NFL Predictions: Houston Texans AFC South Preview

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The Houston Texans made big strides in year two of the Gary Kubiak regime by compiling an 8-8 record. The club also finished the year by winning three of their last four games, which included a final game (42-28) blowout of the playoff bound Jaguars. Houston should be even better this year, but unfortunately for them they play in one of the toughest divisions in football. NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com have the Texans at +1200 odds to win the AFC South.

Last year the Texans acquired former Falcon quarterback Matt Schuab to run Kubiak's version of the West Coast offense. Schaub posted reasonably good numbers (87.2 passer rating), but he only appeared in 11 games. The club would like to see the Virginia product stay healthy long enough to lead them to their first winning record. However, if he is not able to start all 16 games the coaching staff feels more than comfortable with backup Sage Rosenfels running the show.

Houston has a good mix of skill position players and they should be able to equal or surpass last year's 23.7 point per game average. Receivers Andre Johnson and Kevin Walter are outstanding targets and Ahman Green, when healthy, is a proven threat out of the backfield. New addition Chris Brown is also capable of carrying the load or spelling Green. The future at running back, though, will be third round draft choice Steve Slaton.

Upfront the Texans have a decent unit in place, but there is definite room for improvement. Kubiak brought in an old acquantance from Denver, zone blocking wizard Alex Gibbs, to help the Texans with their run blocking. Last year the Houston ground game only averaged 3.8 yards per carry and they need that number to increase if they are to keep pace in their division. The Texans also selected OT Duane Brown out of Virgina Tech with their first pick and he will step in straight away at left tackle. Pass blocking was not an issue as the line only allowed 22 sacks last year; they should do fine protecting Schaub this season.

The Texans defense was not impressive at all last year. They allowed 24 points per game and they gave up a ridiculous 230.1 yards passing per game. Club officials and the coaching staff spent the off season trying to avoid a repeat of those numbers in 2008.

Houston drafted four defensive players and added five defensive free agents. The secondary was of primary importance because injuries there significantly impacted production. Former Cowboy cornerback Jacques Reeves should add quality depth, as should former Bronco safety Nick Ferguson.

The front seven for Houston is extremely talented and if the secondary can improve, the Texans defensive ranking should jump at least 5-10 spots in 2008. Defensive end Mario Williams justified his number one overall selection in 2006 by recording 14 sacks last year. The team also expects last year's first round pick Amobi Okoye to improve upon a mediocre rookie year.

NFL Betting odds at SBGglobal.com lists the Texans at +4500 odds to win the Super Bowl and +2500 odds to win the AFC Championship. Houston's win total is set at 7.5 with the over a -125.

Prediction: 4th Place AFC South.