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Buccaneers Lose In A Heartbreaker To Saints, 35-28

At one point, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers were leading the New Orleans Saints by 14 points before losing to them 35-28. The Bucs started out strong but the Saints kicked it into high gear. Tampa Bay safety Ronde Barber set a team record of 222 starts and he did it in style. In the Saints opening drive, quarterback Drew Brees' pass was tipped on third-down by defensive tackle Gerald McCoy and intercepted by Barber. That was Barber's 46th career interception. The Tampa Bay offense had its second 500-yard game in team history with 513 yards after putting up 400-plus yards against the Kansas City Chiefs a week earlier.

Buccaneers' Offense

The Bucs offense started the game off strong, scoring on their opening drive in one play. Barber's interception set the team up with great field position, allowing quarterback Josh Freeman to throw for a 13-yard touchdown to wide receiver Tiquan Underwood. That was Underwood's first career touchdown.

Freeman had a career game throwing for 420 yards and three touchdowns. He looked very sharp versus the Saints as if he was learning from the great quarterback on the other side of the field in Brees. He had no interceptions and was sacked once. Freeman also ran twice for nine yards with his longest being 13 yards for a first down. It was the first time he put up back-to-back 300-yard passing games. He gave his offense the best chance to win but they could not prevail.

The running game also looked sharp. Running back Doug Martin rushed 16 times for 85 yards and one touchdown. He also caught three passes for 37 yards. LeGarrette Blount, on the other hand, did not have a good game. He rushed five times for a loss of two yards.

Freeman threw to eight different receivers in the game but none had as big an impact as Vincent Jackson. Jackson showed very little sign of his calf strain, receiving a team record of 216 yards in seven receptions and one touchdown. His longest reception on the day was for 95 yards, which was also the longest reception in Bucs history.

Tight end Dallas Clark caught the ball five times for 51 yards. He also picked up his first career touchdown with the Bucs. Last week's breakout star Tiquan Underwood didn't see the ball too much after his opening drive touchdown, catching two passes for 35 yards and the aforementioned TD. Tight end Luke Stocker caught only his third reception on the year with a 33-yard catch, which led to a touchdown. Erik Lorig and D.J. Ware each received the ball once for six yards.

Mike Williams was only thrown to four times for 36 yards. He was also part of the controversial play that ended the game. As time expired, Williams caught a pass in the end zone for a would-be, game-tying touchdown. However, because he had been pushed out of bound at the back of the end zone prior to catching the pass, he was called for an illegal touching penalty, ending the game. **Grade: A**

Buccaneers' Special Teams

The Bucs special teams did not do much Sunday. They only had one field goal attempt and kicker Connor Barth missed the 42-yarder. Punter Michael Koenen kicked his 12th straight touchback. The returners didn't have a big game, either. Punt returner Roscoe Parrish had two returns for seven yards, his longest being for nine. Kick-off returner Arrelious Benn only had one return for 16 yards but was tackled on the Bucs eight-yard line. After that, he knelt for touchbacks. The punt return drew two penalties. One was for running into the punter and the other was for illegal formation. **Grade: B+**

Buccaneers' Defense

For the second straight week, the Bucs defense was unable to get a sack. As a whole, they had great moments and some terrible ones. They started the game hot, preventing the Saints from scoring until the end of the first quarter. The defense looked confused on who was supposed to cover whom. The second quarter did not get any better, as they let the Saints score three more touchdowns. At that point, they were not putting any pressure on Brees, not covering the receivers and missing tackles. Towards the end of the game, the defense was holding the Saints, allowing the Bucs offense to get back in the game.

Cornerback Eric Wright led the team in tackles with eight, despite several missed plays. Once again, rookie Mark Barron broke-up several plays, reassuring Bucs fans he will be great for years to come. Barber was the only Buc to intercept Brees. He ran it back for 30 yards to set up the Bucs for a touchdown. **Grade: C-**

Buccaneers' Coaching

The Bucs coaches called some new plays early in the game. They did some trick plays that the Saints were not expecting which helped put the Bucs ahead 14-0. They had Benn set up as a running back once, and they called a flea flicker early in the game that went for 13-yards. The coaches did not call those types of plays after the first quarter.

On the drive that featured Jackson's 95-yard reception, the Bucs were unable to score any points. They got as far as the one-yard line and could not get in the end zone. They ran up the middle three times and was pushed back a yard every play. On fourth down, Freeman couldn't find a receiver in the end zone, so he ran with it but came up short. **Grade: B**

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers have a quick turn around this week as they play the Minnesota Vikings Thursday night in Minnesota.