



**HOUSTON TEXANS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS**  
**SUNDAY, AUG. 27, 2023 • CAESARS SUPERDOME**  
**SAINTS POSTGAME NOTES**

- The Saints lost to the Houston Texans 13-17 in the final preseason game. They finished the preseason 2-1 to record their first winning record in the preseason since 2018. Tonight's attendance was 70,053.
- The Saints return to action on Sunday, September 10, when they open their regular season hosting the Tennessee Titans at noon CT. The game will be regionally televised on CBS (WWL 4 locally).
- New Orleans outgained the Texans 348-235 and converted eight-of-20 first downs (40.0%).
- QB **Jameis Winston** received the start and completed 11-of-16 passes (68.8%) for 93 yards with one touchdown and a 104.4 passer rating. In the third drive of the contest, Winston completed six-of-six passes for 58 yards, including three third down conversions. Winston completed a 25-yard pass to Graham and a three-yard touchdown.
- In relief of Winston, **Jake Haener** completed 17-of-38 passes for 172 yards with two interceptions.
- TE **Jimmy Graham** had three receptions for 34 yards and a TD. It was Graham's first touchdown as a Saint since a four-yard touchdown from Drew Brees on Dec. 21, 2014 vs. Atlanta. Graham last scored a touchdown in the Superdome as a member of the Chicago Bears on January 10, 2021, a 19-yard touchdown from Mitch Trubisky on the last play of Chicago's NFC Wild Card playoff loss to the Saints.
- TE **Lucas Krull** led the team in receiving with seven grabs for 106 yards. He is the only Saint to have recorded a 100+ receiving yards in a game this preseason.
- WR **Jontre Kirklin** finished with five receptions for 63 yards.
- RB **Ellis Merriweather** led the team in rushing with eight attempts for 32 yards.
- K **Blake Grupe** went 2-for-3 on field goals, hitting one from 38 yards and one from 50 yards while missing a 60-yard attempt.
- Defensively, LB **Jaylon Smith** tied for the team lead with five tackles (club-best four solo), including a team-high two stops for loss.
- LB **Nephi Sewell** tied Smith with five stops (Three solo) and also tied for the team lead with two solo special teams stops.
- DE **Isaiah Foskey**, DL **Malcolm Roach** and DE **Niko Lalos** finished with one sack apiece. Roach added one forced fumble.
- Rookie DB **Jordan Howden** tied Sewell for the team lead with two solo coverage stops and also added one solo tackle.
- Second-year LB **D'Marco Jackson** finished with two tackles (one solo) and two special teams stops (one solo), to tie Howden and Sewell in the overall category.



## POSTGAME NOTES AND QUOTES

### HOUSTON TEXANS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2023 • CAESARS SUPERDOME SAINTS HEAD COACH DENNIS ALLEN

(Opening Statement) “A bit disappointed in the loss. I just thought we gave ourselves plenty of opportunities, and I thought we had a couple of chances in the last couple of drives that we didn’t take advantage of. We lost the turnover battle for the first time. Thought that was the big difference in the game. There were a lot of positives. Particularly early in the game, I thought we did some good things. It was nice to see Jimmy (Graham) have a couple of nice catches, contested catches.”

(On Graham’s contested catches) “Yeah, I think that was one of the things that – we’ve said this. We’d like to see it every day from these guys, particularly veteran players, but at some point, we have to see it. We saw it tonight.”

(On if Blake Grupe’s kick from 60 weighs as heavily as a 50-yard field goal) “I think it’s all encompassing. (Grupe) nailed the 50-yarder, went right down the middle. Then, the 60-yarder just hung it out to the right a little bit, had plenty of leg. Look, I mean percentages of 60-yarders aren’t really high in our League yet, but I wanted to give the kid a chance to see what he could do. He just missed the kick.”

(On Bryan Bresee’s play) “Yeah, I thought (Bryan Bresee) was active in the game. I don’t know what his final stats were, but I did think he was active in the game both against the run and with the pass rush. It looked like there were a couple of good things I saw in Isaiah Foskey, also in the game. We have some tough decisions that are coming up. We have a lot of good football players on this team. We have to make some decisions over the next 48 hours.”

(On if the team is where he would like them to be to enter the season) “I don’t think you’re ever where you want to be or need to be. We’re in a race to improve and get ready for the opener that’s here two weeks from today. There’s a lot of positives with this football team right now, yet, there’s certainly some things we have to improve.”

(On the decreasing penalties throughout the preseason): “Yeah, it was much better. It was much better every game. I think we had one false start (tonight). I think we took too long at the line of scrimmage, needed to kind of get into the flow a little bit and get the snap going. I thought that was a step forward.”

(On Jimmy Graham’s progression this preseason): “Really, probably since the Chargers practices, I started to see some signs of the mental picture I have of Jimmy Graham. Again, I saw it this week in practice, and I saw it carry over into the game. That’s a positive.”

(On Foskey) “I think (Foskey)’s getting better, yet he is still a rookie. He still has a long way to go. He’s made significant strides from where he was in OTAs and even the first part of training camp. Look, that’s what you want to see. You want to see a guy that every time he gets an opportunity to go out there and receive more reps, you see the guy’s getting more comfortable in what we’re asking him to do.”

(On the difficulty of the next 48 hours in the league-mandated roster reduction) “Well, look this time of year’s always difficult and probably more difficult this year. That’s a good challenge to have, a good problem to have. We have a lot of good football players. We will go through this tomorrow and have some significant meetings to talk about it and pick the right 53 for this team.”

(On elaborating on the process of making the final roster) “Yeah, I just think we have a lot of good players, and you can’t keep them all. There will be some tough moves.”

(On when the moves will be made) “We will discuss it tomorrow and see where we’re at.”

(On Trevor Penning) “I think we’ve seen some improvement out of (Penning), and I think where we’re at right now with where he is you kind of take into account last year in the preseason and the last preseason game he was injured. I felt good about where he was at and didn’t want to risk putting him out there.”

(On Tre’Quan Smith’s status) “(Tre’Quan) is getting closer. He is not full-go yet, but he is continuing to rehab.”

(On evaluating players who are injured) “Well look, some of the guys have gotten some significant exposure to, in terms of past experience. Then you have to go back to what you saw early on in camp while yet giving some other guys opportunities to impress. I think we will look at all of that and take that all into consideration, and we will make the moves that we think are best for this team.”



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#### **DL Malcolm Roach**

(On his preseason): “My confidence is really growing. The game is slowing down for me. I’m really just out there having fun. I’ve worked my tail off this season to get better at certain things. I’m trying to become more explosive, so that I can be more effective and disruptive on the defensive line. It’s nice to see hard work pay off. We still have a long way to go. It’s just the preseason. Now it is time to get to work and get started on Tennessee.”

(On if he expected to play this much tonight) “I never really ask questions. I play until they tell me not to. If I’m not playing, then I’m not playing. I never ask questions. I just go out there and try to do my job to the best of my ability.”

(On if he feels like it has been his best camp) “It was one of the best camps. I feel like I always do well in camp, but now I have to bring it over. I stayed healthy during this camp, so thank God for that. Now it’s time to bring it over to the regular season and keep building on this success. I just want to keep building on the momentum we have and keep rolling. Let’s get this defense together and keep building on this momentum. Let’s keep creating takeaways. Let’s keep getting after the quarterback. If we can keep doing that then I can see us as one of the top defenses in the league.”

(On the next detail in his game) “For me, it is consistency. I wouldn’t say it is easy. I can show you a flash play here and there, but to do it (with) consistency. I look up to guys like Cam (Jordan). You see his success. He is successful because he does it on every play of every game. For me just becoming a pro and coming to work every day and getting better. I want to strive to be better because there is someone working for your job. You have to have that in the back of your head every day. I just need to take that next step and be consistent and go to work every day. You have to work your tail off every day because you know someone is coming.”

#### **QB Jameis Winston**

(On targeting Jimmy Graham in the red zone): “He is a living legend. It is a blessing to be able to throw him the ball and watch him go out there and make spectacular catches.”

(On his takeaway of preseason) This was the best camp of my career. I’m happy we were able to go out there and compete. Unfortunately, we weren’t able to go out there and get a win in this last game. I’m just ready to go out there and take advantage of opportunities.”

(On what made this his best camp in his opinion) “The numbers. A high completion percentage. Accurate throws. 100 percent decisions. That’s what made it my best camp.”

(On the next 48 hours) “This was my first year that we were able to keep a 90-man roster up until this point. Being able to evaluate players and see what people can do up until this point has been great on my heart and I’m sure a lot of guys hearts. The next 48 hours are going to be tough, but that is just a part of this business. They will find a way to be resilient. It is in the Lord’s hands. That is just a part of this business that is unfortunate. However, I commend all the people that are going to make a roster. Also, for the people who don’t make a roster, keep your head up because you are not just playing for one team. You are playing for 32 teams. 32 teams are evaluating you and hopefully they will make a roster somewhere.

(On how it felt getting Graham a touchdown) “It was excellent getting Jimmy Graham a touchdown. It was an opportunity to throw a ball to a living legend. We learned from some things we worked on in practice. It was great to make it to fruition. Jimmy’s been Jimmy since he first walked in the building. He has been to 12 training camps in his career. We need to keep him fresh. We need to keep him healthy. When you go out to L.A. and you aren’t playing in the conditions that we play in every single day, I think it would allow for a lot of people to find their best side.”

(On how he feels about this team) “I feel very confident about this team. We are going to do big things. I am confident about this team.”

**TE Jimmy Graham**

(On opportunity to make some big plays in the Superdome again even though preseason) "It just reminded me of all the amazing moments I had here in front of these fans, with my teammates and with this coaching staff, so many special moments and wins. I'm looking forward to continuing to capitalize and let this feeling become even bigger. I'm looking forward to the regular season. It's been an amazing training camp and I can't say enough about how good this team is at every position and how awesome iron sharpening iron is."



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#### Texans Head Coach DeMeco Ryans

(on if C. J. Stroud has earned the starting position) “Yes, C.J. will be our Week 1 starter in Baltimore.”

(on how was the decision made) “It’s been over the course of the entire process of OTAs, training camp, preseason games, and seeing the complete product and knowing C.J.’s desire to continue to get better. We are not where we need to be as a team overall. We all have to continue to get better. It’s just having the mindset to do that; and C.J., along with all of our other guys, know that in order to get better.”

(on his thoughts on how Stroud ran the offense tonight) “I thought that he did a really good job tonight. He continued to progress. He had a good week. Last week versus Miami, and to come back out this week, I thought the ball placement, again, was very nice. He can’t do that without the offensive line up front. I thought the offensive line deserved the credit. He had the time to make those throws, so credit to the offensive line. They did a really good job protecting him. That’s what we want up front. It all starts there, so I am happy what those guys did tonight.”

(on Michael Deiter starting tonight) “Deiter has done a really good job all camp. He deserved reps, and (I) wanted to see him in with the first group.”

(on if Kenyon Green has regressed) “No, we are all working to get better. As I said multiple times standing here that every position, everybody is always moving around. Every position, we always evaluate each guy and see where we are.”

(on if there was an effort to get Dameon Pierce more touches tonight) “I love the way that Dameon ran. That’s what we want to see from him. That’s what we want to see. The challenge this week was to our running backs to accelerate through the hole, to continue to move their feet, continue to finish, continue to go forward; and, it was good to see Dameon run that way. That’s his style and we love the angry style. That’s what we want to continue to see from him. Also, Mike Boone did a really nice job today as well running the ball (and) finishing runs. He ran with a very physical mindset. I love the way that both of those guys ran tonight.”

(on if the team is prepared to continue to invest in the offensive line throughout the season) “Whatever we need to do up front, we will do it. We don’t go if our offensive line doesn’t go. We don’t go if our d-line doesn’t go, so whatever we need to do to continue to get better up front, we will do it and invest in whatever we need to invest to make that work.”

(on Tank Dell) “It’s exciting. Tank is an exciting player. And, you see it again, I think each game he’s in, I think he has made a big-time play, an explosive play. That’s the type of playmaker that Tank can be for us. I am really excited with his growth throughout OTAs, training camp (and) preseason. Tank has shown up each and every day. He’s worked. He’s made those plays in practice and it’s showed up in the game.”

(on the run defense) “To start the game, I thought that our run defense was really good. I thought that the challenge on defense this week was to set edges, to swarm, and to tackle. I think that we did that defensively. We only let one get out with the quarterback, but I am proud of how our guys responded this week to the run defense. We had a bad taste in our mouth last week. That’s not the type of run defense that we expect to play, so I am happy with how they responded this week.”

(on Christian Harris going against top talent, like Jimmy Graham) “I thought that Jimmy Graham made a really nice play. Christian was in position. Jimmy made a nice play. It happens in the league. I love Christian. He was in his proper leverage. He was exactly where he was supposed to be. He was tight in coverage. At the end of the day, offenses make plays, too. Jimmy Graham has been making plays for a long time, so it was a good play by Jimmy. Credit to him.”



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#### Quarterback C.J. Stroud

(On being named the starting QB) “First of all, you want to give all, I have to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Just having this opportunity, man a blessing to be able to play this game, especially in the league. But you got to keep working. It's something that I think I worked for and definitely earned but at the same time nothing else really changes. I'm still going to work the way I've been working, even more now. So, I'm blessed to be able to be a starter so young and this league, which is not the easiest thing to do. But I know my coaches have trust and faith in me, so we'll go out there and try to do our best.”

(On his progression from OTAs to now) “I think every day in practice I pushed myself to not just get away with the easy things but try to push myself to make the hard throws, make the hard protection calls or whatever. It's tough. So, practice is hard but when it comes to the game, it feels like the game slows down for me. I think from OTAs to now, everything is slowing down. My footwork has gotten better, where I start my eyes, where I finished my eyes and everything that Bobby [Slowik] and Jerrod [Johnson] and Bill Lazor and Shane [Day] preach, I think I've kind of gotten accustomed to it and getting better and better at it. Of course, coming from Ohio State there were some similarities, but still a lot of different things that I was doing in college. Now I feel like I'm getting used to how Bobby is calling plays and my eyes are getting better every week.”

(On throwing his first touchdown pass) “That was a blessing. It was really cool to connect with Nico [Collins]. We work hard. Actually, we got that rep after practice on Friday like three or four times, just getting it down. So for it to pay off and for us to get a touchdown off of it was definitely cool to see.”

(On what that means to have a running back like Dameon Pierce) “Yeah, I think just watching football my whole life, it's hard to do anything without running the ball. DP [Dameon Pierce] is the type of person where every time he touches it, he wants to score. I think that will pay off for him. I think he will start getting out to the secondary tackling and get straight to the endzone. Every single run, he was running hard, and that's what you can really expect from him. On top of that he is great in pass protection. I think he is a slept on person who can catch the ball out the backfield and still get vertical and be elusive. I think he catches the ball really well so I'm really excited to get to work with him and I know we are going to do great things together.”

(On his readiness for the regular season) “We will see, it's not really something I can just answer right away. I have to go out there and practice this week and get ready for Baltimore and work really hard to try to better myself and then be as best I can. When it's time to go line up, the mission's on God so I am really excited to do that. But yeah, I don't know if I'm ready or not. Well, God willing, I will be and I think I am.”

(On what he has learned about himself in this process) “I think just being myself is all I need. I don't have to be anything or be anybody else. I have to just be myself and be comfortable in my own shoes, comfortable in my own skin. I have to make the offense mine like how I think about plays, and of course, how to get on the same page with Bobby [Slowik]. But I think that's something that I've gotten more use to, being myself as I'm trying to do new things I'm asked to do.”

(on winning the locker room) “Honestly, I think that means a little more. Something about football, I think everything kind of happens naturally. Like either you're going play good or you're not. Whatever is going to happen happens. But locker rooms, those are where bonds and brotherhood and things that really mean something to me happen. And I mean, I just came in and was myself and think guys gravitated towards me and got to hang out with a lot of dudes off the field in the locker room and done some things that were awesome group bonding, and I definitely think that that's what makes football special. You got so many dudes from different walks of life come together play this amazing sport, and all of us to be in the locker room and sharing the same name, that's special man because it's hard to do. I don't think there is any other profession does that at our scale and have to trust on seeing other guys to do their jobs.”