



GOOD THINGS COME IN PAIRS

The “tandem” backfield has made a return!

Last season, 12 teams boasted two running backs with at least 500 rushing yards apiece, including the final four playoff teams – Indianapolis, Chicago, New England and New Orleans.

“It’s good for the game and good for offenses,” says former New York Giants quarterback and current CBS analyst **PHIL SIMMS**. “I look for everybody to try to stack two guys in that position because of injuries, but more importantly, because it’s more productive to play that way.”

Bears head coach **LOVIE SMITH** agrees.

“You see a lot more teams using two running backs now,” says Smith, who watched as **THOMAS JONES** (1,210 yards) and **CEDRIC BENSON** (647) helped lead the Bears to Super Bowl XLI. “You need at least two good running backs to make it through a season. It’s a lot of punishment the players take during the course of the year.”

The Saints used the No. 2 overall pick in the 2006 NFL Draft to select **REGGIE BUSH** and paired him with Pro Bowl running back **DEUCE MC ALLISTER**. McAllister led the team with 1,057 rushing yards and Bush added 565 yards on the ground along with 88 receptions for 742 yards as New Orleans advanced to the NFC Championship Game.

“Given the pounding that the running back position takes, it’s difficult to get through the year thinking you’re going to run one back 30 times a game,” says Saints head coach **SEAN PAYTON**. “I just know that you can’t have enough at that position.”

In San Diego, the Chargers compiled the best record in the NFL last season with a 14-2 mark behind the play of NFL MVP running back **LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON** and backup **MICHAEL TURNER**. Tomlinson scored an NFL-record 31 touchdowns and led the league with 1,815 rushing yards while Turner added 502 yards on the ground and averaged 6.3 yards per carry.

“I believe in depth,” says Chargers general manager **A.J. SMITH**. “And we’ve got two of the best backs in the NFL.”

The Atlanta Falcons led the NFL in rushing last year, averaging 183.7 yards per game. The Falcons boast a pair of dynamic running backs in **WARRICK DUNN** (1,140 yards) and **JERIOUS NORWOOD** (633).

“In the NFL these days, defenses have gotten so big, physical and athletic that it’s very hard for a young man to be able to carry the entire load by himself,” says Falcons offensive coordinator **HUE JACKSON**. “As the season goes on and when you start to get to the later games in the year, the guy is not playing as well as he was when he was fresh.

“There is no question that having a different back in your stable to provide a change-up for your starter is good. There are two reasons. The first is that it keeps the ball carrier fresh. Two, it gives the defense something else that they have to defend against. Normally, the second back is a little different from the starter – whether it’s a speed element, a power element or his ability to catch the ball. Now the defense has to prepare for the skills that another guy brings to the table, which makes your offense more dynamic.”

Following are the teams that employed two running backs with at least 500 rushing yards apiece last season:

TEAM	RUNNING BACKS WITH 500+ YARDS
Atlanta Falcons	Warrick Dunn (1,140) and Jerious Norwood (633)
Carolina Panthers	DeShaun Foster (897) and DeAngelo Williams (501)
Chicago Bears	Thomas Jones (1,210) and Cedric Benson (647)
Dallas Cowboys	Julius Jones (1,084) and Marion Barber (654)
Denver Broncos	Tatum Bell (1,025) and Mike Bell (677)
Indianapolis Colts	Joseph Addai (1,081) and Dominic Rhodes (641)
Jacksonville Jaguars	Fred Taylor (1,146) and Maurice Jones-Drew (941)
New England Patriots	Corey Dillon (812) and Laurence Maroney (745)
New Orleans Saints	Deuce McAllister (1,057) and Reggie Bush (565)
San Diego Chargers	LaDainian Tomlinson (1,815) and Michael Turner (502)
Seattle Seahawks	Shaun Alexander (896) and Maurice Morris (604)
Washington Redskins	Ladell Betts (1,154) and Clinton Portis (523)