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The Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the "Curse of Doug Williams"

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With the end of the National Football League's regular season, we have come to the end of another season of despair for the Tampa Bay Bucs. New levels of futility were achieved as the Bucs turned in their tenth consecutive season in which they have lost at least ten games. And the Bucs don't just lose, they lose in new and creative ways. This is a team of legendary incompetence, whose poor performance over a sustained period of time is earning them a special place in the history of the NFL.

To sustain this level of ineptitude is not easy. Everyone must contribute, and there must be a simultaneous run of bad luck.

Ten years. Despite top draft choices, despite coaching changes, nothing changes. Only three other teams have achieved this decade long level of failure, and two of them were expansion teams in the first decade of their existence.

It is clear now that the Tampa Bay Bucs are heading into select company, and when you look at their short history the similarities to the Boston Red Sox are frightening. The Red Sox have not won a World Series since Harry Frazee sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees. That was over seventy years ago, and people speak knowingly of the curse of the Bambino. Bad players who are traded suddenly become good, and good players who are acquired suddenly become bad. Bright young prospects never live up to their potential, or are devastated by injuries.

Does all this sound familiar to Buc fans? In 1980 the Bucs came within one game of the Super Bowl. The next two seasons under the leadership of Doug Williams at quarterback, they reached the playoffs. This seemed to be a franchise building a winning tradition.

And then everything went south. Doug Williams got into a contract dispute with owner Hugh Culverhouse, and for whatever reasons, (some blame Culverhouse, some William's agent, some racism) Williams left the Bucs for the USFL. It was the biggest mistake the franchise ever made, and they have never recovered. Williams went on to take Washington to a Super Bowl victory. After a decade it is time to call this what it is. THE CURSE OF DOUG WILLIAMS.

In 1983 after going 4-0 in preseason some were asking, Doug Who? When the season ended the Bucs were a miserable 2-14. After a 6-

10 season in 1984 John McKay packed it in, and four coaches have followed: Leeman Bennett who went 2-14 two years in a row; Ray Perkins, who Culverhouse called "my Vince Lombardi"; Richard Williamson who is already a vague memory; and now Sam Wyche. McKay had a less than stunning winning percentage of .335, and no one has been able to match it. In the last decade the Bucs have lost 119 games, are below .250 in winning percentage, and have won only 13 road games.

In the NFL the draft is designed to equalize things over the long haul and the scheduling policies are designed to equalize things in the short-run. But somehow none of this has mattered to the Bucs. The draft has been rendered largely ineffective because the Bucs have 1) made bad picks, 2) traded away their number one pick for poor players, 3) made bad personnel decisions, and 4) have had extraordinarily bad luck. Yes, all of the above.

The most famous of the Bucs draft picks was Bo Jackson in 1986. Jackson told the Bucs in advance that he would not play for them. He didn't. But the 1984 draft was more interesting. That year the Bucs were ready to pick Booker Reese, but instead they handed Roselle a card with the name Sean Ferrell. To correct that mistake they traded the following year's first round pick to the Bears for Reese. Reese started seven games in three years. The Bears used the pick to get Willie Gault.

Other first round picks disappeared to get quarterbacks. After the departure of Williams the Bucs traded a first round pick for Jack Thompson, the Throwin' Samoan. Cincinnati had asked for a number two pick for Thompson, but the Bucs insisted on giving them a number one. If you insist on asking why, you aren't paying attention.

In 1990 the Bucs gave away their first round pick for quarterback Chris Chandler, who as a starter was 0-6, and was released. He has gone on to play for Phoenix. Other ex-Buc quarterbacks who have gone on to do quite well have been Steve DeBerg and this year's likely NFL Player of the Year, Steve Young.

Testeverde too was a first round pick. This was Ray Perkins' great contribution. He already had the two Steve's, but he wanted the Heisman winner out of Miami, and so took Vinnie over Cornelius Bennett.

On the field there have been a series of embarrassments, the most recent being the loss to the Anaheim Rams 31-27, having blown a 27-3 halftime lead. This was the third greatest comeback in NFL history. The Bucs were also the victims of the second greatest comeback when in 1987 the Cardinals made up a 24-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat the Bucs 31-28. The Bucs did not win another game that season.

But let Hugh Culverhouse have the last words. In 1990 he said, "I still believe that the 1990's belong to the Bucs." In 1992 he said, "I am not making any more predictions." Maybe he too has come to believe in the Curse of Doug Williams.
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