

2007 NFL Preview: Tampa Bay Buccaneers

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Wednesday, 11 July 2007
Last Updated Wednesday, 11 July 2007

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers made a turnaround last season, just in the wrong direction. Now see if they can turn the corner this season in Jeff Alexander's NFL Preview for Point-Spreads.com.

The Bucs went from first with 11 wins to worst with just four victories in 2006. It was their second trip to the NFC South basement in three seasons and their third losing season in the four years since their Super Bowl XXXVII victory. Sportsbook.com have listed the Tampa Bay Bucs as a long shot with 45 to 1 odds to win Super Bowl XLII.

Any coach would be ecstatic to have two division titles and a Super Bowl victory in his first five years with a team but because he has only produced two winning campaigns in his five-year tenure in Tampa, head coach Jon Gruden enters the 2007 season in Tampa Bay on the hot seat whether fair or not.

And the Buccaneers definitely approached the offseason like a team in need of a quick fix. They attacked the free agent market and brought in several 30-somethings to supplant or at least push the young starters with hope of producing another worst to first turn around like they did in 2005.

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Jon Gruden's multifaceted West Coast offense is not for kids, as the Bucs found out the past two years with young guns Chris Simms and Bruce Gradkowski under center. Gruden hopes to have fixed this by signing free agent Jeff Garcia, who appeared in three Pro Bowls operating the West Coast offense in San Francisco and who salvaged the Eagles's season in 2006. Garcia and Simms will theoretically compete for the starting job in camp, but with Gruden on the hot seat, you can bet he'll be giving the ball to Garcia to work his magic.

Running back Cadillac Williams was stalled in a sophomore funk running behind a hodgepodge offensive line and with a rookie under center for much of the season. Williams should improve in 2007 behind a better offensive line and with an improved passing attack.

Wide receiver Joey Galloway is a true number one wideout, but there is little talent behind him. With Garcia in Tampa Galloway will be ready to stretch the field in Gruden's scheme with his famous fly patterns.

Age and injury finally caught up to the once tough as nails Buccaneers defense. A core group consisting of defensive end Simeon Rice, weak side linebacker Derrick Brooks, middle linebacker Shelton Quarles, defensive end Greg Spires, and cornerbacks Ronde Barber and Brian Kelly that were the best in the business for the past decade fell out of the top 10 in total defense for the first time since 1996.

To bounce back from their unforgettable struggle in 2006, the Bucs need to improve the pass rush. They finished second to last in the league in sacks with 25 last season. But a better offense that is able to move the football to give these still skilled vets more time for a breather will help out the defenses effectiveness as much as anything.

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Cincinnati Bengals 25-1

Denver Broncos 25-1

Philadelphia Eagles 18-1

Dallas Cowboys 25-1
Carolina Panthers 25-1
Seattle Seahawks 18-1
New Orleans Saints 18-1
New York Giants 35-1
Jacksonville Jaguars 30-1
Kansas City Chiefs 60-1
New York Jets 40-1
Miami Dolphins 55-1
Tennessee Titans 60-1
Atlanta Falcons 60-1
Buffalo Bills 100-1
Washington Redskins 40-1
Arizona Cardinals 40-1
Saint Louis Rams 50-1
Tampa Bay Buccaneers 45-1
San Francisco 49ers 20-1
Minnesota Vikings 50-1
Green Bay Packers 40-1
Houston Texans 100-1
Oakland Raiders 75-1
Cleveland Browns 100-1
Detroit Lions 100-1