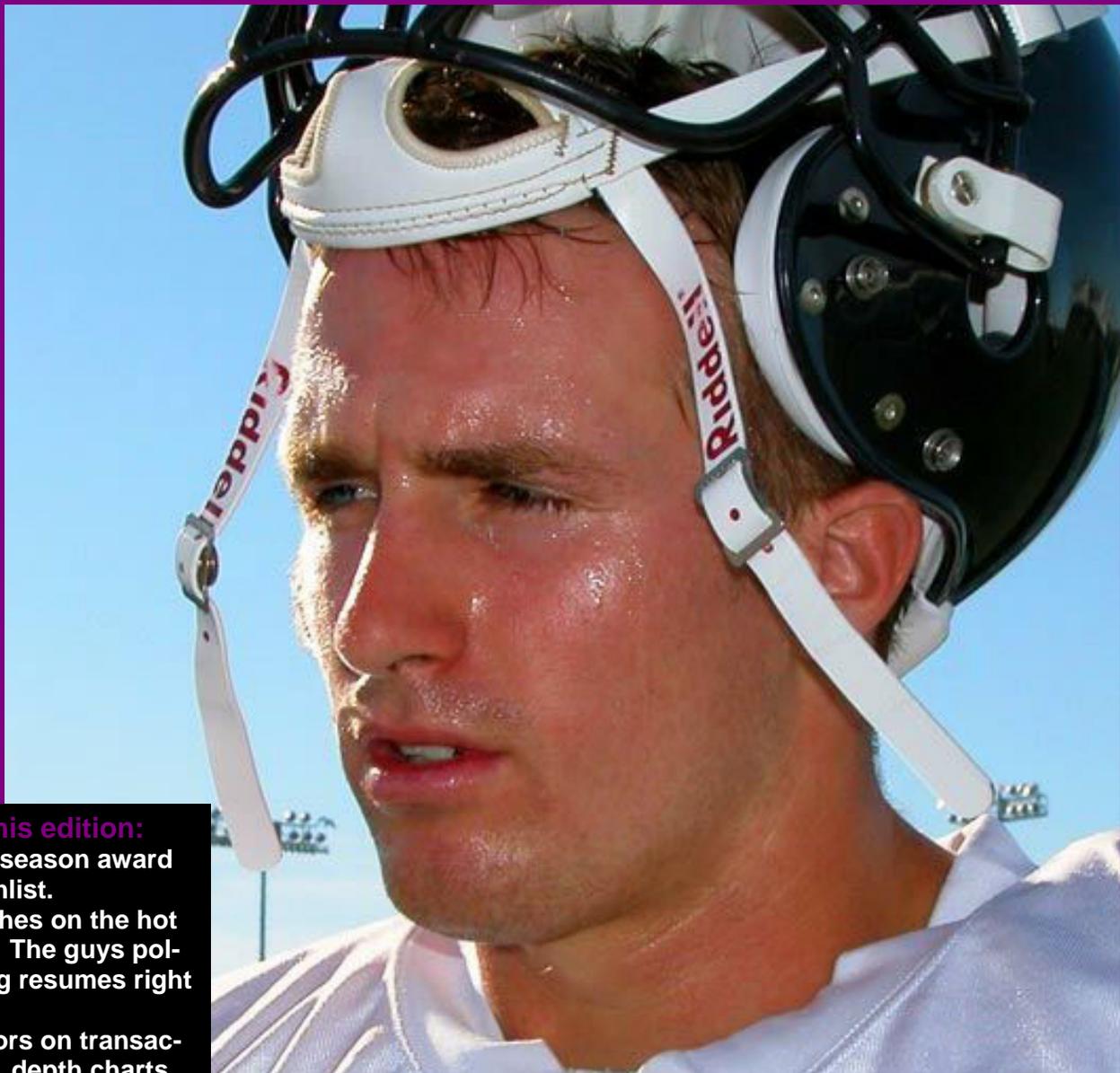


NAFlustrated

Quoth the Raven: I Want More

Out upon a field so dreary, a man named Brees spoke very clearly



Inside this edition:

- Post-season award watchlist.
- Coaches on the hot seat! The guys polishing resumes right now.
- Rumors on transactions, depth charts, coaching moves and more.
- QB's on the way out?

Weeks 14/15, 2006Vol. 1 Issue 2

Around the League in Three Pages

From the Cover:

Baltimore Raven Drew Brees got everyone's attention by predicting an upset victory over powerhouse New England. That by itself was a story. Then he upped the ante by declaring that his team would win out and make the playoffs. So far, only New Orleans had the chance to shut him up and they couldn't do it. Broadway who?

The defensive line in Dallas is becoming a headache all around for the club. Rookie Deion Huston has been overwhelmed at the tackle spot all season and has managed less than 20 tackles. It might be from all the shouting near him in practice. La'Roi Glover and Marcus Wiley have made no secret about their mutual hatred and are repeatedly separated by the coaches. Glover is said to have told the team that he'll retire if he's not traded. His cap hit would be far easier to swallow than Wiley's, but sources close to the team say that if Glover doesn't retire, Wiley will be shopped around. The lack of upfield pressure is the biggest disappointment this year for the 'boys. With all that talent, something has to change...New Orleans doesn't have a lot of depth at corner, but they don't need it. Dennis Weathersby and Fernando Clayton are playing extremely well opposite each other. Clayton looks to be every bit the player the Saints thought when they took him #1 overall in 2005. The additions of former Steelers Darwin Walker and Kendrick Bell this offseason have provided the run defense that takes the pressure off the secondary. If Jermaine Haley continues to improve, this could be the top defense in the league for years to come...Talk about defense, Cleveland has one for the books. They have two MVP candidates on offense, but Ray Lewis is leading the top unit on either side of the ball in the entire NFL. They're a nice mix of youth and experience and

Buffalo doesn't have much hope for the playoffs this year, but they've got plenty of positives for next year. Tiki Barber has shown he's got plenty left as long as he can share the load. He's tops in the league in YPC. First-round pick Burt Carswell is slowly but surely growing into the left tackle spot. He's got years of solid play in front of him. On defense, Takeo Spikes and Nate Clement are veteran anchors on a defense that has young talent... Panther stud DeShaun Foster is already hinting at the need for a renegotiated contract. Inklings in his public statements seem to say this won't be easy. Team sources have implied something on the order of a \$12 million signing bonus and \$10 million plus a year. That's going to be tough for Carolina to swallow. They may have to hope he plays out the current deal and move on. Jeff Mitchell will lead the candidates for their franchise tag since coaches fear he may be near a decline. When current bargain Patrick Ramsey gets a deal more commensurate with his ability, finances will be tight there...



Jaguar Head Coach Tracy Brady is putting a positive spin on the loss of Ephraim Salaam and Vince Manuwai on the offensive line. He told reporters that he's excited to see a few of the younger backups step up and perform in this situation. He's not, however, saying anything good about corner Michael Stone going down. The depth there is much thinner. With "Big John" Henderson set to become a free agent, the strain on the cap may be too much to add new backs. Then again, Henderson's agent hasn't spoken to Jag GM General Mike. Nor has Ernest Wilford's who will get top-flight receiver cash with someone next year.



Clinton Portis has dropped off his production following his 5-year deal. Redskin coaches say that they're sure it's a coincidence but privately they admit that his motivation is suspect. It's going to be a bigger issue next year because of the haphazard performance of their recent draft picks. Russell Scanga has found his way to the bench since the staff sees limited potential. Roy Meeter, a #5 overall pick, has disappointed as well. If the offense doesn't start to step up, people will notice Portis' issues...



Robert Griffith got little mention for his two interception performance two weeks ago against New Orleans. The 14 year vet is quietly having one of the best seasons of his career. He's picked off four passes and offenses are throwing away from him more now than they were three years ago. At 36, he's making the case for his expiring contract to be renewed post haste.

Award Watchlist

MVP

QB Marc Bulger—Rams
RB Travis Henry—Browns
QB Tom Brady—Patriots
QB Jake Plummer—Den
QB Jeff Garcia—Cle
RB DeShaun Foster—Car
WR Roy Williams—Lions
WR Andre Johnson—Hou
DE Reggie Hayward—Den
QB Ben Roethlisberger—Pitt
RB Ahman Green—GB
S Shaun Williams—Giants
QB Donovan McNabb—Phi

Off. Player of the Year

QB Marc Bulger—Rams
RB Travis Henry—Browns
RB DeShaun Foster—Car
WR Roy Williams—Lions

Def. Player of the Year

S Shaun Williams—Giants
DE Reggie Hayward—Den
LB Ronald McKinnon—Ari
DE Bert Berry—Ari
S John Lynch—Den
CB Will Allen—Pitt

Offensive Rookie

QB Russell Scanga—Wash
RB Stan Finks—Detroit
RB Cris Ladner—Dallas
WR Jimmie Horton—Atl
RB Jon. McCormick—Oak
WR Antonio Sjogren—TB

Defensive Rookie

DT Joe Dunn—Arizona
S Quinn Crum—Atlanta

Week 15

Arizona at St. Louis
Atlanta at Tampa Bay
Baltimore at Cleveland
Buffalo at New Jersey
Carolina at New Orleans
Chicago at Minnesota
Dallas at Washington
Denver at San Diego
Green Bay at Detroit
Indianapolis at Houston
New England at Miami
Oakland at Kansas City
Philadelphia at New York
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati
Seattle at San Francisco
Tennessee at Jacksonville

Heated Seats Come Standard



Six coaches face the fire...

1. Sammie Siddiqui, Bengals

The Bengals have the worst record in the league and the 46-year old isn't exactly learning new tricks in his first year. His life as an offensive coordinator hasn't translated to Carson Palmer's savior yet.

2. Jared House, Titans

Brought in with offense in mind, Tennessee is at the bottom of the league in passing offense and points per game. He had one year in Chicago...might be the same in Nashville.

3. Amos Fields, Bears

The new front office in Chicago may want to shake things up once the dust settles. Fields' worst attribute is his defensive playcalling—something that doesn't sit well in Chi-town.

4. J.T. Orta, Seahawks

Orta's squad has gotten steadily worse over the last three years. At 62 and not a disciplinarian, he might be past his prime.

5. Juan Beisel, Giants

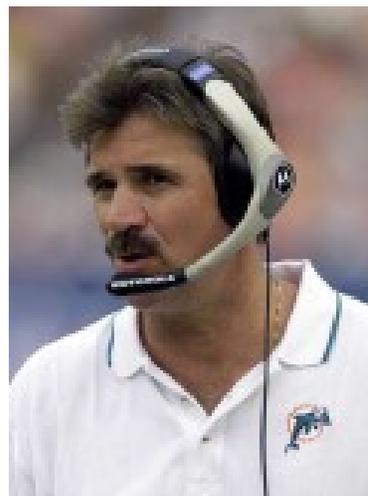
Beisel's contract is up this year and, although he's cheap, he hasn't improved on last year's division winner. He's not without potential, but might need a few years.

6. Les Schroeder, Redskins

He's a lame duck that can't condition his athletes or keep them out of trouble. Miami of Florida, Les?

Sweating but surviving. Who gets a pass this year?

For sure these guys will have some tough questions to answer this offseason, but which coaches that haven't produced will likely be back? For one, [Jon Kosderka](#) of the Dolphins will get another shot. He's an offensive genius and his players respect him. With any motivation at all, he'll work wonders. Another is [Floyd Stargell](#) of the Chiefs. He got a five-year deal to come back and is the best game-day coach in the league. The poor record this year and workout program get overlooked with the thought that he's close to getting a playoff spot. The last is [Brad Morris](#) in San Fran. His deal is up and what looks to be his third straight 6-10 year isn't the contract year his agent hoped for, but he's too good with the defense to let go. In fact, he might actually get an offer from another club.



The mustachioed Kosderka has a dreadful record this year, but he's got the brains to generate points and yards. The Dolphins will give him enough rope to hang himself in 2007 before cutting him loose.

Dallas execs are noticing the declining the production in guard [Larry Allen](#) and determining a plan to handle his potential retirement. He's lost a step in quickness and may feel the need to bow out. It's possible that the team would move right tackle [Jacob Rogers](#) down to guard, but Rogers has played so much better than expected over the last three years, he may have the position locked up... The [Jets](#) are in the top few teams this year in passing offense no matter what stat you look at. Most credit the fill-in play of [Kyle Boller](#), [Randy Moss](#) and the steady hand of [Chad Pennington](#). To be sure, those two are major parts of the success. But the team has only allowed eight sacks all year, less than one per game, with a very ordinary offensive line. If the Jets make the playoffs, you'll hear all about Moss, Pennington and [Jamal Lewis](#), but don't forget guys like [Milford Brown](#) and [DeMingo Graham](#) are just as vital... The [Steelers](#) D-line took a blow when DT [Casey Hampton](#) went down last week. That came just as DT [Ma'ake Kemoatu](#) won Player of the Week. Look for the club to add another DT via free agency since Hampton is now damaged goods. Rumors have [Lance Johnstone](#), a summer cap casualty, in talks to return yet this year... The [Washington Post](#) reported recently that receiver [Rod Gardener](#) is going to be shopped once the season ends. He's got a year left on a relatively cheap deal and should bring something of value in return. [Washington](#) has two rookies behind him that are worth a shot at his spot.

Wasteful Spending?

Jaguar management has taken some lumps this season for their acquisition of CB Jamar Fletcher who's yet to intercept a pass. But look a little deeper and you'll find he's made his teammates better by forcing teams to throw away from him.

	2004	Thru Week 13
CB Blue Adams (tackles)	40	42
FS Gary Baxter (INT)	0	2
FS Deon Grant (INT)	0	2
LB Akin Ayodele (tackles)	46	62
LB Mike Peterson (INT)	0	2





Bledsoe has spent most of his time on the bench this year, advising the coaches rather than running their plays. He won't take many more seasons of the same.

Just Pine Tired

At least one veteran quarterback, **Tommy Maddox** of **Dallas**, has said that he'd rather retire than stick around as a backup. With **Josh Lewis** behind him, nobody's going to cry too hard. Here are a few more fogeys who may hang up the clipboard instead of hold it and the likely replacement:

Buffalo

Drew Bledsoe, **Todd Collins** **JP Losman** was supposed to be the future starter. Now he's just the most capable backup. They'll sign a third.

Cincinnati

Trent Green **Levon Medley** went in the third round for just this reason. No panic in Cincy.

Minnesota

Doug Pederson It's going to take more than **Mike McMahon** if **Culpepper** goes down. The Vikes draft a new guy.

Tampa Bay

Kordell Stewart **Donnell Araujo** recently extended his deal and might do, but the team doubts even **Coppa**. The Bucs need at least one new QB.

The **Titans** have begun to slowly cycle in some of their younger reserves as the situation allows. First-round pick **Craig Ross** has gotten a few starts at quarterback, **Ben Troupe** at tight end, **Kenny Juneau** at guard, **Travis LaBoy** at end and **Jerome Meseck** at defensive tackle; all over older vets. Collectively the team is fairly old and this will ease them into next year which figures to be one without **Steve McNair**... **Russell Gillespie** has lost his starting tailback job to **Domanick Davis** in **Houston**. Davis had the job but was injured and Gillespie average on 2.0 yards per carry... Despite their poor record, we haven't seen much of **Dolphins'** rookie quarterback **Louie Fariior**, their first-round pick last year. He started a few games earlier in the year for injured **Brad Johnson**, but Johnson still has the #1 spot. With Johnson set to become a free agent and 38 years old, it seems odd, but insiders say Fariior may not be for real... **Washington** insiders says that the 'skins took **Clinton Portis'** injury to signal the end of this season. Going forward, watch for them to bolster their passing game and try to improve play on third downs. Whether that means adding a short-yardage back or better tight ends is yet to be determined. They will also look for some help on defense to stop teams from converting first downs. They were able to hold teams on first and second but fell apart on third...

In what could be either the world's largest barbecue or the ugliest family reunion ever, the **Texans** and **Cowboys** are cooking up a Texas-sized party for the weekend of their matchup in Houston Week 16. The battle for the Longhorn State has loads of playoff implications this year and both teams are likely peeking ahead. If they are, they're seeing a carnival, 300,000 spare ribs, 850 kegs of beer and one gigantic country music stage...The **Ravens** have come from nowhere to surprise analysts everywhere with their defense. Both against the run and the pass, they have been top-notch and are a huge reason why they'll make the playoffs... **Tampa** has been quietly but feverishly trying to fix whatever is behind the inconsistent play of **Leo Coppa**. They're doing that because scrapping the young quarterback here isn't going to be viewed well. If Coppa doesn't settle down by year end, watch the middle of the draft for a cheap but capable challenger. Across the ball, corner **Brian Kelly** finds himself to be the latest veteran to get benched. The pattern will continue... There isn't a rumor in **San Diego** these days that doesn't involve **Philip Rivers**. Management denied for weeks that he was on the block. Then after the 40-7 drubbing at the hands of the **Rams**, they said he's "off the market." You figure out what that means. Rumors have him assaulting **LaDainian Tomlinson** in the parking lot after practice recently. That would point to a trade. His recent knee injury could jeopardize any trade that's in the works. Defensively, **Jerris Yoder** has been installed at middle linebacker for the rest of the season. He's raw and under-sized, but coaches say Yoder may fill the hole at that spot being left by injured free agent **Zeke Moreno**... **Shaun Alexander** signed a six-year renegotiated contract recently. Indications are that he'll make just shy of \$40 million over the course of the deal. He's average almost five yards per carry again this year. His receiving yards have dropped off a little bit this year, but his scoring hasn't. This should allow him the opportunity to retire a **Seahawk**...

Saints Head Coach **Vinny Williams** has finally had it with **Aaron Brooks**. Statistically, Brooks is having his best year but his play has been inconsistent and he's found himself fighting for the backup spot behind **Brian Griese**. Brooks was hoping to earn a new contract with the team, but may be forced to shop around for a home next year if the team holds on to Griese or acquires someone better in the offseason. In the meantime, management will shop Brooks. **Roosevelt Crawford** will get a shot in training camp as well. The team is faced with the potential retirement of K **John Carney**, S **Jay Bellamy**, FB **Sam Gash** and T **Wayne Gandy** so they're trade bait for a new signal caller is limited... **Washington** has been trying to structure a three-year extension to **Mike Rucker's** deal but feel that his bonus demands outweigh his mediocre performance. The next step is likely a second year with the franchise tag. They'll go outside the organization for a lock-down corner opposite **Joel Madera** and look to upgrade the defense in general... **William "Hawk" Reynolds**, the **Raven** GM, has been meeting with **Drew Brees'** reps off an on for a few weeks. He's trying to keep Brees around for a long time and is said to be willing to pay up to have the quarterback that put Baltimore in the top tier of passing offenses. Brees riled the team and the league with bold predictions recently and says the squad has the talent to win out. If they can stop rookie tackle **Martin Schalm** from slamming vet **Edwin Mulitalo** in the press, Brees might be right...



Brian Urlacher has improved his pass rush this year at the expense of pass coverage. He's being asked to pick up the slack from **Alex Brown** and **Tommie Harris**. It's stressing the young secondary and they will have to adjust.