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Bucs Another Miserable Season

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The body count for fired NFL coaches seems to be on the rise. Buddy Ryan got the boot in Phoenix the day after Christmas, less than twenty-four hours after his loss to Dallas. Sam Wyche was fired in Tampa with the next twenty-four hours. Meanwhile the Bucs themselves twist slowly in the wind, uncertain where they will be when the 1996 NFL season rolls around.

It was another truly remarkable season for the Bucs who for the first time in over a decade did not lose ten games. They lost nine; and did so with one of the weakest schedules in recent memory. It was so weak in fact that the Bucs were leading their division at several points during the season and were even over .500, with the highpoint being 5-2. It was however an illusion as the Bucs went on to their fourteenth consecutive losing season.

Reality was in fact just as grim as in most of those ten loss seasons. The new Buc saviour and former first round draft pick Trent Dilfer threw for eighteen interceptions and a grand total of four, yes four, touchdowns. It would seem that in the course of a season any quarterback ought to be able to throw for one touchdown in half the games just by accident. But not Dilfer. Why? Because he was a first round draft pick of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

The Bucs effort, and you can't be this bad without special effort, should not be dumped on Dilfer alone. This was a total team effort, in fact a total franchise effort.

In the final game against the Lions one of the last possessions of the game nicely summarizes the Buc's season. Tampa Bay was punting on fourth down, a play they had more than ample experience with, and one that they should have perfected. On the first try Reggie Robey kicked but there was a flag on the play. An interior lineman was illegally downfield. So Robey sets to kick again, but no, there is movement before the snap, a false start. So the Bucs line up again and Robey hits another booming kick. Then another flag. Once again the Bucs have an interior lineman illegally downfield. In an act of mercy worthy of the Christmas season the Lions declined the penalty. One can only guess how long this could have gone on and how far back Robey might have been pushed were it not for this act of mercy.

This final game was further marred by Sam Wyche's decision to replace Dilfer with Casey Weldon in the second quarter, a

decision he had made earlier in the week and had told everyone about except for Dilfer, who was the only one surprised by the move. This led to a heated sideline exchange between Wyche and his first round draft pick.

Still it was not just poor play on the field or poor judgement by the head coach, this was a organization-wide effort. The new owners, the Glazer Brothers, contributed to the atmosphere of chaos surrounding the Bucs by spending the better part of the season threatening to move the team out of Tampa Bay to LA, Orlando, Baltimore, or anywhere else that seemed even mildly interested.

First there was the drive in Tampa to get season ticket pledges with a large surcharge that would serve as a loan to the Glazers allowing them to built a new stadium with other people's money at no interest. When that failed the deadline was extended, and then when that failed, there was a more active pursuit of a new city. The fact that the announced search for a new city came before the season ticket drive was over, was management's version of the team's inept attempt to punt against the Lions.

While looking around for a new city the Glazers were no doubt dismayed when Baltimore slipped away as a possible site. On the other had this meant that Cleveland was now in the running to get the Bucs. At one point there was even a story circulating that the Bucs would move to Cleveland and become the new Browns, while the Browns would go to Baltimore and become the new Bucs. This meant that Vinny Testaverde, who had once been a dismal quarterback for the Bucs, might once again become a Buc in Baltimore. Vinne's Worst Nightmare. It might have been the first time that a franchise pursued a former player by trading an entire franchise rather than just the player.

If all of this seems bizarre and strange then you have not been a follower of the Tampa Bay Bucs over the years. For over a decade now the Bucs have made the strange and bizarre, routine and commonplace. Wasted draft choices, horrible trades, off-beat coaches, incompetent owners and strange management decisions, star players laid low by disease or injury after just a brief time in a Bucs uniform, all have been part of Buc History. And it all began so many years ago with the failure to sign Doug Williams allowing him to go off to the Oklahoma Outlaws.

Yes even with new ownership, the dreaded curse of Doug Williams remains part of the scene in Tampa Bay. Whether a new location would end the curse, remains doubtful.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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