



More than a game for Saints fans

Aug. 29, 2005. Sept. 11, 2001. For most people in this country, the latter date stands out more than the former, but not if you're from the Gulf Coast.

On Aug. 29, 2005, as the New Orleans Saints prepared to start their season less than two weeks later against the Carolina Panthers, a blitz of wind and rain pummeled their city. One of Mother Nature's most vicious play calls ever: Hurricane Katrina.

I remember watching the storm coverage on TV in awe, not sure how something so devastating could appear on the horizon one day, disappear the next, and in the process destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of helpless people.

The day after the storm hit, I answered a phone call from my aunt, who lives in Gulfport, Miss., only a short drive from New Orleans and a short walk from the beach. She couldn't talk long, because cell phone battery power had suddenly become a precious commodity, but she said all she needed to.

"We're alive, but we've lost everything."



By Reilly Moore
SPORTS EDITOR

Her story was not unique, and the months and years that followed would not get any easier for Katrina's victims. Countless lots still littered with FEMA trailers complemented recurring nightmares as the daily reminders of the storm's wrath. Even Saints quarterback Drew Brees recalled his visit to post-Katrina New Orleans during an interview for USA Today with startling honesty.

"You just say, 'Man, what happened here? It looks like a nuclear bomb went off.'"

Katrina's punishment was swift, unwavering and indiscriminate – the rich and the poor, the black and the white, the young and the old. No one in her path of destruction was spared.

But now, 53 months after Katrina changed New Orleans forever, the Saints have a chance to change it again.

During 2005, the New Orleans Superdome had suffered so much damage that the Saints couldn't play a single home game in it during the season, providing the perfect incubation period for the Saints fever that was preparing to spread.

When 2006 came around, questions still loomed

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Photo by Nick Mider

Junior Justin Harper jumps for a layup during the men's basketball team's 62-36 victory against Saint Louis University on Saturday afternoon at the Robins Center. Harper scored 16 points during the game, which was played despite snowy conditions on campus. Richmond continued its Atlantic-10 schedule on Wednesday with a 68-58 win against St. Joseph's University and will return home on Saturday to face Temple University.

TWO-MINUTE DRILL



By Reilly Moore

♦ Former NFL running back Herschel Walker, 47, won his first-career mixed martial arts fight on Saturday, beating a 25-year-old man from Arizona. ... Kind of a cool story, but it begs the question: Why would you ever want to fight Herschel Walker?

♦ Professional golfer Scott McCarron and Phil Mickelson have engaged in a tabloid catfight after McCarron said Mickelson's use of square-grooved wedges constituted cheating. ... The two were going to settle the dispute in an MMA fight of their own, but Mickelson is about 45 Big Macs out of McCarron's weight class.

♦ Beyoncé and Taylor Swift were the big winners at Sunday night's Grammy Awards, which was refreshingly free of Kanye West. ... Normally the Grammys wouldn't make the TMD, but apparently the NFL had an All-Star game on the same night. ... But, it wasn't in Hawaii, it was before the Super Bowl and David Garrard played in it, so it might have just been a prank.

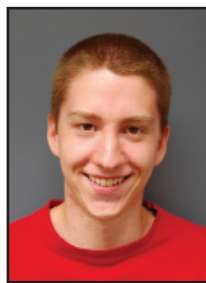
♦ New York Jets head coach Rex Ryan flipped the bird to Miami Dolphins fans at, you guessed it, an MMA fight in Miami last week, earning himself a \$50,000 fine from his team. ... The rotund Ryan claims the entire incident was a misunderstanding and that he was actually using his middle finger to get the attention of both the cotton candy man and the beer man at the same time.

The big winners and big losers of the MLB offseason

The great thing about this weekend's Super Bowl is that baseball season is right around the corner. Pitchers and catchers start to report for spring training on Feb. 17 and games start on March 2. In case you have not paid attention to the sport since Nov. 4 when the New York Yankees defeated the Philadelphia Phillies for their 27th World Series title, here are my winners and losers of the offseason.

Winners:

The Yankees had the best offseason of any team. They started early by acquiring center fielder Curtis Granderson from the Detroit Tigers for three players, including a top prospect in the Yankees' farm system. The 28-year-old Granderson should



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be a fixture in the Yankee outfield for years to come. The Yankees also solidified the back-end of their rotation by trading for pitcher Javier Vazquez. The 33-year-old Vazquez, who was an All-Star in his lone season in the Bronx in 2004, will give the Yankees a power-pitcher as their third or fourth starter. New York also made nice short-term additions by signing designated hitter Nick Johnson and left fielder Randy Winn to one-year deals. Johnson and Winn will give the lineup more balance between power and average.

The Boston Red Sox also had a good offseason. Their additions were better than the Yankees', but they had to give out longer contracts than their rival in New York. The best move was adding pitcher John Lackey to an already formidable rotation. The Sox had to give a five-year deal to Lackey, 31, and there are some questions as to whether he can pitch at a high level for all five years. Boston did greatly improve its defense with the signings of third baseman Adrian Beltre, shortstop Marco Scutaro and centerfielder Mike Cameron. This year's Bos-

ton team will be very different than previous years with the team relying on pitching and defense, not offense, to win games.

The Seattle Mariners also had a great offseason, becoming the favorite to win the American League West. They acquired pitcher Cliff Lee from the Phillies and now possess the best 1-2 pitching combination in all of baseball with Felix Hernandez and Lee. The combination of Ichiro and newly signed Chone Figgins at the top of the lineup will cause fits for opposing pitchers. The only thing missing from this team is a power bat, which could have been solved if they had signed Matt Holliday.

The Arizona Diamondbacks and Washington Nationals both receive honorable mentions on my list. The Diamondbacks' starting rotation has the potential to be one of the best in the National League with the additions of Edwin Jackson and Ian Kennedy. The Nationals added veterans in catcher Ivan Rodriguez and pitcher

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