



The Yucks: Two Years in Tampa with the Losingest Team in NFL History

Jason Vuic

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Friday Night Lights meets *The Bad News Bears* in this uproarious account of the first two seasons with the worst team in NFL history: the hapless, hilarious, and hopelessly winless 1976–1977 Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Long before their first Super Bowl victory in 2003, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers did something no NFL team had ever done before and that none will ever likely do again: They lost twenty-six games in a row. It started in 1976, in their first season as an expansion team, and it lasted until the penultimate game of the 1977 season, when they defeated Archie Manning and the New Orleans Saints on the road. After the game, Saints coach Hank Stram was fired and said, “We are all very ashamed of what happened. Ashamed for our people, our fans, the organization, everybody.” When the Bucs arrived back in Tampa, they were mobbed, and eight thousand people came to a victory party. It was the beginning of a new streak for a team that had come to be called “The Yucks.” They won their final game at home, and the fans tore down the goalposts.

This was no ordinary streak. It was an existential curse that unfolded week after week, with Johnny Carson leading the charge on *The Tonight Show*. Along with their ridiculous mascot and uniforms, which were known as “the Creamsicles,” the Yucks were a national punch line and personnel purgatory. Owned by the miserly and bulbous-nosed Hugh Culverhouse, who charged players for sodas in the locker room, the team was the end of the line for Heisman Trophy winner and University of Florida hero Steve Spurrier, and a banishment for former Cowboy defensive end Pat Toomay after he wrote a tell-all book about his time on “America’s Team.” Many players on the Bucs had been out of football for years, and it wasn’t uncommon for them to have to introduce themselves in the huddle. They were coached by the ever-quotable college great John McKay, whose press conferences were infamous. “We can’t win at home and we can’t win on the road,” he said. “What we need is a neutral site.”

But the Bucs were a part of something bigger, too. They were a gambit by promoters, journalists, and civic boosters to create a shared identity for a region that didn’t exist—Tampa Bay. Before the Yucks, “the Bay” was a body of water, and even the worst team in memory transformed Florida’s Gulf communities into a single region with a common cause. *The Yucks* is an unforgettable and hilarious account of athletic futility and despair. But the players worked their way into the fans’ hearts and were a team that, by losing, did more to generate attention than they ever could have otherwise.

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