

# *CASE NFL*

## *NFL WEEK 10*

### **1. *Buccaneers +3 1/2 hosting Texans (1 unit)***

A strong running attack and a much improved defense have been instrumental in Houston being three games above .500 for the first time.

But the Texans still aren't a strong enough team to cover more than a field goal on the road against a respectable foe while missing Andre Johnson and being in a flat spot.

Johnson has missed the last five games with a hamstring injury. Most likely, the Texans will hold him out again this week since they have a bye next week. This marks the 13th straight week the Texans are in action if you count preseason. Their long awaited bye doesn't come until next week. So fatigue could set in especially in a high-humidity setting.

Houston's passing attack is far less explosive without Johnson, losing on average about 30 yards through the air. Matt Schaub is having just a mediocre year minus Johnson.

The Texans will try to overcome Johnson's absence by featuring Arian Foster and Ben Tate on the ground. The Buccaneers know they need to be stout on run defense. That's why they picked up Albert Haynesworth after losing star tackle Gerald McCoy for the season.

Haynesworth was a bust with New England, but should fit in better with the Buccaneers because he's at his best in a one-gap scheme, which Tampa Bay uses. Haynesworth should be on his best behavior, too, since this could be his final stop.

Tampa Bay is 4-4 and desperately needs this home victory to maintain contact with New Orleans and Atlanta in its much tougher NFC South Division.

This game isn't nearly as important to Houston, which has become the class of the AFC South. The Buccaneers need a decent running game to be effective. They are 0-4 when rushing for less than 100 yards.

LeGarrette Blount is the Bucs' offensive key. He's healthy after missing two games. He's averaging 100 yards rushing and 5.6 yards per carry in his last six home games. Josh Freeman has a lot more confidence when the pressure isn't entirely on him to produce.

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## **2. Titans +3 1/2 at Panthers (1 unit)**

Mention the Carolina Panthers and Cam Newton immediately pops up. Newton is a stud. No argument there.

Newton gives Carolina a chance to cover spreads every week. The backdoor is alive with him.

It's easy to overlook Carolina's many weaknesses because of Newton. The Panthers are giving up 25.8 points, which is the fifth-highest in the NFL, and are weak on special teams.

The Panthers don't know how to win games blowing second-half leads during five of their six losses. They are just 2-6. Tennessee is a far more respectable 4-4.

The Titans have faced three of the top four ranked defenses during their past four games having gone against Pittsburgh, Houston and Cincinnati. This is a huge step down for the Titans taking on the Panthers.

Chris Johnson is having a terrible season with just one touchdown. But I don't believe the three-time Pro Bowler, who was the best runner in football two years ago, has suddenly just lost it.

I see Johnson finally having his long awaited breakout game against a Panthers run defense that is tied for having allowed the most rushing touchdowns with 11 and is giving up 133.3 yards on the ground per game, the sixth-worst in the league.

The Panthers also are yielding 8.35 yards per pass attempt, which is the second-highest ratio in the league. Matt Hasselbeck has held up well so far throwing for 2,014 yards, which is the second-most he's passed for through eight games in his career.

Yes, Hasselbeck misses Kenny Britt. But now he's facing a much weaker defense than he's usually gone up against and should finally be able to count on some ground support.

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## **3. Bills +6 at Cowboys (1 unit)**

Buffalo is 3-0-1 ATS when taking points this season. The Bills are 5-1-1 ATS in their last seven November games. Dallas has failed to cover eight of the past 10 times it has been home chalk. The Cowboys are 2-10-1 ATS the past 13 times they've been favored either home or away.

So the trends, angles and history clearly favor Buffalo. What about the matchup, though?

The Bills are averaging 27.8 points. No team in the AFC is averaging more. Only once have the Bills failed to produce at least 20 points.

The Cowboys have surrendered an average of 200 yards on the ground during the past two weeks. Fred Jackson is the AFC's top rusher. The Cowboys' secondary is down a key player with cornerback Mike Jenkins out. It's another plus for Buffalo if linebacker Sean Lee has to miss another game for Dallas after sitting out last week with a wrist injury.

Ryan Fitzpatrick is at his best on carpet in a temperature controlled climate where his weak arm isn't exposed by any possible bad weather elements. The Cowboys don't have enough depth in the secondary to stop Fitzpatrick's short passing-spread out style attack.

The Bills' have a bend-but-don't-break type of defense. They give up lots of yardage, but also lead the AFC with 15 interceptions. The Cowboys pick up lots of yardage, but have trouble converting in the Red Zone. Tony Romo is turnover prone. Because of that, Dallas has become very conservative in the Red Zone settling for field goals instead of being aggressive. That's important when taking close to a touchdown against the Cowboys.

The Cowboys' attack isn't at full strength either. Miles Austin, their most dependable wide receiver, is out and Felix Jones isn't expected to play either.

The Bills are 1-2 away from home. Their two losses were by three points each to the Bengals and Giants, teams with much better records than the Cowboys. The Bills also are used to playing on carpet.

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## **4. Steelers -3 at Bengals (1 unit)**

The Bengals have been a nice story going 6-2 behind rookie quarterback Andy Dalton.

But reality sets in on the Bengals in this matchup.

Pittsburgh is in an angry, foul mood after giving up a touchdown pass with eight seconds left at home last Sunday night to lose to arch-rival Baltimore.

The Steelers own a strong psychological edge on the Bengals having beating them nine of the past 10 times, while also covering all nine victories.

Under ace defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau, the Steelers have been particularly rough on rookie quarterbacks using their various confusing blitz packages.

The Bengals have a below average offense that isn't built to play from behind. Cincinnati relies a lot on Cedric Benson, who has averaged just 3.3 yards per carry in six lifetime meetings against the Steelers. Pittsburgh ranks No. 3 in the league in total defense.

Cincinnati also has a stellar defense, but hasn't faced a quarterback as good as Ben Roethlisberger, who is averaging 352 yards throwing in his last three games with six touchdown throws during this span. Mike Wallace is a premier deep threat and Antonio Brown is emerging as a very good wide receiver, too.

The Bengals' fancy 6-2 record is deceiving. Cincinnati has played only two foes with a winning record. The Bengals lost to Denver and five of their victories have come against Cleveland, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, Seattle and Tennessee. The combined record of those five opponents is 11-30.

Cincinnati has cut the gap, but not enough to stay within a field goal of the Steelers.

## **5. Atlanta PK hosting New Orleans (1 UNIT)**

I may not be quite as impressed with New Orleans as are most. The opening week surge against quality teams Green Bay, Chicago, and Houston is long ago and fading from the rear view mirror. In the NFL world of "what have you done for me lately?", they are 3-2 SU, 2-3 ATS against Jax, Carolina, T. Bay, Indy and St. Louis. That's a motley crew at

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best. Their travails as traveler have persisted. They enter on a 2-8 ATS road run, including 1-4 ATS TY. Under-loved Atlanta is the value side in this. Fourth year HC Smith has a 35-23 ATS record. And QB Ryan is 19-5 at home. Again this year, they are 2-1 SUATS on this field with their only loss to the undefeated Super Bowl champs. But five road games have left them in relative anonymity. Only the offensive passing game of New Orleans shows a statistical edge. All of the above factors make Atlanta the clear choice for success today.

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