NFL Predictions: Tampa Bay Buccaneers NFC South Preview

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The Buccaneers have been an erratic bunch the last few seasons. Under Head Coach Jon Gruden they have looked like both trash and treasure. Last year they righted their ship a little after a horrendous 4-12 2006 season. The pieces appear to be in place for Tampa Bay to not only avoid a collapse in 2008, but to contend for the title again in the wide open NFC South. NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com list the Bucs at +200 odds to win the division.

The Tampa Bay offense did not overwhelm opponents in 2007, but they were efficient enough to get the job done. The team averaged 326.8 yards per game while produced 20.9 points per contest. Both totals were good enough for an 18th league ranking. Quarterback Jeff Garcia, who missed three games due to injury, played well but he did not exactly post extravagant numbers. He accumulated a little over 2400 yards passing and 13 touchdown tosses on his way to a 94.6 passer rating and Pro-Bowl appearance. He is currently in a dispute with the franchise over his contract and with the Brett Favre rumors circulating; it is uncertain what will happen to him. Farve talk aside, the team brought back Brian Griese as an insurance policy.

The best part of the Buccaneer offense last year was their rushing attack. Tampa Bay backs churned out 117 yards per game in 2007 with Earnest Graham and Michael Pittman leading the way. Graham, who established himself as a dependable lead back early in the year, will again be the primary rusher this season. Pittman departed in the off season, but the club replaced him with a familiar face in Warrick Dunn. Former first round pick Carnell Williams is a question mark with knee issues. Blocking for this group is a first-rate offensive line that got even better in the off season with the addition of former Saint Jeff Faine.

The vaunted Buccaneer defense did not look so intimidating in 2006, but last year they made a return to glory. The team held the opposition to just 16.9 points per game and 278.2 yards per game. As the numbers would indicate, they are solid in all areas and with the improvement shown by some young players last season, they may be even better in 2008. The also added a couple of quality free agents in Teddy Lehman (LB) and Jimmy Wilkerson (DL). They are not star names but they are great effort guys who are versatile and productive.

The unit does have some age in the secondary but Ronde Barber showed little drop off last season. The Bucs also drafted standout Kansas corner Aqib Talib with their first pick in this year's draft. Talib should see a lot of action this year both on the outside and in the slot.

NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com have Tampa Bay at +4500 odds to win the Super Bowl and +1400 odds to take the NFC Championship. The team's win total is currently set at 8 with the over a -120.

Prediction: 1st Place NFC South.