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HOPES HIGH FOR SAINTS & CARDINALS AS FANS CAN'T WAIT FOR 2006 KICKOFF

The calendar may read May, but it's football season year-round for legions of passionate NFL fans from coast to coast.

And on the heels of an NFL Draft that was watched by a record number of TV viewers, among those most excited for Kickoff 2006 Weekend are fans in America's Gulf Coast region and Arizona. Bring on the season!

After a year of unprecedented challenges, the New Orleans Saints welcome a youthful, energetic new head coach in 42-year old former Dallas Cowboys assistant head coach **SEAN PAYTON**.

"I hope that in some small way the effort of this team will represent the city and region well and show the country that New Orleans is back and a team to be reckoned with in the NFC South," says Payton.

Sharing that enthusiasm is the club's new quarterback **DREW BREES**, one of the most sought-after free agents in the league who elected to bring his talent to New Orleans, where he continues his rehabilitation from a shoulder injury.

"I feel great right now and I'm way ahead of schedule," says Brees of his rehabilitation. "I've been throwing for almost five weeks and I'm looking forward to being 100 percent by training camp. I'm just so excited to be a part of this team and this community. New Orleans and the region are very alive, and you have a lot of great citizens who are very committed to rebuilding the city and are excited about Saints football."

That excitement reached a crescendo on draft day on April 29 when the Saints used the No. 2 overall selection on Heisman Trophy-winning running back **REGGIE BUSH** of USC, one of the most dynamic players in college football history. Bush joins a backfield that includes a two-time All-Star in former Mississippi standout **DEUCE MC ALLISTER**.

"Everybody is excited," McAllister says. "The highlights of what Reggie has done at USC show that he can really add a dimension to our offense. We have two different games and I think we'll create mismatches for teams defending us."

Adds Bush, "It's a blessing to be here. I think I can do a lot not only for the organization, but the city itself. I can't wait to get started."

That start before the hometown fans will come on Monday, September 25 in a restored Louisiana Superdome against the NFC South rival Atlanta Falcons. The Saints have already broken their season-ticket record with 54,969 sold.

The theme of excitement is echoed approximately 1,300 miles to the west of Louisiana in the Valley of the Sun, where fans of the Arizona Cardinals are thrilled by the prospects ahead for the team. And much like in New Orleans, that excitement was stoked by the signing of a prized free agent – and cemented with a draft class loaded with potential.

"The Cardinals were the right situation for me," says running back **EDGERRIN JAMES**, who joined the club this spring after seven record-setting seasons with the Indianapolis Colts, sparking a ticket-buying frenzy that helped the Cardinals sell out their season ticket allotment for the season. "The sooner we get going, the better."

The team will "get going" in the brand-new Cardinals Stadium this season. The state-of-the art facility, which will open in August and host Super Bowl XLII on February 3, 2008, has received global media attention for its innovative design which features the first fully retractable grass surface in North America.

Adding to the high hopes for 2006 was a draft class that includes a pair of USC Trojans in quarterback **MATT LEINART** and guard **DEUCE LUTUI**.

"We are really gaining new fans every day," says Cardinals head coach **DENNIS GREEN**. "We have sold out season tickets and we will have a packed stadium. It's going to be a terrific atmosphere and we are all looking forward to it."