

## Ain't Got No Crystal Ball: Tampa Bay Buccaneers @ Carolina Panthers Thursday Night Football Preview

<b>Game</b>	Tampa Bay Buccaneers at Carolina Panthers
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	Thursday September 12, 2019, 8:20 PM (EDT)
<b>Location</b>	Bank of America Stadium Charlotte, NC
<b>The Line</b>	Carolina Panthers -6.5 -- Over/Under: 50.5

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Leading up to this season, the Bucs and the Panthers were two of the NFL's most hyped teams. Bucs fans goggled in anticipation for Bruce Arian's mystic quarterback whispering and the Panthers paddled back out and caught their regular 2015-MVP nostalgia wave. Yet after Week 1, both Carolina and Tampa Bay are 0-1, lost their home opener and are either shaking their arms at the sky towards an unresponsive God or furiously tweeting for an explanation.

### **Tale of the Tape:**

The Panthers took on the LA Rams last Sunday, and lost at home 27-30. Christian McCaffery was spectacular, with over 200 all-purpose yards and a touchdown. Cam Newton wasn't, going 25-38 for 239, no touchdowns and one interception, which later led to the Rams taking a two-possession lead. Defensively, Carolina allowed 349 yards last week and Shaq Thompson led the team with nine tackles.

The Buccaneers, flopped in their home opener, falling to the SF 49ers 31-17. That may be a little too harsh on the team, as I was impressed with their run game and a defense that held Jimmy Garoppolo to under 200 yards. But Jameis Winston was sickening, throwing 194 yards on 38 attempts with one touchdown and three interceptions, two of which San Fran took the house for six. Defensively, Tampa Bay allowed 256 yards and Jordan Whitehead led the team with eight tackles.

### **Who's Q?**

Over the past three seasons, the fates of these two teams have fallen to the feet of their quarterbacks. On that pretense, and conveniently ignoring Christian McCaffery for now, the general consensus would probably give the upper hand to Cam Newton over Jameis Winston. It's

a no brainer! Cam is Superman! He won an MVP that one year! And he's big and fast and he can dance and he wears cool hats and..... Stop.... Que, "Where is My Mind" by the Pixies.

Both Cam Newton and Jameis Winston are mobile quarterbacks, relative in size and hail from marquee football schools. Throughout their careers both have benefited from the talent around them: Jameis's high-powered hands team in Mike Evans, OJ Howard and now Chris Godwin (previously Desean Jackson); Newton's just-as-if-not-way-more heroic running back Christian McCaffery and don't forget that terrifying defense pre-2016.

Thus far, Newton's career is remembered as almost super human and usually romanticized with his 2015 MVP season and SuperBowl appearance. And in 2015 Cam was the man scoring a total of 45 touchdowns and leading the Panthers to a 15-1 season. But this is a 'what have you done for me lately' league and when you look at Cam's 'lately' it's pretty mediocre.

Since 2016, and playing in at least 43 games:

	<b>Andy Dalton</b>	<b>Jameis Winston</b>	<b>Cam Newton</b>
Touchdowns	64	66	65
Interceptions	31	43	43
Completion %	62.2	63.1	59.8
Passer Rating	89.4	89.5	83.5
QB Record	18-24-1	15-23	23-21

You know it's average if you see Andy Dalton's name. Of course, there's context that goes into these numbers. Cam has dealt with some minor injuries; his wide receiver core was about the equivalent of a DII program with Devin Funchess as the number one wideout and their defense is finally redefining itself.

Still, after Cam's MVP season and Winston's rookie season in 2015, the stats almost mirror each other, but both are viewed on entirely different spectrums. But is the gap really that far or is it based on a narrative?

Jameis Winston's career is clouded with off-the-field issues stringing from pocketing crab legs to sexual assault accusations. His antics off the field are more consistent than his play on the field, as he's the living example of boom or bust, and the Buccaneers haven't made the playoffs since Winston's been on the team. But he has talent, you see it every time he plays Atlanta.

To me, 2019 is the last shot Winston gets at solidifying the franchise quarterback role in Tampa Bay. For Newton, his job seems to be safe, I just think he gets a little more credit than he deserves—McCaffery piece coming soon. But keep in mind the Panthers organization was bought by a new owner in 2018. An owner, who wasn't around for the Clark Kent gimmicks. If Cam can't get it done, I wonder if the new management's patience is as deep as their pocketbooks.

**Prediction:**

*Tampa Bay Buccaneers +6.5*

I don't like betting Thursday Night games, especially this early in the season. I'd stay away. If I had to I'd lean Tampa Bay and the points. +6.5 is a lot and Winston can possibly be as terrible as he was last week, right? But if the Panthers get ahead early, and control the ball with McCaffery, forget it.