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Sunday, October 23, 2005

San Antonio is team's likely home next season

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Saints owner Tom Benson declared this week that nothing will be decided on the franchise's future until after the season. But ESPN's Chris Mortensen reports that, based on information from key league sources, the team has probably played its last game in New Orleans.

According to Mortensen, San Antonio is a likely home for 2006 and Los Angeles is the preferred destination beyond that. The NFL could still include New Orleans as a Super Bowl site when the city is reconstructed, and expansion might even be a possibility, but that's 10 to 15 years away.

If the Saints relocate to San Antonio or elsewhere, New Orleans has only a slim chance of ever seeing another NFL team, according to a major sports consultant.

Marc Ganis of SportsCorp Ltd. in Chicago served as a consultant to Cleveland in 1996 when that city's NFL team moved to Baltimore and the NFL guaranteed Cleveland a new team and allowed the city to keep the Browns' logos, colors and nickname.

Earlier this week, New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin said he wanted the "Cleveland deal" if the team relocates. Gov. Kathleen Blanco said she supported Nagin on such a plan.

But Ganis questioned the strategy.

"If I were advising Mayor Nagin, I would have given him the same advice that someone should have given the mayors of Baltimore and Houston," Ganis said. "Hold on to what you have. Do everything you have to hold on to what you've got, because there's no certainty to what will come next or what will come at all."

Houston lost the Oilers to Tennessee and later got the expansion Texans.

Ganis said New Orleans is already viewed as a small market struggling to remain financially competitive -- and most NFL owners oppose expanding beyond the present 32 teams.

Cleveland provided stout support for its new team with corporate dollars and businesses that generated tax money to build a new stadium, Ganis said.

"It's not the people," Ganis said of New Orleans' situation. "It's not the individuals who show up at the game and buy the tickets. The people are great. It's the business, or lack of, that's the primary factor. For whatever reason, the area simply does not have many strong and large businesses."

But Ganis and two other sports consultants said the issue includes a wild card -- compassion for a city devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

"When it's all said and done, the whole situation boils down to one thing -- how do these 32 owners feel about resolving New Orleans while protecting their franchise value?" said David Carter, a sports consultant in Los Angeles.

Dean Bonham, a sports consultant based in Denver, questioned whether the NFL would support a move to San Antonio, which like New Orleans is considered a small market, or whether the NFL could strike a deal to build or renovate a stadium equipped for a team in Los Angeles.

If neither San Antonio nor Los Angeles is adequately prepared to support an NFL team, Bonham said the Saints will likely remain in New Orleans.

"I would have to say the chances are 50-50 or less that you'll see the [New Orleans Saints](#) move from one city to another at this point," Bonham said.

Information from The Associated Press was used in this report.

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