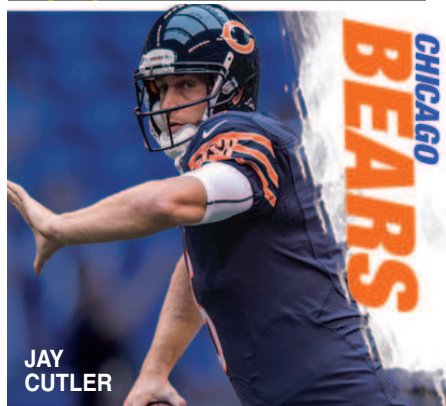


NFC NORTH



JAY CUTLER

BEARS HAVE MANY HOLES TO FILL

Coach: John Fox
2015 Record: 6-10

In 2015 the Bears did not have a 1,000-yard rusher or receiver. That doesn't bode well for quarterback Jay Cutler, who continues to be asked to carry the load in what has become a competitive division. Leading rusher Matt Forte is gone and Chicago fans are hoping that John Fox can get the defense turned around. The Bears drafted heavy on defense and expect three rookies, including Miami safety Deon Bush, to start.

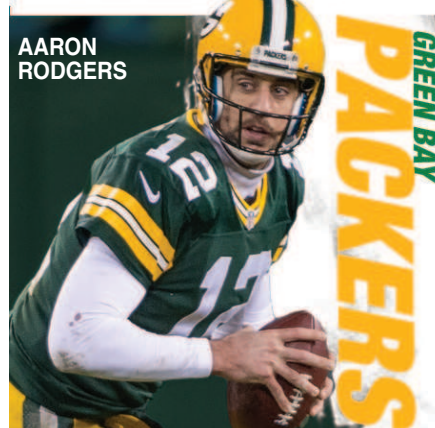


MATTHEW STAFFORD

LIONS MOVE ON WITHOUT MEGATRON

Coach: Jim Caldwell
2015 Record: 7-9

Calvin "Megatron" Johnson's early retirement took Detroit by surprise. To fill the void at receiver, the Lions signed free agent veteran Anquan Boldin and also Marvin Jones, giving quarterback Matthew Stafford formidable targets. They had a good draft that included taking Ohio State offensive tackle Taylor Decker to help protect Stafford. A playoff team in 2014, things could be going in the wrong direction if they don't improve their running game and plug defensive holes.

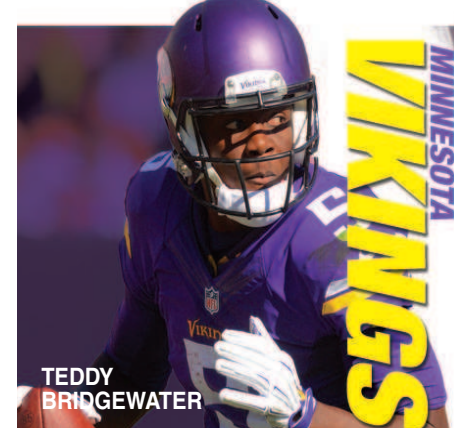


AARON RODGERS

HEALTHY PACKERS BAD NEWS FOR OPPONENTS

Coach: Mike McCarthy
2015 Record: 10-6

Even with Aaron Rodgers keeping them in the playoff picture, the Packers had their weaknesses, mainly injuries, exposed in the postseason. Last year with receiver Jordy Nelson among the injured, they settled for a wild card berth. Nelson's return and a healthy Eddie Lacy should benefit Rodgers, arguably the league's best quarterback. Meanwhile, the defense led by veteran linebacker Clay Matthews, can still get it done. The Pack still has the upper hand in the NFC North.



TEDDY BRIDGEWATER

CAN THE VIKINGS KEEP PACE IN THE NFC NORTH?

Coach: Mike Zimmer
2015 Record: 11-5

The Vikings are a team on the rise (at least they were in 2015), thanks to a maturing Teddy Bridgewater and the defensive-minded coaching of Mike Zimmer. Building on that momentum becomes paramount and while the defense improved, the offense stalled at times, even with Adrian Peterson carrying the ball. Drafting Ole Miss wideout Laquon Treadwell is a good start in putting a better supporting cast around Bridgewater, who needs to be less conservative.

NFC SOUTH

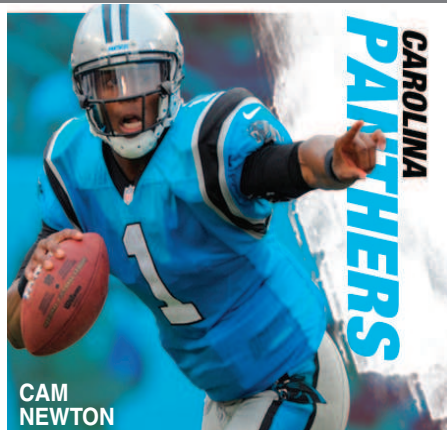


MATT RYAN

FALCONS IMPROVED DEFENSE SHOULD BOOST OFFENSE

Coach: Dan Quinn
2015 Record: 8-8

With quarterback Matt Ryan throwing deep balls to receiver Julio Jones, the Falcons can score at any time. Running back Devonta Freeman emerged with a 1,000-yard season and the Falcons had the seventh best offense in the league but only finished at .500. They addressed their defense in the offseason by re-signing Adrian Clayborn, grabbing Derrick Shelby from Miami and taking Florida safety Keanu Neal in the first round of the draft.

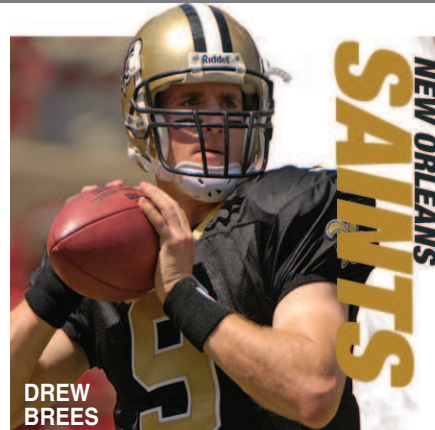


CAM NEWTON

SUPER BOWL OR BUST FOR NEWTON AND THE PANTHERS

Coach: Ron Rivera
2015 Record: 15-1

There's only one way to improve on a 15-1 season and a Super Bowl loss and that is to win the Super Bowl. That's a lofty goal for franchise quarterback Cam Newton and the Panthers, who were sixth in defense and eleventh in offense in 2015. Taking some running pressure off Newton makes him more dangerous while the defense remains intact. Their divisional opponents may be improving but barring injuries, the division should belong to the Panthers.



DREW BREES

BREES STILL AMONG THE BEST OF NFL QUARTERBACKS

Coach: Sean Payton
2015 Record: 7-9

Quarterback Drew Brees led a potent offense in 2015 that at times looked like the Saints of old, before the bounty scandal and ensuing 2012 suspensions. But while their offense was the second best yardage wise in the NFL, the defense was the second worst. They did their best to address that during the offseason, drafting Louisville defensive tackle Sheldon Rankins in the first round and signing free agent linebackers Craig Robertson and James Laurinaitis.



JAMEIS WINSTON

BUCS BUILD ON WINSTON'S ROOKIE CAMPAIGN

Coach: Lovie Smith
2015 Record: 6-10

Statistically the Bucs were one of the NFL's best in 2015, finishing fifth in offense and 10th in defense. It just didn't reflect in the standings. If they can improve on that in any way, they could be a playoff team. Quarterback Jameis Winston should be able to build on a commendable rookie season and coach Lovie Smith is always working on constructing a better defense. This could be a fun team to watch as the season progresses.