



2009 Preview: Baltimore Ravens

Ravens looking for lofty return in 2009

by [Larry Bloemker](#)

Outlook

With a new head coach and rookie QB Joe Flacco in 2008, the Baltimore Ravens were one of the biggest surprises in the NFL, making it all the way to the AFC Championship game. Unfortunately, they lost to their division rival — the eventual Super Bowl champions — Pittsburgh Steelers.

Despite the odds, the Ravens made it further than anybody imagined through with the tried and true — their ferocious defense.

Additionally, the Ravens had great success running the football, ranking fourth in the NFL in rushing as a team, yet their most productive running back ranked 20th for yards gained in 2008. RB Le’Ron McClain was the Ravens biggest surprise, and their biggest success at running back. McClain, a converted full back, rushed for 902 yards and scored 10 TDs.

Willis McGahee battled injuries and wound up with 671 rushing yards and seven TDs in 2008. Rookie Ray Rice added 454 yards on just 107 carries but didn’t score a rushing TD in 2008.

Flacco had fairly pedestrian numbers for the year, throwing for 2,971 yards, 14 TDs and 12 INTs. Still, Flacco managed games well and kept the Ravens offense

on the field for sustained drives.

Considering the Ravens' receivers, Flacco's numbers aren't all that bad. His most consistent target was Derrick Mason, who's now 35 years old. Mason had a decent season with 1,037 yards receiving and five TDs. Mason is coming off shoulder surgery, and it is hoped he'll be ready for training camp.

Flacco could use another steady receiver to emerge. Mark Clayton started 13 games at receiver in 2008. He gained 695 yards and scored three touchdowns. TE Todd Heap is a shell of his former self, gaining just 403 yards for three TDs in 2008. Demetrius Williams barely made a contribution in seven games before injury finished his season. To help with the receiving game, the team signed TE L.J. Smith during free agency.

While all the skill position players return to the offense, which also gets new talent on the offensive line with the selection of OT Michael Oher in the first round of the 2009 NFL Draft, the Ravens storied defense will face some changes in 2009.

The Ravens long-time defensive coordinator, Rex Ryan, was hired as the head coach of the Jets in the offseason. Additionally, LB Bart Scott and S Jim Leonhard left via free agency to join Ryan in New York.

Look for the Ravens to continue emphasizing running the football. There are conflicting reports that McGahee either had offseason knee or ankle surgery, but he's been working out with the second team in June organized team activities (OTAs) while Rice ran with the starters. Though the order is not set, the Ravens look poised to have RBBC yet again.

Considering how surprising the Ravens were in 2008, they may regress in 2009. It should also be noted that the conservative nature of the Ravens offense isn't likely to produce a lot of production.

Key offseason moves

a. Acquisitions

TE L.J. Smith

Offers veteran depth behind Todd Heap.

C Matt Birk

Veteran should help anchor an offensive line in the midst of being upgraded.

b. Loses

LB Bart Scott

Joined former Raven's defensive coordinator Rex Ryan in New York.

FB Lorenzo Neal

Le'Ron McClain could assume traditional fullback duties.

c. Impact draft picks**OT Michael Oher, Mississippi**

He'll help the running game.

Star Tracker**Rising:**

Let's face it, Baltimore isn't a place you go in search of lots of offense. But if Le'Ron McClain receives the goal line work and enough touches in the RB rotation, he'd be a decent RB3.

Falling:

Willis McGahee is giving up touches to both McClain and Ray Rice. He's still battling injury, and he may get pushed out of the committee

Could Surprise

WR Mark Clayton might finally be able to put it together had have a solid season. With Derrick Mason missing time after surgery, Clayton has a chance to step up.

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