ST. LOUIS – Oh what a difference a year can make.

Prior to Sunday’s 34-27 win in St. Louis, the last time the 49ers played their divisional counterparts from the Midwest, the 49ers saw their postseason chances come to an end.

Following a 25-17 loss to the Rams on Dec. 26 of 2010, 49ers CEO Jed York faced the media, promising to make important changes in order to get the proud franchise back into Super Bowl contention.

“Our object is to win the Super Bowl – year-in and year-out be there and be able to compete for a Super Bowl,” York said that day. “We’re going to make sure we get this right.”

York and the 49ers front office have certainly done so.

After promoting Trent Baalke to General Manager and hiring coach Jim Harbaugh to a five-year contract, the 49ers have become one of the best stories of the 2011 NFL season.

Baalke and Harbaugh should be in consideration for Executive and Coach of the Year honors thanks to the duo working together to build an NFC West-winning team that finished 13-3 and as the NFC’s No. 2 seed. Baalke and his staff have brought in a number of contributing free agents and draft picks, while Harbaugh has become a difference-maker in his own right.

So what’s changed most with the 49ers?

“I think it’s the mindset of the players and coaches, the whole team and the organization,” said cornerback Tarell Brown, who recorded a career-high two interceptions against St. Louis. “Guys have really bought into what Coach Harbaugh has brought to the team. We really trust him. At the end of the day, as long as you trust your coach and your coach has confidence in you, and we’re out there playing ball so hard, you keep getting better.”

The changes to the 49ers organization could not be any more apparent than in St. Louis. Instead of ending the season in the visiting locker room of the Edward Jones Dome, the 49ers contemplated their newest challenge at hand.

Sure, their regular season technically ended in St. Louis. But really, there’s plenty to play for with the 49ers being two games away from appearing in the franchise’s sixth Super Bowl.
“We start a new season as of today,” Harbaugh said after the 49ers sixth road win in 2011, most for the organization since 1996. “We’ll enjoy this win and all the planning and preparation will be for the playoff season.”

The 49ers will not know their opponent until the Wild Card Playoff round concludes this weekend, but they’ll host either one of three teams: the Atlanta Falcons, New York Giants or New Orleans Saints. That game will be played Saturday, Jan. 14 at 1:30 p.m. PT at Candlestick Park.

Alex Smith was asked if he’d thought of the potential matchups down the road following the regular season finale which saw him surpass the 3,000-yard mark for the first time of his seven-year career.

“Haven’t even thought about it,” Smith said. “So locked in on this game.”

That’ll change quickly.

The 49ers will have an extra week to gameplan for their opponent. Judging by the creativity shown in all three phases of the game this season, the players expect their coaches to fully take advantage of the extra preparation time.

Perhaps even more important than scheme advantage, the 49ers will be well rested for the divisional round of the playoffs.

David Akers agrees. The 49ers kicker, who threw a 14-yard touchdown and set the NFL’s record for post points (165) in a single season with no touchdowns, knows just how important the playoff bye week is from his time in Philadelphia.

“It gives guys time to get healthy, first off. We have some banged up guys and that’s huge right there,” said Akers, the 13-year veteran. “You gameplan what you want to do and next week, you figure out who you’re playing and go from there.”

The percentages are in the 49ers favor to move on from their first playoff game, that’s according to running backs coach Tom Rathman, who spoke to the team prior to Sunday’s game in St. Louis.

Safety Donte Whitner shared the crux of Rathman’s talk.

“Rathman told the team last night, teams that get the first-round bye, win the second game 73-percent of the time,” Whitner shared. “We’re going to have two weeks to prepare for our opponent, two weeks to rest up, we’ll be ready and we’ll be fresh when we step on the field for that playoff game.”

As Smith explains, there’s no time to rest. “This isn’t a vacation. Everyone will be here. It’s a chance to get healthy and rest a little bit, but we’ll be around.”
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- January 2012
Cut Sourdough Sam out and bring him wherever you go!

Submit your snapshots at 49ers.com/SourdoughSam

Snap a photo of you and Sourdough Sam at your favorite place, on vacation, at school, or anywhere and submit your photo at 49ers.com/SourdoughSam!

The winning photo will be featured on Sourdough Sam’s Facebook page as well as in the Kids Club Playbook newsletter.

The winning photographer receives autographed 49ers items.

**Entry Deadline: Friday, February 10th**

**Follow Me!**
Facebook/SourdoughSam
Patrick’s Prototypes, Ray’s Renegades, Vernon’s VIPs. These are just some of the special sections that line the perimeter of Candlestick Park. Each section represents a specific 49ers CARE group, the program through which 49ers players donate blocks of 20 season tickets to non-profits in the Bay Area.

On Tuesday, Dec. 20, the 49ers Foundation celebrated a season of giving at the Celebrate the Season event at Global Winter Wonderland. Current 49ers players, including K David Akers, T Anthony Davis, C Jonathan Goodwin, G Mike Iupati, QB Scott Tolzien and LB Patrick Willis, alumni, and members of the 49ers Foundation spent the day interacting with representatives from the 49ers CARE beneficiaries, while everyone enjoyed amusement rides, food, visits with Santa, face-painting, and of course, the beautiful light display.

The day’s event included cameos from Sourdough Sam and the 49ers Gold Rush Cheerleaders, and was a great way to capture the spirit of the 49ers amazing season, both on the field and off, and to end the year with cheer.

“It’s so amazing to reach this point in the season to be where we are on the field, but then off the field to see what we’ve accomplished,” said Joanne Pasternack, executive director of community relations. “We’ve had a tremendous year. Not only did we have 100 percent of the players participate over the season, but we were also able to donate $2.4 million to the Bay Area community through the 49ers Foundation.”

“The 49ers are really generous in allowing us to purchase tickets for our foundations for each game,” said David Akers. “They allow us to buy 20 tickets and set up a program for these kids. I was a part of the Ronald McDonald House at Stanford, so we’ve been able to provide 300 tickets to the kids this season. Today is a great opportunity to just kind of connect with some of those families who have gone through some tough times in their life.”

Celebrating the season is exactly what the children and their families did as they got to know some of their favorite on-field heroes. “It’s exciting and humbling to actually meet the children who appreciate what you’re doing for them so much and we appreciate them as well, so it’s a win/win situation,” said Anthony Davis.

Partnering with the International Cultural Exchange Group (ICEG) to bring the event to life, Global Winter Wonderland opened two hours early for the special guests from the 49ers CARE beneficiaries.

The special Celebrate the Season event ended with a giant check presentation representing the 49ers Foundation’s charitable grants in 2011; however the amazing season and philanthropic efforts will continue.

Non-profits that received season tickets in 2011 included: The 49ers Academy, Special Olympics of Northern California, Fealofani Samoa III, Bring me a Book, YWCA of Silicon Valley, the California Police Activities League, Bay Area Women’s Sports Initiative, House of Grace (CityTeam Ministries), Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Ronald McDonald House at Stanford, Bayview/Hunter’s Point YMCA, Fresh Lifelines for Youth, the Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco, The ROLE Model Program and the US Armed Forces—representing a total of 3,200 49ers 2011 tickets.
San Francisco 49ers running back Frank Gore and Seattle Seahawk cornerback Richard Sherman battling on Christmas Eve in Seattle. The 49ers beat the Seahawks 19-17 and the 49ers returned home with a 12-3 record on the season.
Determined to get back on the field, linebacker Patrick Willis has been working diligently behind the scenes to play after missing San Francisco’s last three games. Willis, who’s fresh off his fifth consecutive Pro Bowl selection, has been limited in practice this week. 49ers.com caught up with the team’s star linebacker to hear his thoughts on Pro Bowl announcements and the big upcoming game in St. Louis.

Q: What was it like finding about your Pro Bowl selection along with seven other 49ers who share the honor with you?
A: It was a great feeling. In my years so far of going over there, one other time we had a large group of guys selected. A lot of times you see the other teams have five or six guys and you just feel like, “Man, why can’t our guys be over here with me?” And now to be able to hear that announcement in the team meeting room from Coach Harbaugh, to hear how many guys we had, it was a lot of fun.

Q: What did it mean to you to see Dashon Goldson get selected, a player drafted in the 2007 NFL Draft along with you?
A: Dashon’s a guy who came in five years ago and was a guy who I really looked up to. He’s a guy a lot like me. I love the way he practices. I love the energy he brings to the team. I just like talking to him period. He reminds me so much of myself as I’m sure I do to him. It’s been a long road, but it’s great to share the honor with him.

Q: How much pride do you take from seeing the defense playing such a big part in the team’s success, now one win away from clinching the NFC’s No. 2 seed?
A: So far, it’s been unbelievable. To finally have the type of defense I always felt like we could have on a team I always thought we could be – it means a lot. But at the same time, our goal is to focus on the game this weekend and win it, go to the playoffs and win those games to get to the Super Bowl. It would almost be bittersweet to do all this to only go home early. I keep that in the back of my mind.
Q: You’re the first 49ers player to make five Pro Bowl appearances to start a career, how much pride do you take in your consistency as a top-notch performer?

A: I take a lot of pride in being consistent. I’ve always felt as a player, consistency is what we’re measured by. Anybody can have a good game. Anybody can have a good year. It’s about being a pro. It’s about consistently trying to raise your game to another level that hasn’t been seen by others. That’s the way I’ve always tried to approach the game ever since I was a kid. I try to be the very best I can be now and not be the same player I was the season before. My whole goal is to get better every day and just keep it fun and continue to be positive no matter what. A lot of it has to do with that. I’ve been through too much in my life in 26 years to not want it, to not go get it. God has been good. My teammates have been unbelievable. My coaches in the past and my coaches now, I have all them to thank for what I have achieved thus far. I just hope I stay positive, stay focused, stay humble and stay hungry.

Q: I know you’re working hard behind the scenes to get back on the field from the hamstring injury that’s caused you to miss the last three games, but do you pick up more on the mental side of the game when you’re watching on the sideline?

A: I do. It’s one of those things when you have nothing but time to think, you start to think about a lot of things. You think about what you could do better. To be able to see it from the sideline and to miss it the way that I have, it’s really opened my eyes up on certain things. If I see something or anticipate it, I’ll think, “I can play it like this,” or, “I can rush it like this,” or, “I can cover it like this.” You see all that from the sideline, from a coach or a fan’s perspective. Just having it taken away from me period for a little while, it’ll just make me appreciate it that much more when I get the opportunity to go back out and play.
In December, the 49ers Kids Club asked members to snap a photo in their best Play60 moment! We wanted to see how you stay healthy and exercise, whether by playing sports or eating a nutritional meal.

The winning Kids Club member Ethan, age 8, from Susanville, CA, submitted the above photo playing catch with his father in Disney World during the halftime of the 49ers vs. Detroit Lions football game.

Ethan was invited along with his family to visit 49ers Headquarters in Santa Clara, CA to take a tour of the training facility and see the 49ers’ five Super Bowl trophies. Along with the tour, Ethan will be the Kickoff Kid for the 49ers playoff game on Saturday, January 14th at Candlestick Park.

As a Kickoff Kid, Ethan will run to the center of the field to remove the kicker’s tee after kickoff. Ethan will also watch the pregame festivities unfold from near the 49ers benches.

Congratulations Ethan from the 49ers Kids Club and Play60!

NFL Play60 is part of the National Football League’s campaign to encourage kids to be active for 60 minutes a day in order to help reverse the trend of childhood obesity. For more information, visit NFLrush.com.
NFL Rush Zone

an ultimate internet stop for young 49ers

NFL Rush Zone is a football-inspired virtual world geared towards kids ages 6-13. The goal of NFLRZ is to entertain kids and, wherever possible, to teach kids about fitness, community, and helping others.

In NFLRZ, players can:
- Create their own game character called an "avatar" which can explore the NFLRZ online world
- Play numerous games
- Chat with other players in a safe and secure manner, where no one is able to use profanity or share their real names, ages, or addresses
- Watch animated videos
- Discover hidden items, including pet-like characters called "Gameballz," which your child must feed and care for inside NFLRZ
- Earn "Pigskins" (NFLRZ's virtual currency) and spend them on new gear and NFL team jerseys for their avatar, which helps teach kids about earning currency, saving and spending it wisely.

Check it out at NFLRush.com
What is it like to work for the 49ers?

Meet Tyson, a Corporate Sales Executive for the San Francisco 49ers & learn how he turned his childhood love for the 49ers into a professional career.

**Hometown:** Elk Grove, CA

**What did you want to be when you grew up?** I wanted to be an NFL player and play tight end for the San Francisco 49ers. Thanks to my father, I have been going to 49ers games since the age of three, and I wanted to be like my childhood heroes #87 Dwight Clark and #16 Joe Montana. If I couldn't play, I knew I wanted to be involved in professional football in some capacity. I was fortunate at an early age to see how wonderful football is and the positive memories it can create for its fans.

**How long have you been working here?** This is my 2nd season.

**What do you do for the 49ers?** As a Corporate Sales Executive I create partnerships between business companies and the 49ers. This involves the different types of signs/billboards at Candlestick Park, various game day promotions, and different types of media such as radio, television and the internet. These partnerships are very important in helping the 49ers organization and enhancing the overall experience for our fans.

**What did you study in school?** I studied Communications, Sociology, and Sports Management in college.

**How did that help you get this job?** Through school I learned how to conduct myself in a professional setting and how to create relationships, meet new people, and how to speak in front of various groups. The most important thing is understanding the work ethic needed to be successful in my job.

**What’s your favorite part about working for the 49ers?** I pinch myself everyday on how lucky I am to work for an organization I’ve cared about for my entire life. Every day is full of new challenges and it feels good knowing that I am contributing to creating an overall special experience for fellow 49ers fans.

**What advice would you give someone who wants to work in sports?** Meet as many people as you can that already work in sports and learn about what their job entails. This helps one gain a better understanding of the different opportunities in sports. Then make sure you work hard every day to reach your goal.

**Do you have any funny experiences with a 49ers player?** One day I was at Candlestick Park and a man was walking onto the field. Nobody else was around so I asked, “Excuse me sir, are you lost?” When the man turned around, I realized that it was none other than 49ers Legend and Hall of Fame player #80 Jerry Rice! He jokingly said, “No, I’m pretty sure I know my way around here.” I quickly smiled and said, “Yes sir, you sure do!” That was the first time I got to meet one of my childhood heroes, who called Candlestick Park home for 16 seasons with the 49ers.
While the San Francisco 49ers traveled to Glendale, Ariz., for a divisional matchup against NFC West rivals Arizona Cardinals, young 49ers fans were treated to a variety of events in the Bay Area in mid-December.

Saturday marked the inaugural 49ers Kids Club Skating Party held at Downtown Ice in San Jose. All Gold Members of the 49ers Kids Club were invited to attend and guests had full use of the outdoor ice skating rink in addition to partaking in activities like cookie decorating and face painting.

“I brought my son and his friend down to the rink. We were really looking forward to going skating and he’s learning and slipping and sliding all over the place. We had a great time today,” stated Michael, the father of a Kids Club member.

49ers Gold Rush Cheerleaders enhanced a 49ers photo booth as they posed with children and their families, and to everyone’s delight, the 49ers mascot Sourdough Sam stepped onto the ice rink to display his skating talents.

“I was kinda nervous to try ice skating, but Sourdough held my hand and we skated together,” eight year-old Annabelle said. An energetic Sourdough Sam also provided entertainment off the ice, jumping into pictures and spreading 49ers holiday cheer to all Kid’s Club attendees and their families.

Aundrea, mother of Mateo, a longtime 49ers Kids Club member noted, “My favorite parts of the event are that it’s clean, safe, and fun. My son loves being able to ice skate with other 49ers fans. When we go to the other rinks there are too many people, but here Mateo feels it’s pretty intimate, so he’s having a good time.”

Energized by festive holiday music and beautifully lighted palm trees, the skaters ended their morning with a special 49ers raffle including a Mike Iupati signed football and two pairs of Monday Night Football tickets against Pittsburgh.