

# NFL 2011

Team capsules and order to finish predicted by the World-Herald staff writers.

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**GREEN BAY:** With several injuries and a nonexistent running game, the Packers still won the Super Bowl. The formula for repeat? Protect QB Aaron Rodgers and let the defense keep the game close.

**DETROIT:** Will QB Matthew Stafford and RB Jahvid Best stay healthy? Will Calvin Johnson continue to become an elite receiver? Will Nick Fairley have an impact? Will DT Ndamukong Suh lead the NFL in fines? If the answer to the first three questions is yes, watch out for the Lions.

**CHICAGO:** The Bears need to rely on their defense, which despite its age is still pretty good. QB Jay Cutler hasn't overcome his inconsistency. It may be time for RB Matt Forte to handle more of the load.

**MINNESOTA:** Hockey season can't get here fast enough in Minnesota. The key is RB Adrian Peterson — and Vikings' foes know it, too.

— Kristin Donovan



AARON RODGERS

## NFC NORTH

**Certainty:** Rodgers is by far the best quarterback in the division. He'll have to learn how to handle MVP hype, but he's doing well so far.

**Uncertainty:** Are there two playoff teams in the NFC North? It seems the Packers are already being penciled in, but are the Lions and last year's division champion Bears going to the postseason?

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**ST. LOUIS:** QB Sam Bradford and RB Steven Jackson have what it takes to get the Rams to the playoffs, even if that means a 9-7 record. Adding WR Mike Sims-Walker gives Bradford one more target.

**ARIZONA:** Picking up QB Kevin Kolb makes WR Larry Fitzgerald even more dangerous. Throw in TE Todd Heap and RB Beanie Wells, and the Cardinals will certainly move the ball.

**SAN FRANCISCO:** The 49ers signed a new coach in Jim Harbaugh, but the same problems hover over the Bay Area. The biggest of which is QB Alex Smith, who has yet to have a 3,000-yard season.

**SEATTLE:** The Seahawks made the playoffs in 2010 with a 7-9 record, but with a downgrade at quarterback to Tarvaris Jackson, things are looking worse.

— Cameron Carlow



LARRY FITZGERALD

## NFC WEST

**Certainty:** It can't be as bad as last year, can it? Either way, all four teams have a shot to take the division crown.

**Uncertainty:** Quarterback Bradford is the only proven passer in the division, and saying that is a stretch. Alex Smith is a bust, Tarvaris Jackson failed in Minnesota, and Kevin Kolb has yet to play a full season in the NFL.

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**ATLANTA:** Rookie WR Julio Jones provides QB Matt Ryan with an explosive new weapon. That connection could be just the difference the Falcons need to push past the Saints in a tight race.

**NEW ORLEANS:** The Saints should be in the hunt for a playoff spot and could certainly make a Super Bowl run with an improved defense. On offense, the key will be the running game and rookie Mark Ingram.

**TAMPA BAY:** Was last season a fluke? The Bucs surprised with 10 wins against the weakest schedule in the league. The offense has developed enough to compete, but the extremely young defense will be a liability.

**CAROLINA:** There's more talent on this roster than it would appear after a 2-14 season, but developing under new coach Ron Rivera will take time. Rookie QB Cam Newton and the Panthers are likely a year or two away.

— Brian Norton



CAM NEWTON

## NFC SOUTH

**Certainty:** This will be a very entertaining division race to watch. Both Atlanta and New Orleans are filled with talent and potent offenses. And the youngsters in Tampa likely will surprise again this year.

**Uncertainty:** Was Newton a one-hit wonder? After one big year at Auburn, he now takes the helm of the Panthers.

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**PHILADELPHIA:** Michael Vick — who played in only 12 games last year — heads an offense that ranked third in scoring a season ago, and the defense got a big boost with the addition of All-Pro CB Nnamdi Asomugha.

**NEW YORK:** The Giants missed the playoffs the last two years, despite starts of 5-0 and 6-2. With the defense hurting, the pressure is on Eli Manning, Hakeem Nicks and company to get back to the postseason.

**DALLAS:** Tony Romo's return at QB should help the offense, but the defense — now headed by Rob Ryan — will need to improve after finishing 31st in points allowed last season.

**WASHINGTON:** Just how threatening is a team whose battle for the starting quarterback job was between Rex Grossman and John Beck? Expect the Redskins to be contenders in the Andrew Luck sweepstakes.

— Cory Gilinsky



MICHAEL VICK

## NFC EAST

**Certainty:** The Eagles will be OK if Vick gets injured. Vince Young has been a starter most of his career, and coach Andy Reid has a knack for getting the most out of backup QBs.

**Uncertainty:** Will the Giants' defense survive the season? Starters Terrell Thomas and Jonathan Goff are out for the year, and the line is banged up heading into Sunday's opener.

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**PITTSBURGH:** The team that was one drive short of another Super Bowl title returned 20 of 22 starters, including QB Ben Roethlisberger and safety Troy Polamalu.

**BALTIMORE:** With Ed Reed, Ray Lewis and Terrell Suggs, no one is going to score much against the Ravens. They just have to get past the Steelers — and they'll get their first chance Week 1.

**CLEVELAND:** Colt McCoy, the 10th QB to start a season opener for the Browns since 1999, worked out with Brett Favre (still retired) in the offseason. McCoy's progression in his second year is worth watching.

**CINCINNATI:** What a difference a year makes. Cincinnati was a playoff contender with QB Carson Palmer. Ten straight losses, Palmer's talking retirement and QB Andy Dalton will try to save Marvin Lewis' job.

— Kristin Donovan



JAMES HARRISON

## AFC NORTH

**Certainty:** Barring catastrophic injuries, the Steelers and Ravens will make the playoffs. And it will take a miracle — or the return of Boomer Esiason circa 1988 — to save Lewis' job.

**Uncertainty:** Where will Palmer end up? Between the QB and Bengals ownership, no one wants to back down. But someone should.

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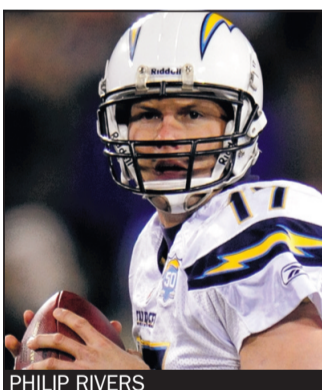
**SAN DIEGO:** Philip Rivers is an elite quarterback, and the additions of safety Bob Sanders and LB Takeo Spikes will fuel the defense. The Chargers boasted a league-high 395.6 yards per game, and the defense allowed a league-best 271.6 yards per game in 2010.

**KANSAS CITY:** The defending division champs added All-Pro FB Le'Ron McClain to bulldoze a path for RB Jamaal Charles, who is coming off a 1,400-yard season.

**DENVER:** Coach Jon Fox's decision to bench QB Tim Tebow left Bronco fans scratching their head, but QB Kyle Orton was fourth in the league in passing yards per game last season.

**OAKLAND:** After losing corner Nnamdi Asomugha and TE Zach Miller, Oakland will likely miss the playoffs for the ninth straight season.

— Cameron Carlow



PHILIP RIVERS

## AFC WEST

**Certainty:** The AFC West features two MVP-caliber players in San Diego's Rivers and Kansas City's Charles.

**Uncertainty:** Will Tebow take snaps by the end of the season? Can Oakland repeat an unlikely 8-8 season? Can the Chargers live up to their potential?

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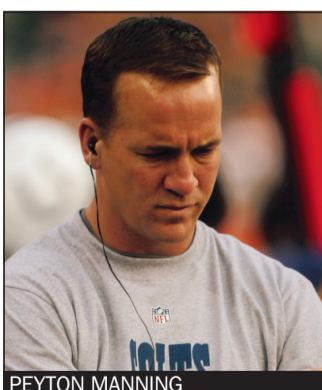
**HOUSTON:** The Texans' high-powered offense should be able to push past the rest of the division, including a Peyton Manning-less Colts. This is the Texans' chance to have a breakout season.

**INDIANAPOLIS:** Can the Colts win without Manning? Hard to tell at this point but the dropoff at quarterback from Manning to Kerry Collins, coaxed out of retirement, will be too much to overcome to win the South.

**JACKSONVILLE:** The shocking decision to cut QB David Garrard leaves the offense in the hands of Luke McCown and rookie Blaine Gabbert. Coach Jack Del Rio's job is on the line and things don't look good.

**TENNESSEE:** There are plenty of new faces on the Titans' sideline in what will most certainly be a rebuilding year. With Matt Hasselbeck and Jake Locker, QB should be a more consistent position.

— Brian Norton



PEYTON MANNING

## AFC SOUTH

**Certainty:** The only certainty here is that the division is up for grabs. Houston's Matt Schaub is the only returning starter at QB and could be the key to a division title.

**Uncertainty:** The Colts will be without Manning for 2 to 3 months. Replacing a star is always tough, but Manning hasn't missed a start in his NFL career. Can the Colts cope?

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**NEW ENGLAND:** Tom Brady and coach Bill Belichick are still around, and offseason acquisitions WR Chad Ochocinco and DT Albert Haynesworth — despite carrying some baggage — could turn in big years.

**NEW YORK:** The Jets have been one win from the Super Bowl the past two seasons, but their only big move in the offseason was adding WR Plaxico Burress. Will that be enough to get them over the hump?

**MIAMI:** Reggie Bush finally gets a shot at being a featured running back, and he'll need to play like one to get the Dolphins into the playoff race. A better season from QB Chad Henne couldn't hurt, either.

**BUFFALO:** Ryan Fitzpatrick played well last season after taking over the starting QB job, and he's got a deep threat in Stevie Johnson. This team's not quite ready to contend, but the Bills could play spoiler late in the year.

— Cory Gilinsky



TOM BRADY

## AFC EAST

**Certainty:** Jets coach Rex Ryan will say something controversial about Brady before New York plays the Patriots — and probably every other week, too.

**Uncertainty:** Is Shonn Greene ready to shoulder the load in New York? He was tabbed as the No. 1 back last year, but ended up losing carries to an aging LaDainian Tomlinson.

## MIDLANDERS ON NFL ROSTERS

Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	College
<b>ARIZONA CARDINALS</b>					
Stewart Bradley	LB	6-4	258	5	Nebraska
Brandon Keith	OT	6-5	335	4	Northern Iowa
<b>ATLANTA FALCONS</b>					
Jonathan Babineaux	DT	6-2	300	7	Iowa
Bob Bruggeman	C	6-4	293	1	Iowa
<b>BALTIMORE RAVENS</b>					
Sam Koch	P	6-1	220	6	Nebraska
Bryan Mattison	G	6-3	210	2	Iowa
Marshal Yanda	G	6-3	315	5	Iowa
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Austin Howard	OT	6-7	333	2	Northern Iowa
Ryan Mahaffey	FB	6-2	257	R	Northern Iowa
<b>BUFFALO BILLS</b>					
Scott Chandler	TE	6-7	263	3	Iowa
Chris Kelsay	LB	6-4	260	9	Nebraska
Chad Rinehart	G	6-5	323	4	Northern Iowa
<b>CAROLINA PANTHERS</b>					
Jason Baker	P	6-2	205	11	Iowa
Sean Considine	DB	6-0	212	7	Iowa
Charles Godfrey	DB	5-11	205	4	Iowa
<b>CHICAGO BEARS</b>					
Zack Bowman	DB	6-1	195	4	Nebraska
*Nathan Enderle	QB	6-4	240	R	Idaho
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Ricky Henry	G	6-4	310	R	Nebraska
<b>CLEVELAND BROWNS</b>					
Eric Hagg	DB	6-1	205	R	Nebraska
Ahtyba Rubin	NT	6-2	330	4	Iowa State
Seneca Wallace	QB	5-11	205	9	Iowa State
<b>Injured Reserve</b>					
Brandon Jackson	RB	5-10	216	5	Nebraska
Eric Steinbach	G	6-6	295	9	Iowa
<b>DALLAS COWBOYS</b>					
None					
<b>DENVER BRONCOS</b>					
Russ Hochstein	G	6-4	300	11	Nebraska
<b>GREEN BAY PACKERS</b>					
Bryan Bulaga	OT	6-5	314	2	Iowa
<b>HOUSTON TEXANS</b>					
Tim Dobbins	LB	6-1	245	6	Iowa State
<b>INDIANAPOLIS COLTS</b>					
Pat Angerer	LB	6-0	235	2	Iowa
Dallas Clark	TE	6-3	252	9	Iowa
Mike McNeill	TE	6-4	235	R	Nebraska
<b>JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS</b>					
Brad Meester	C	6-3	302	12	Northern Iowa
Zach Miller	TE	6-4	245	3	UNO
Zach Potter	TE	6-7	280	2	Nebraska
Aaron Kampman	DE	6-4	260	10	Iowa
Matt Roth	DE	6-4	275	7	Iowa
<b>KANSAS CITY CHIEFS</b>					
Ricky Stanzi	QB	6-4	228	R	Iowa
Casey Wiegmann	C	6-2	285	15	Iowa
Demorrio Williams	LB	6-1	232	8	Nebraska
<b>Injured Reserve</b>					
Tony Moeaki	TE	6-3	252	2	Iowa
<b>MIAMI DOLPHINS</b>					
Benny Sapp	CB	5-9	190	8	Northern Iowa
Richie Incognito	G	6-3	324	7	Nebraska
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
D.J. Jones	OT	6-5	310	R	Nebraska
<b>Injured Reserve</b>					
Lydon Murtha	OT	6-7	315	3	Nebraska
<b>MINNESOTA VIKINGS</b>					
Christian Ballard	DT	6-4	282	R	Iowa
Chad Greenway	LB	6-2	246	6	Iowa
Seth Olsen	G	6-5	312	2	Iowa
Kenny Onatolu	LB	6-2	225	3	UNO
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Allen Reischer	TE	6-3	248	R	Iowa
<b>NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS</b>					
A.J. Edds	LB	6-4	246	2	Iowa
Jeff Tarpinian	LB	6-3	238	R	Iowa
Danny Woodhead	RB	5-8	195	4	Chadron State
<b>NEW ORLEANS SAINTS</b>					
Mitch King	DT	6-2	280	2	Iowa
Carl Nicks	G	6-5	343	4	Nebraska
Scott Shanle	LB	6-2	245	9	Nebraska
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Michael Higgins	TE	6-5	242	R	UNO
<b>Injured Reserve</b>					
Jerimiha Hunter	LB	6-2	235	R	Iowa
Fabian Washington	CB	5-11	175	6	Nebraska
<b>NEW YORK GIANTS</b>					
Prince Amukamara	CB	6-0	207	R	Nebraska
Tyler Sash	S	6-0	215	R	Iowa
Dave Tollefson	DE	6-4	266	5	NW Missouri State
<b>Injured Reserve</b>					
Sage Rosenfels	QB	6-4	222	11	Iowa State
<b>NEW YORK JETS</b>					
Shonn Greene	RB	5-11	226	3	Iowa
Matt Slauson	G	6-5	315	3	Nebraska
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Matt Kroul	OL	6-3	300	2	Iowa
<b>OAKLAND RAIDERS</b>					
Brandon Myers	TE	6-4	250	3	Iowa
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Mason Brodine	DE	6-7	255	R	Nebraska-Kearney
<b>PHILADELPHIA EAGLES</b>					
Alex Henery	K	6-1	177	R	Nebraska
Julian Vandervelde	G	6-2	300	R	Iowa
<b>PITTSBURGH STEELERS</b>					
None					
<b>SAN DIEGO CHARGERS</b>					
Nate Kaeding	K	6-0	187	8	Iowa
Bob Sanders	S	5-8	206	8	Iowa
<b>SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS</b>					
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
*Xavier Omon	RB	5-11	227	3	NW Missouri State
<b>SEATTLE SEAHAWKS</b>					
Robert Gallery	G	6-7	325	8	Iowa
<b>ST. LOUIS RAMS</b>					
Josh Brown	K	6-0	205	9	Nebraska
Bradley Fletcher	CB	6-0	198	2	Iowa
<b>TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS</b>					
Larry Asante	S	6-0	210	2	Nebraska
Adrian Clayborn	DE	6-3	281	R	Iowa
<b>Practice Squad</b>					
Collin Franklin	TE	6-6	256	R	Iowa State
<b>TENNESSEE TITANS</b>					
Karl Klug	DT	6-3	275	R	Iowa
Barrett Ruud	LB	6-2	241	7	Nebraska
<b>WASHINGTON REDSKINS</b>					
Adam Carriker	DE	6-6	315	4	Nebraska
DeJon Gomes	DB	5-11	200	R	Nebraska
Roy Helu	RB	5-11	219	R	Nebraska
Niles Paul	WR	6-1	224	R	Nebraska

\* Nathan Enderle is from North Platte, Neb.; Xavier Omon is from Beatrice, Neb.