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Year of the Saints

By Corey LeBlanc

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Well Saints fans the beginning of football season is almost upon us. With the start of training camp, it's time to take a look at the upcoming season. Saints fans have become familiar with the high expectations early and the depressing let downs late into the season. There have been too many seasons, for the comfort of Saints fans, that have ended with the Saints looking from the outside in on the playoffs. Every year we flutter to find an excuse for our all too early elimination from contention. This is something Saints fans have dealt with since the inaugural season back in 1967.

Every year we ask ourselves the same questions, "When will it be our turn to bask in the glory of a title?" or "What would have happened if a few plays or injuries had went another way?" and sigh to ourselves "Next year will be our year!". With all the short comings of this organization you begin to wonder if it will ever happen. Do the Saints really have a chance at a title? The answer to that question would be "YES!". I mean why not, every team has a chance right? If you don't think so look back at the Carolina Panthers not even a year ago. Sure they didn't win it all but can you say they didn't have a chance. Well I bet you would have a said they didn't a year ago. Did anyone think the New England Patriots would win it all in 2001-02 against the mighty Rams? Mighty Rams? Did you think you'd hear that before the '99 season? The truth be told, everyone in the NFL has opportunity to make a run. It's up to the players, coaches, and yes fans! So is this finally the year of the Saints? Are there reasons for faith, well lets take a look.

Led by 4th year starter Aaron Brooks the Saints' offense has shown flashes of greatness. Brooks has shown poise at a position that needs it most. Aside from a case of the fumbles last year, Brooks showed improvement in his ability to run the offense, as he posted a career best 88.8 quarterback rating and threw for 24 touchdowns to only 8 interceptions despite a injury plagued year that limited both Joe Horn and Donte' Stallworth. With all the negatives put on Brooks you have to take a long look back to a certain Mr. Manning to find a better Saints quarterback. Aaron has posted some of the best passing numbers in Saints history since becoming the starter and ranks in the team's top five in every major passing category, including: Net yards passing (8,918, fourth), pass attempts (1,280, fourth)

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completions (708, fourth), completion percentage (55.3, fifth), touchdowns (62, third) and passer rating (79.4, second). He has thrown for over 300 yards five times since emerging as the team leader in 2000 in relief of injured starter Jeff Blake in Week 11 (vs. Oakland, 11/19/00).

Striving to not have a repeat of year's past wideout Donte' Stallworth has worked on his conditioning in the offseason to prevent the nagging injuries, along with improving his work ethic to develop himself into a real force for 2004 and if he CAN stay healthy look for great things from this speedy receiver. Horn, despite rumors of a possible trade, returns as one of NFL's most prolific receivers since signing with New Orleans in 2000 adding to one of the league's best receiving cores. Another bright spot for the New Orleans offense was the emergence of tight-end Boo Williams who in replacement of the injured Ernie Conwell proved to be the tight-end Haslett and company has been looking for since their arrival in New Orleans. To add to this already thrilling group unit, "Deuce is loose" and has been since getting the starting nod in 2002. McAllister has emerged as on one of the leagues, arguably, top 5 runningbacks. One thing however there is no argument about is that Deuce is one of the league's most

dangerous threats and is one of the major keys to New Orleans success in 2004. He gives the Saints a valuable asset whether it be through running the ball, receiving, or blocking. All areas McAllister has mastered over his still young career. Deuce has eclipsed the 1000 yard mark in each of his two seasons as the Saints starter, having his best in 2003 with 1,641 yards rushing, reaching the 100+ mark in 9 consecutive games and his second consecutive Pro Bowl nomination.

The Saints' defense is one of the teams biggest question marks coming into the training camp. After a failure with the "lunch bunch theory" coach Haslett look to speed and a nonstop motor on defensive line with the free agent pick up of DT Brian Young and the drafting of Ohio State defensive end Will Smith with the 18th overall pick in April's draft. With the offseason addition of defensive line coach John Pease the Saints' defensive line look to be improved. The main area's of concern going into the offseason, however were at the linebacker and cornerback spots. Haslett and crew hope that the drafting of MLB Courtney Watson and the development of second year linebacker Cie Grant fill the needs at linebacker. The Saints also went out and picked up CB Jason Craft and New Orleans Voodoo standout Monty Montgomery give them the depth needed to be successful at stopping the pass. There have also been reports the 5th year man Fahkir Brown has improved dramatically and could vie for a starting spot during training camp. There are still too many question marks on defense that should be answered during training camp and preseason.

After all has been said the question still remains. Is this the Saints year? Well only time can tell but with the surplus of young talented players you definitely can't rule them out. Regardless of the overall outcome of this season, it should be a fun exciting ride. So get your jersey's out of the closet, pull out the Mardi Gra beads, and start the chants of "WHO DAT!" because it's football time in the Big Easy!

I am just getting started and I am a HUGE New Orleans Saints Fan!

NFL Week Two Part Two

By Sebastien Veilleux

Year of the Saints

In part two of our NFL week two preview, we will look at four NFL games. I'll review the following games: Texans at Colts, Saints at Packers, Giants at Eagles and Raiders at Ravens. The Giants at Eagles will be the matchup of the week out of this group. Let's take a look.

Houston Texans at Indianapolis Colts

Are Texans fans wishing they had Reggie Bush yet? The Texans offense was stifled when they played the Eagles. Ten points and no rushing attack won't get the job done in the NFL. The Colts are coming off a major win in New York against the Giants. It was the Manning Bowl. Now, they get a cupcake in Houston. For the Colts, it's time to go 9-0 against the Texans.

Pick: Colts Why? Colts are 8-0 against the Texans and beat them by an average of 15 points per game.

New Orleans Saints at Green Bay Packers

If not for Reggie Bush, this game would have about 6 people watching it—all fans. The Packers were shutout last week and looked like one of the worst teams in the league. This is no surprise. The Saints looked improved against the Browns, but they still have work to do. Neither of these teams will be going to the playoffs this season, but it's worth watching, because Reggie Bush will get about 20 or so touches again. Last season the Packers destroyed the Saints, but this Saints team has some new key players.

Pick: Saints Why? Despite their horrible record in Green Bay, I think the addition of Drew Brees and Reggie Bush will help get the job done.

New York Giants at Philadelphia Eagles

The New York giants are in a must win situation. They are 0-1 after their loss to the Colts and they play in what many regard as the toughest division in the NFC. If they go down 0-2, they might not be able to recover. Their schedule is brutal. The Eagles will have their first real test this week. Sure, they beat up the Texans, but who doesn't these days? The Giants have won three straight in Philly, but this game could be different.

Pick: Giants Why? I think both of these teams will be in the playoffs, but the Giants have too many weapons.

Oakland Raiders at Baltimore Ravens

To say that the Raiders looked disgusting in their Monday night opener against the Chargers would be a grave understatement. They are one of the worst teams in the league. It's hard to imagine them putting up a good fight in Baltimore. The Ravens have their defense working again. They shut down Tampa Bay and should have no trouble marching to 2-0.

Pick: Baltimore Why? Because I'm not crazy.

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