

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION

THE COMIC AGONY OF DEFEAT:

A

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES'

COVERAGE OF THE

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

BY

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ABSTRACT

In the world of professional sports, a substantial amount of journalistic attention is paid to the victorious teams while the losing teams receive scant notice. A study by Leah VandeBerg and Nick Trujillo pointed out the different treatment winners and losers receive. In an analysis of Dallas newspapers, VandeBerg and Trujillo identified five distinct phases of media coverage that correlated with the Dallas Cowboys' on-field performances. While thorough in its analysis of the media treatment of the Dallas Cowboys, the VandeBerg/Trujillo study did not adequately address a team that is a perennial loser. An example of such a team is the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. By analyzing the rhetoric found in the *St. Petersburg Times* concerning the Buccaneers during their twelve year streak of losing seasons, the author of this thesis proposes a sixth phase of media treatment to be called the "Comic Agony of Defeat" phase.

During the "Comic Agony of Defeat" phase writers at the *Times* used humorous devices predominantly in their coverage of the Buccaneers. Using rhetorician Kenneth Burke's theories of consubstantiality, logology and redemption, a possible motivation for this use of humor is theorized. That theory is that fans and journalists who are associated with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers use humor as a means for achieving redemption. This need for redemption is caused by the Buccaneers' failure to live up to the ideals that have been

established by Buc fans and journalists who cover the team. That ideal is simply to win football games.

Through rhetorical analysis, four literary devices were found to be prominent tools of redemption by sportswriters at the *Times*. These four devices were invective, metaphor/allusion, wordplay and rhetorical questions. Invective served as a tool of redemption by assigning the Bucs the role of the butt of jokes, metaphor/allusion was used to show the discrepancy between the fans and journalists' ideal and the Bucs' reality, wordplay acted to let the fans and journalists assert their superiority over the team while rhetorical questions allowed fans and journalists to directly call the Bucs' abilities into question.