

## NFL Predictions: Pittsburgh Steelers AFC North Preview

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Last season Mike Tomlin had to follow a legend in Bill Cowher and he did not embarrass himself. However, his team did fall short on its own field in the playoffs to a tough Jaguars team. Another finish like that and Tomlin's honeymoon period will end in quickly, especially since everyone knows the pieces are in place for them to make a run this year. NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com have the Steelers at +1100 odds to win the AFC Championship.

Last year Ben Roethlisberger returned to the form he displayed in his first two seasons and the offense certainly benefited from it. While the team did not throw the ball all over the field, they were efficient in compiling 327 yards per game. Roethlisberger threw 32 touchdowns and just 11 interceptions and finished the year with a 104.1 passer rating.

The passing game should be just as good this year with a healthy Roethlisberger in place and Texas deep threat Limas Sweed joining receivers Santonio Holmes and Hines Ward. The offensive line must cut down on the number of sacks allowed, though. They gave up 47 last year and that is way too many for a top tier team.

A solid rushing attack was a staple of Cowher's during his tenure in Pittsburgh and Tomlin made sure he continued that tradition during his first year as coach. Willie Parker led a ground assault that posted 135.5 yards rushing per game. Spelling Parker this year will be first round pick Rashard Mendenhall out of Illinois.

In 2007 the Steeler defense was more than menacing. Their 3-4 scheme, under the direction of Dick LeBeau, stone walled opponent ground games and held passing attacks to just 176.5 yards per game. The defense did lose linebacker Clark Haggans in the off season, but the unit is loaded with young talent at that spot. LaMarr Woodley should fill in admirably for Haggans.

The biggest question marks are in the secondary. That said, a healthy Troy Polamalu could go a long way toward fixing any major issues. Polamalu was not himself last year and he had off season knee surgery to correct the health problems that hindered him during the season.

NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com list Pittsburgh at +2000 odds to win the Super Bowl and +115 odds to win the AFC North. Their win total is set at 9 with the over a -140.

Prediction: 1st Place AFC North