



The 1980 NFL Season: The stories of the league's most consequential teams (Past NFL Seasons Book

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Dan Flaherty

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Read the story of the 1980 NFL season as told from the perspective of the 11 most consequential teams. Each section consists of a discussion of each team's key players and then a game-by-game narrative of their drive through the season.

No wild-card team had ever won the Super Bowl prior to the 1980 NFL season, and three years earlier the league had made it even more difficult. They expanded the playoffs to five teams per conference, but with a three-divisional alignment similar to what major league baseball uses today, the wild-cards would now have to win an extra game for the first time. In spite of these obstacles, the Oakland Raiders pulled it off and went the distance.

This blog compilation contains the complete game-by-game narratives of every notable team in the 1980 NFL season, starting with...

*The Raiders and Houston Oilers pull off a big quarterbacks swap of Ken Stabler-for-Dan Pastorini, but it ends up being Jim Plunkett who makes the biggest mark of them all.

See how Oakland began to come together around the 1980 season's midway point and how Houston seemed close to fulfilling their dream of a Super Bowl run behind powerful back Earl Campbell, but first lost tiebreakers and then lost a wild-card playoff game...ironically in Oakland.

*In the NFC East, the Philadelphia Eagles and Dallas Cowboys were both at the top of the NFL and jostled all season for the top. See the strange way the Eagles "beat" the Cowboys in the season's final week. It proved to be a historic year for both franchises—Philadelphia made its first Super Bowl trip and Dallas began the post-Roger Staubach era.

*The Atlanta Falcons and Cleveland Browns each had magical years, and both were in positions to win playoff games at home, against the more tradition-laden Cowboys and Raiders respectively. Each had their hearts ripped out. Read how their rises to prominence came about before the fall.

*The San Diego Chargers continued to be the league's most exciting offense with Dan Fouts at quarterback, and went all-in to try and win in 1980. Read how they survived Oakland in the AFC West during the season before losing to the Raiders in the playoffs.

*The Buffalo Bills stepped up and won the AFC East. Read how an excellent head coach in Chuck Knox guided a team through the season even though they didn't have the best talent.

*The Minnesota Vikings and Los Angeles Rams, two powers of the 1970s, would fade briefly in this decade, but still had enough in the tank to reach the playoffs. Read how the Vikings crawled to the finish line in a weak NFC Central, aided by a miracle pass, and the Rams played their way into the postseason a year after making a Super Bowl run.

*And how can we forget the Pittsburgh Steelers? They didn't make the playoffs, but this was the two-time defending Super Bowl champion, with four titles in the previous six years. "One For The Thumb" was the rallying cry. You'll read how they came up short, as well as the moments at the early and mid-points when it seemed like they were still in position to make a championship run.

Each of these articles is published individually on TheSportsNotebook.com and editing has been done to eliminate obvious redundancies. Taken together, these eleven articles tell the story of the 1980 NFL season through the eyes of its most consequential teams.

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