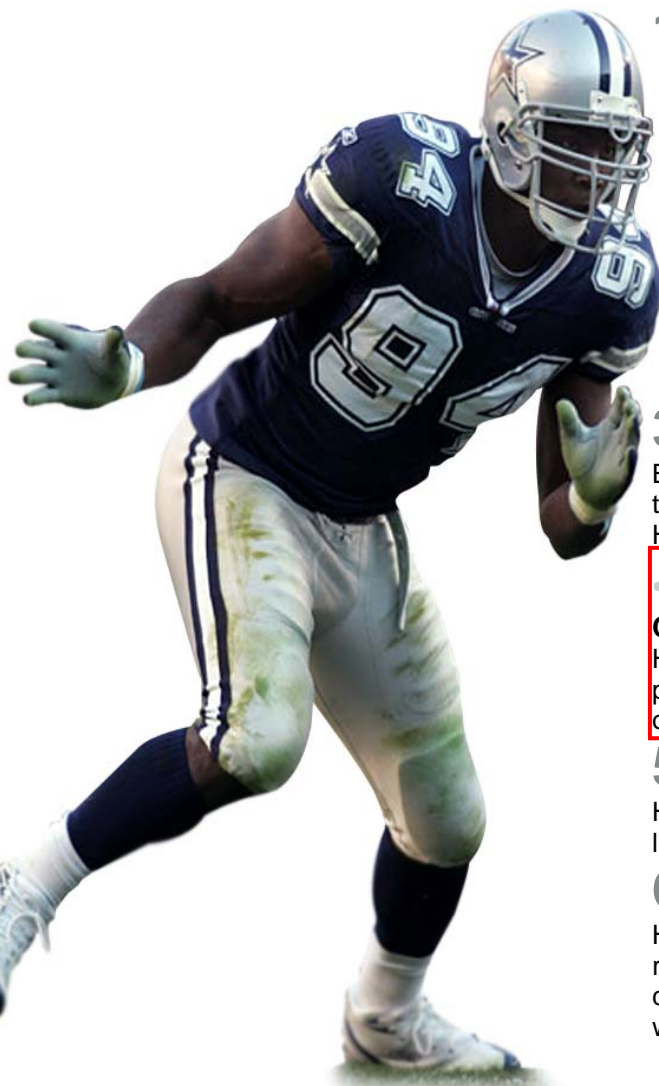


# SportingNews TODAY

RealScouts, *Sporting News Today's* team of former NFL scouts, projects the 25 players it expects to be most dominant in 2009:



**1. Peyton Manning, QB, Colts.**

His football IQ is unmatched. He's remarkably accurate, the ultimate competitor and indispensable.

**2. Adrian Peterson, RB, Vikings.**

He already is the NFL's best runner, and coaches say they'll finally throw him the ball this year.

**3. Tom Brady, QB, Patriots.**

Brady and the Patriots feel like the '08 season was taken from them. He's healthy, and it's payback time.

**<<4. DeMarcus Ware, OLB, Cowboys.**

He is a game-changer—an elite pass rusher with a stunning combination of size, speed, strength and agility.

**5. Larry Fitzgerald, WR, Cardinals.**

His postseason run is the stuff little boys and grown men dream about.

**6. James Harrison, OLB, Steelers.**

His biggest plays come as a pass rusher, but he does everything well. A complete and dominant player, Harrison wants to prove '08 was no fluke.

**7. Ed Reed, S, Ravens.**

An instinctive ballhawk, Reed is a future Hall of Famer and will continue to flourish in a system that won't change with the departure of Rex Ryan.

**8. Andre Johnson, WR, Texans.**

He was unstoppable when the Texans had no one else to stop. With improved depth at wideout and emergence of RB Steve Slaton and TE Owen Daniels, Johnson could move up the list.

**9. Troy Polamalu, S, Steelers.**

The catalyst for the Steelers' Super bowl runs, he is tough, smart, instinctive and versatile.

**10. Reggie Wayne, WR, Colts.**

He has been the Colts' go-to guy for a couple of years, a guy who can make something special happen on every touch. Marvin Harrison's departure won't have an impact.

11. Shawne Merriman  
OLB, Chargers  
12. Nnamdi Asomugha  
CB, Raiders  
13. Drew Brees  
QB, Saints  
14. Jared Allen  
DE, Vikings  
15. Albert Haynesworth  
DT, Redskins  
16. Ryan Clady  
OT, Broncos  
17. Julius Peppers  
DE, Panthers  
18. Jason Witten  
TE, Cowboys  
19. Anquan Boldin  
WR, Cardinals  
20. Randy Moss  
WR, Patriots  
21. Brian Urlacher  
MLB, Bears  
22. Steve Hutchinson  
G, Vikings  
23. Dwight Freeney  
DE, Colts  
24. Kevin Williams  
DT, Vikings  
25. Steven Jackson  
RB, Rams

# TOP 25 RANKINGS (11- 25)

It's important to understand a couple of things when you read the remaining list of the top players compiled by RealScouts, Sporting News Today's team of former NFL scouts.

First, there are only 25. By the time injury replacements were named, 97 players qualified for the Pro Bowl last season. So RealScouts had to skim the cream of the cream. Second, the overall list represents the 25 players they expect to be the best *in 2009*. In other words, it's a projection, not a salute to the past.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <b>Peyton Manning</b><br>QB, Colts       | 6. <b>James Harrison</b><br>OLB, Steelers |
| 2. <b>Adrian Peterson</b><br>RB, Vikings    | 7. <b>Ed Reed</b><br>S, Ravens            |
| 3. <b>Tom Brady</b><br>QB, Patriots         | 8. <b>Andre Johnson</b><br>WR, Texans     |
| 4. <b>DeMarcus Ware</b><br>OLB, Cowboys     | 9. <b>Troy Polamalu</b><br>S, Steelers    |
| 5. <b>Larry Fitzgerald</b><br>WR, Cardinals | 10. <b>Reggie Wayne</b><br>WR, Colts      |

**15. Albert Haynesworth, DT, Redskins**

He is a dominant run defender with the size and quickness to also be a disruptive pass rusher. His production might not justify his contract, but he'll absolutely improve the Redskins' defense in '09.

**16. Ryan Clady, OT, Broncos**

Standard bearers Walter Jones and Orlando Pace still are good, but Clady was the NFL's best pass protector as a rookie and the biggest improvement in most NFL players comes between Years 1 and 2.

**17. Julius Peppers, DE, Panthers**

If he is going to play in '09, it's going to be in Carolina. He is coming off a career year, and the team is poised for another playoff run. If he can "accept" his \$16.7 million, one-year contract, he should dominate again.

**18. Jason Witten, TE, Cowboys**

With Terrell Owens out of the picture, Witten will get even more looks from pal Tony Romo. Witten is an excellent blocker with the speed, hands and route-running ability to remain a top receiving threat.

**19. Anquan Boldin, WR, Cardinals**

A big, physical receiver, he makes his biggest plays after the catch. He shows great toughness catching balls over the middle, too.

**20. Randy Moss, WR, Patriots**

No one is more excited about the return of Brady than Moss. The two were unstoppable in '07, and there is little reason to think they won't pick up where they left off.

**21. Brian Urlacher, MLB, Bears**

Urlacher had a down year in '08, but with improved play up front there's no reason he can't reassert himself as the do-it-all middle man in the Bears' cover 2 scheme.

**22. Steve Hutchinson, G, Vikings**

Peterson should be thankful for Hutchinson, one of the most physical and dominant run blockers in the game.

**23. Dwight Freeney, DE, Colts**

With 10 1/2 sacks, Freeney enjoyed a bounce-back year in '08. When healthy, his speed off the edge is unmatched.

**24. Kevin Williams, DT, Vikings**

The potential for a four-game suspension hurts his ranking, but he is one of the few players who can't be blocked one-on-one. He regularly beats double-teams and is an absolute force inside.

**25. Steven Jackson, RB, Rams**

The Rams will use a West Coast-style offense in '09 with a quarterback who never has played in the system and an inexperienced receiving unit. Jackson, a workhorse when healthy, will be more important than ever.

— RealScouts analyzes NFL and college players, coaches and teams exclusively for Sporting News Today. Published in June 6, 2009 issue.

**11. Shawne Merriman, OLB, Chargers**

After a year on the sideline, he is determined to be a force again, and coordinator Ron Rivera will make that happen. If Merriman is healthy, he'll be the focus of an elite defense.

**12. Nnamdi Asomugha, CB, Raiders**

When Peyton Manning avoids Asomugha's side of the field, it tells you all you need to know about this guy. He is the NFL's top cover corner.

**13. Drew Brees, QB, Saints**

Reggie Bush, Jeremy Shockey and Marques Colston missed 15 games combined last year, and Brees—with his quick release and dead-on accuracy—still threw for 5,000 yards. With all his weapons in place, he'll lead the Saints back to the playoffs.

**14. Jared Allen, DE, Vikings**

He is an elite pass rusher and also is a force against the run who never gives up on a play. He is a tough who played through knee and shoulder injuries in '08.

