[11]. ESPN's injury page lists his estimated return as **27 September**, i.e. Week 3 at Tampa Bay, which is consistent with a stage-by-stage protocol clearance rather than a longer absence[24].

That hands the offence back to **Carson Wentz, who will make his 100th career start**[1]. He is **4–0 in his career against the Bears**, and the occasion is not lost on him:

> *"I've been around a lot. It's kind of fitting to start my 100th game with the team I grew up cheering for … so very blessed for that. Hopefully we can get in the win column on that, too." — Carson Wentz*[1]

The depth chart beneath him is the season's most awkward story. **J.J. McCarthy, the 2024 first-round pick and 2025 starter, is third string** behind Wentz[22]. He was named the backup in August, then dropped to QB3 at the start of September, and called the demotion a "speed bump" in his career while saying Minnesota "is the place I want to be"[22]. If Murray's protocol stretches, **Max Brosmer could be elevated from the practice squad** to serve as the backup[11].

12 Aug 2026
Murray named QB1
J.J. McCarthy demoted to backup; Murray gets the first-team reps.

9-10 Sep 2026
McCarthy drops to third string
Carson Wentz becomes the primary backup.

13 Sep 2026
Murray concussed on his 11th play
Wentz replaces him and throws three touchdowns in a 39–22 win.

16 Sep 2026
Jordan Mason to injured reserve
Thumb surgery; minimum four games out. DeeJay Dallas promoted.

18 Sep 2026
Murray ruled out for Chicago
O'Connell confirms Wentz will start Sunday.

Injury reports and who is missing

Minnesota's Friday report is short and lopsided: two players out, one questionable, and everyone else expected to play[4].

VIKINGS PLAYER	POS.	INJURY	WED	THU	FRI	STATUS
Kyler Murray	QB	Concussion	LP	LP	LP	**Out**
Jauan Jennings	WR	NIR – personal	DNP	DNP	DNP	**Out**
Brian O'Neill	T	Knee	LP	DNP	LP	**Questionable**
Blake Cashman	LB	Wrist	LP	FP	FP	—
Andrew Van Ginkel	OLB	Chest	LP	LP	FP	—
Christian Darrisaw	T	NIR – rest	—	—	DNP	—
Harrison Smith	S	NIR – rest	—	—	LP	—

Jauan Jennings, a 2026 free-agent addition, is out for a personal reason with an estimated return of 27 September[4][24]. **Brian O'Neill** practised Friday after sitting out Thursday with a knee injury and is the only Viking on the report whose availability is genuinely in doubt[4]. The left side of the line, meanwhile, should be fine: Christian Darrisaw and Harrison Smith were listed only for rest management[4].

There is one absence not on the report. **Jordan Mason, who led the Vikings with 15 carries for 59 yards and a touchdown in Week 1, had surgery to repair a fractured thumb and was placed on short-term injured reserve**, which means a minimum of four games out[11]. He reported soreness on the Monday after the opener[11]. Minnesota promoted **DeeJay Dallas** from the practice squad — he played seven snaps against Green Bay — and signed **Jerome Ford** to the practice squad, so Dallas is the likely primary backup behind Aaron Jones Sr., with rookie Demond Claiborne also on the roster[11].

Chicago, by contrast, has no game-status designations at all. Ten Bears appeared on the week's report, and **every one of them finished as a full participant on Friday**, including D'Andre Swift (ankle/knee), Kyle Monangai (hamstring), Darnell Wright (knee), Joe Thuney (rest), Dayo Odeyingbo (shoulder), Xavier Woods (groin), Ozzy Trapilo (knee), Malik Muhammad II (ankle), Neville Gallimore (illness) and Grady Jarrett (rest)[4]. The unavailable list is all longer-term: **Kyler Gordon** (PUP, calf), **Shemar Turner** (PUP, ACL), **Anthony Johnson Jr.** (out until at least 18 October), **Dallis Flowers** and **Jonathan Garvin** on injured reserve[24].

Ben Johnson against Brian Flores: round seven

Nothing else about this game matters as much as this. Ben Johnson is **5–1 when calling plays against a Flores-coached defence, averaging 27.5 points a game**[2], and he has said out loud that he wants to coach the highest-scoring offence in league history[1].

Flores' counter is volume pressure, and Week 1 was extreme even by his standards. Minnesota **blitzed on 78.3% of Green Bay's pass plays, per Next Gen Stats — no other team in the league was above 52% in Week 1**[5][23]. ESPN reported an **83% blitz rate in the first half** that throttled down to **71.7% for the game, nearly tripling the league average**[3]. The two figures come from different tracking services and describe slightly different things; either way, the Packers' quarterback was pressured on about half his dropbacks[5].

The chess-match framing is Flores' own:

> *"What are we getting week to week? It's hard to know. So a lot of the game is adjustments. … It's certainly a chess match. … It's a lot of fun. And it's a major challenge. That's what we all signed up for." — Brian Flores*[6]

Johnson's response is that preparation only goes so far:

> *"You'd like to think he's put everything he could possibly do on tape until you play him next and you realize he hasn't yet. There always is with him. That's what makes him such a good coordinator." — Ben Johnson*[6]

The good news for Chicago is that Williams has been good against extra rushers. In the Week 1 win at Carolina he was **9 of 14 for 142 yards and two touchdowns when blitzed** [23]. His history against Flores specifically is more mixed: blitzed on **37.2% of his dropbacks in the 2025 opener, he went 6 of 13 for 36 yards and a touchdown**; when Flores sent a blitz **66.7% of the time in the Week 11 rematch, he completed 11 of 21 for 126 yards**, or 6.0 yards per attempt [3] [7]. His **5.84% sack rate in four career meetings with Minnesota is the third lowest of any quarterback with two or more starts against Flores since 2023**, behind Justin Herbert (4%) and Jordan Love (5.56%) [1].

Williams described the week as a grind and the opponent as sui generis: Flores is "one of a kind" [6], and Johnson calls the exercise a "mental war" [7]. He has a nickname for the man, coined as a rookie: the "King of the Cover-0 blitz" [7].

Four matchups that will decide it

1. Justin Jefferson versus Jaylon Johnson

Jefferson is the constant. He caught **eight passes for 92 yards and two touchdowns** in Week 1 and has **59 catches for 790 yards and four touchdowns in 10 career games against Chicago** [2]. Johnson, the Bears' boundary corner, **missed both 2025 meetings with Minnesota** and has one interception in six games against the Vikings; he is also coming off a shaky afternoon against Carolina [2]. Minnesota's own receivers averaged only **3.2 yards of separation** in Week 1, a figure Johnson's teammates can attack [5].

2. Chicago's run game versus Minnesota's front

This is where the game is most likely to be settled. The Bears have now **run for 280 or more yards in a game three times under Johnson, tripling the number of times that had happened in franchise history before he arrived** [5]. Minnesota's defence, for all the pressure, held Green Bay to **66 rushing yards at 3.1 a carry** in Week 1 — but that was against backup running backs behind a banged-up line, with Josh Jacobs out [1].

The Vikings' vulnerability is structural: when Flores blitzes, the second level thins out, and **154 of Chicago's 291 rushing yards in Week 1 came outside the tackles** [5]. O'Connell's own preview notes Minnesota gave up about **130 yards a game to Chicago's backfield in 2025** [1]. The Bears' line — Braxton Jones, Joe Thuney, former Viking Garrett Bradbury, Jonah Jackson and Darnell Wright — reset the line of scrimmage against Carolina and will have to do it again against constant movement [1].

> KEY FINDING
>
> If Chicago runs for 150-plus yards, Flores cannot stay at a 70%-plus blitz rate without leaving his secondary in one-on-one coverage against a passing game that just scored 59 points.

3. Dallas Turner versus Chicago's tackles

Turner, 23 and in his first year as a full-time starter, sat out only 12 defensive snaps in Week 1[14]. His seven quarterback hits in a single game is the sort of line that changes an opponent's protection scheme. Chicago has to decide how often it leaves Wright or Jones alone on him and how often it keeps a back or tight end in to chip — which in turn removes an outlet from the passing game.

4. Chicago's defence versus a 3.2-yard separation offence

The Bears allowed **478 yards and 37 points** in Week 1[12]. They now face better skill players than Carolina's: Jefferson, Jordan Addison, T.J. Hockenson. The counterargument is that Minnesota's offence generated almost nothing on its own terms in Week 1 — **239 yards at 3.9 a play** — and that Wentz is a career backup who has not sustained clean football over a full game in years[8][15].

	Bears offence (Week 1)	vs	Vikings defence (Week 1)
Points	59	·	22 allowed
Total yards	552	·	419 allowed
Rushing yards	291	·	66 allowed
Drives ending in points	9 of 14	·	3 of 12 third downs allowed
Sacks	2 recorded	·	4 recorded

Sources: ESPN, NFL.com, Football Nation, On Tap Sports Net.

The Soldier Field problem

Minnesota leads the all-time series **69-59-2** and Sunday is the **131st meeting**[2][5]. Since 2021 the Vikings have won **eight of the past 10**, and the Bears' 19–17 win in Minneapolis last November ended a three-game Minnesota win streak in the series[5].

But it is the venue that carries the strongest signal. **The Vikings have won six straight games at Soldier Field**[2]. A seventh would **match the franchise record for consecutive road wins over a single division opponent** — Minnesota won seven straight at Detroit from 1968 to 1974 and seven straight at Green Bay from 1971 to 1977[2][5]. Chicago is also **the only team in the NFL that has not beaten every one of its division rivals at home at least once since 2020**; from 2001 to 2019 the Bears were 16–3 at home against Minnesota, which makes the recent reversal sharper[5].

The 2025 meetings explain the current texture of the matchup. In the season opener on **8 September 2025**, J.J. McCarthy threw two fourth-quarter touchdown passes and ran for another in his NFL debut as the Vikings won **27–24** at Soldier Field on Monday night[6]. In Week 11 at U.S. Bank Stadium, **Chicago won 19–17** — the game both coordinators still reference when they talk about blitz rates[2][3].

O'Connell brings an unusual profile into his 70th regular-season game: **31 of his 44 career wins have come by one score (70.5%)**, and he is **5–1 in one-score games against the Bears**. He has 13 career double-digit wins, seven of them against NFC North opponents [5]. Johnson is **12–6** as a head coach [21].

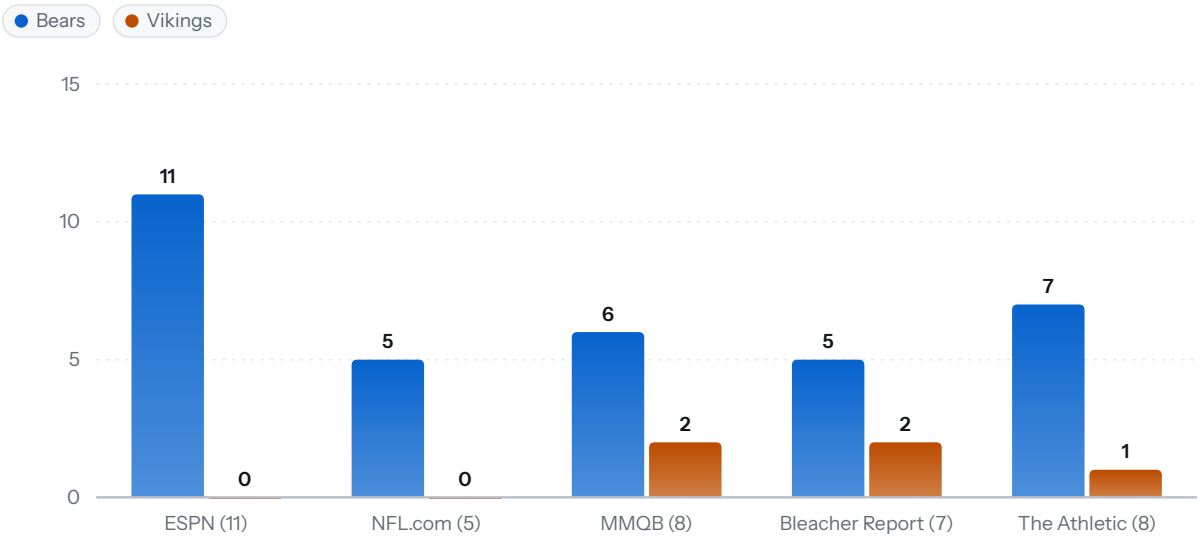
	Bears, 2025	vs	Vikings, 2025
Record	11–6, NFC North champions	·	9–8, third in the North
Points per game	25.9	·	20.2
Points allowed per game	24.4	·	19.6
Offensive yards per game	379.2	·	297.0
Defensive yards per game	373.8	·	299.8
Playoffs	Lost divisional round, 20–17 OT	·	Did not qualify

Sources: Vikings Wire season statistics; Pro Football Reference/Wikipedia records.

What the models and the experts say

This is close to a unanimous pick, and the unanimity itself is worth noting given how narrow the spread is. **ESPN's panel went 11–0 for Chicago; NFL.com's five editors went 5–0** [5] [23]. The Athletic's eight-person panel had **only Chad Graff on Minnesota** — and fellow Athletic writer J.J. Bailey publicly called it "a real heat-check of a pick" [5]. The MMQB split 6–2 and Bleacher Report 5–2, the two friendliest panels for the Vikings [5]. Bring Me The Sports noted wryly that "four of our five pickers didn't drink enough purple Kool-Aid this week" [20].

Expert picks by outlet: Bears vs Vikings



Source: outlet pick panels as compiled by vikings.com, 17 Sept 2026.

OUTLET / ANALYST	PREDICTION
USA Today (Chris Bumbaca)	Bears 31, Vikings 23
CBS Sports (Pete Prisco)	Bears 30, Vikings 24
Sporting News (Bill Bender)	Bears 30, Vikings 23
Sporting News (Vinnie Iyer)	Bears 38, Vikings 24
Bears Wire (Alyssa Barbieri)	Bears 34, Vikings 30
Bears Wire (Brendan Sugrue)	Bears 38, Vikings 31
Bears Wire (Mike Pendleton)	Bears 41, Vikings 24
Bears Wire (Vincent Parise)	Bears 34, Vikings 28
Bears Wire (Ariana Pensy)	Bears 31, Vikings 27
Bears Wire (Randy Holt)	Bears 40, Vikings 31
ESPN (Pamela Maldonado)	Bears 31, Vikings 24
ESPN (Eric Moody)	Bears 35, Vikings 26
ESPN (Seth Walder)	Bears 34, Vikings 17
Vikings Territory (Josh Frey, vs. spread)	Chicago -5.5, "might be by double digits"
Vikings On SI (Adam Carlson)	Vikings lose a close one

The reasoning converges on the same two points: the Bears' run game will limit how freely Flores can blitz, and Wentz is not the quarterback to win a shootout against a 59-point offence[6][9]. ESPN's Walder went further with a bold prediction that **Wentz will throw multiple interceptions**, on the grounds that "this is still Wentz, and I assume he's still prone to a mistake or four"[3]. Minnesota's own beat writers found the counterargument thin: SI's Vikings correspondent predicted both that Jefferson scores and that the Bears run for over 150 yards and two touchdowns in a Minnesota loss[14].

ESPN's Ben Solak rated the game **9.0 out of 10 for watchability**, calling it the most fun schematic matchup in the league, with "a bad Bears defence on the other side of the ball" guaranteeing explosive plays[3].

Records in reach and fantasy angles

Chicago needs 37 points to break the NFL record for the most points in a team's first two games — the 1968 Raiders' 95[3]. That is a live possibility against a defence that just allowed 419 yards, and it is the reason Johnson keeps saying the offence has "not scored any points yet this week"[12].

Individually, **D'Andre Swift is 101 rushing yards from 5,000 for his career**[2], and **Cole Kmet needs four catches to pass Allen Robinson's 293 and move into ninth on the Bears' all-time reception list**[2].

37	101	4	6
Points Bears need for the two-game scoring record	Rushing yards Swift needs for 5,000	Catches Kmet needs for 9th in Bears history	Straight Vikings wins at Soldier Field
`1968 Raiders, 95`	`career`	past Allen Robinson's 293	franchise record is 7

The fantasy case for Minnesota runs through volume rather than efficiency. **Luther Burden III drew only five targets and scored 9.5 fantasy points in Week 1, but led Chicago's receivers in routes run**, and now meets a Vikings secondary that let Christian Watson and Matthew Golden combine for **48.2 fantasy points**[3]. ESPN's panel notes that **all five of Wentz's starts for Minnesota in 2025 went over the game total**[3], which is consistent with a quarterback who takes sacks and shots in equal measure. Colston Loveland, the Bears' second-year tight end, was held without a catch in Week 1 despite the 59-point outburst, and multiple Chicago writers expect that to change against a blitzing defence that leaves the middle open[6][12].

The wind is the one variable that could suppress all of it. Whoever punts into a 20-to-30 mph gust and whoever attempts field goals from distance — Minnesota's Will Reichard was a first-team All-Pro in 2025[17] — will be playing a different game from the one the scoreboards produced in Week 1.

Bottom line

Everything about this matchup points the same direction. One team is healthy, at home, coming off the highest-scoring opener in league history, and has a head coach who is 5–1 against the opposing coordinator. The other is starting a 33-year-old backup on a short week of preparation, has lost its leading rusher for a month, has not won at Soldier Field since 2020, and is asking a defence that surrendered 419 yards to hold a 59-point offence under 30. The consensus pick — Chicago, five of every six analysts, in a one-score-to-ten-point game — is where the evidence sits.

Two things would flip it. The rain and wind could make this a ground-and-punt game, in which case a 291-yard rushing afternoon is not repeatable and a Flores defence that lives on takeaways in the fourth quarter (Minnesota is 21–2 under O'Connell with a winning turnover margin, and 36–4 when it is plus-one or better) gets to decide it [1]. The other is Wentz, who is 4–0 against this opponent and has Jefferson on the outside. If the Bears' secondary plays the way it did in Carolina, the pick against the spread is a bet on Johnson's offence outscoring a bad defence by five points rather than on the defence holding.

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