

Darnold and Maye face off, but only one will win Super Bowl 60

BY ROY MAADDI
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

SAN FRANCISCO — Nobody on the Seattle Seahawks has supported Sam Darnold quite like Ernest Jones IV.

When Darnold threw four interceptions against the Los Angeles Rams in a 21-19 loss in Week 11, Jones had his quarterback's back. The second-team All-Pro linebacker wouldn't allow Darnold to take the blame.

"Sam's been balling," Jones said after that game. "If we want to try and define Sam by this game, man, Sam's had us in every game. So, for him to sit there and say, 'Yo, that's my fault,' no, it's not. There were plays defensively we could have made plays, or opportunities where we could have got stops.

"This is football. He's our quarterback and we've got his back."

Darnold rewarded his teammate's faith. He led the Seahawks back from a 16-point, fourth-quarter deficit to an overtime win against Los Angeles in the next meeting and was sensational in Seattle's 31-27 victory over the Rams in the NFC championship game.

"Like I said, doubt Sam if you want to, Sam's gonna show you every time," Jones said afterward. "That's who we know, and that's why I stood on that, and I'll do it all over again."

Darnold has earned plenty of trust in the locker room in his first season in Seattle after a breakout year in Minnesota. Once considered a bust after the Jets drafted him No. 3 overall in 2018, Darnold — on his fifth team in eight seasons — is one victory away from leading Seattle to the franchise's second Lombardi Trophy.

Darnold and the Seahawks face Drake Maye and the New



Brynn Anderson

Seattle Seahawks quarterback Sam Darnold (14) speaks during a news conference on Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026, in San Jose, Calif., ahead of Super Bowl 60 between the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks.

England Patriots in the Super Bowl on Sunday in a rematch from a matchup 11 years ago.

Tom Brady and the Patriots won that one, 28-24, after Russell Wilson's pass from the 1-yard line in the final minute was intercepted by Malcolm Butler.

That gave Brady, coach Bill Belichick and the Patriots the fourth of their sixth Super Bowl rings before the dynasty ended.

First-year Patriots coach Mike Vrabel, a standout linebacker on three of those championship teams, has quickly turned a team that was coming off consecutive 4-13 seasons into a winner.

Maye has been the catalyst for New England's impressive turnaround.

"From Day 1, I feel like the guys have really taken what Coach Vrabel has wanted to do with us and have just really applied it to their lives in every single way," Maye said.

"Whether it's on the field, off the field, getting treatment, doing little things, making great decisions off the field. I think the biggest thing is just — Coach Vrabel always says he treats us how we treat the team. I think that's how guys have taken this year, and I think it's just rallying together and wanting to play for each other. From there on,

we just have had fun doing it every single day since, and it's been a ride. Looking forward to trying to finish it off."

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ran a bootleg to extend the drive on third down late in the AFC championship game against Denver to seal a 10-7 victory in the snow.

"I think just as we've gone through this entire year in this program, and the more that he's been out there and the games have kind of built up on us that, really, we've done a nice job in those situations," Vrabel said of Maye's maturity in big moments. "I think he's improved in them, and he's a big part of why we're here, obviously."

Of course, both teams are far more than just their quarterbacks.

Darnold has All-Pro wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, running back Kenneth Walker and Seattle's defense is the

stingiest in the league. The Seahawks allowed the fewest points in the NFL and have standout players at every level. Defensive tackle Leonard Williams, linebacker Jones and cornerback Devon Witherspoon were second-team All-Pros. Safety Nick Emmanwori had a standout rookie season.

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- DS

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