

A King Long on the Rise

By Brayton Slusser

Super Bowl Fifty-Five was the pinnacle career moment for several players on the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, however, for head coach Bruce Arians, the victory was a career achievement long overdue. Before joining the Arizona Cardinals in 2013, Arians had never been given the reigns of an NFL team, bouncing around as an assistant coach in both college and professional football. Coming out of a brief retirement in 2019, however, Arians teamed up with Tampa Bay and, after coaching football for nearly forty years, fulfilled the dream of every head coach by winning the Super Bowl. Considering his current age and publicity, one might believe Arians has been around for years

As a longtime college and NFL assistant coach, Arians built up quite the resume within the American football industry. His coaching style saw most of its development during his college career, especially in 1981 and 1982 coaching for the University of Alabama under “his mentor, the immortal ‘Bear’ Bryant” (*All or Nothing*, 2015). After working various coaching jobs, most notably as the head coach at Temple University (1983–1988), and assistant positions for the Kanas City Chiefs (1989-1992) and New Orleans Saints (1996), Arians was hired by the Indianapolis Colts in 1998, where he then focused on coaching positions specifically within the NFL. Upon arriving in Arizona to coach the Cardinals, Arians already had two Super Bowl wins under his belt from working with the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 2005 and 2008 seasons. Despite this track record it still took him another eight years to finally lead a team to victory in the Super Bowl, that being the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

As a coach, Arians is known for being exceptionally, and sometimes explicitly, intense and vocal on the sideline, but behind this gruff intensity is a rather fascinating story, of a coach that takes the time to find what drives his players as individuals. His coaching philosophy was summed up by him in a statement, “No risk it, no biscuit. You can’t live scared.” (Stats Insider, 2021), and is backed by the coach’s focus on the aggression of his team’s quarterback. Arians is no stranger to working with all-star players and recognizing the value they bring to a team, as he was the first quarterback coach to work with Peyton Manning on the Indianapolis Colts. During his time in the NFL, he has also worked with the likes of Andrew Luck and Ben Roethlisberger respectably, giving him ample insight into quarterback playstyles and capabilities. In 2013 upon arriving in Arizona, Arians’ first challenge as head coach was getting the most out of a fading Carson Palmer, a quarterback who had already had two reconstructed knees by the time the Cardinals nearly made the Super Bowl in 2015. By then, it was believed that Palmer’s best days were behind him following a series of season crippling injuries and as the years went on, more people began to call for his retirement. Working with Arians, however, taught him to play despite factors that might wear him down, and to lead an aggressive Cardinal offense, “He’s always educating everybody” Palmer said in Amazon’s *All or Nothing* series, which followed the Cardinals during their 2015 season. While Arians also retired that same year, this was short-lived as he was signed to be the head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in 2019, and in 2020 was given the chance of working with one of the greatest quarterbacks in the NFL, Tom Brady.

Bruce Arians has definitely displayed that he knows how to efficiently and strategically operate a team on the football field, but he has also displayed inspiring activism concerning the NFL and American society as a whole. A major advocate of civil rights and racial inclusion, Arians was actually the first white student enrolled at Virginia Tech to have an African American

roommate, and has actively commented on the racial injustices committed against George Floyd in the summer of 2020, “You would hope as a nation to have grown since 1968. I think we have, but not enough, obviously.” (Tampa Bay Times, 2020), and has supported protesters in their quest for racial equality. Furthermore, Arians “is a true believer in second chances” and without him, in addition to the management for the Arizona Cardinals, the NFL would not have Tyrann “the honey badger” Mathieu, one of the best starting safeties currently in the league (*All or Nothing*, 2015). After being kicked off of his college football team at LCU for “drug problems”, Mathieu’s hopes of being drafted into the NFL had been essentially shattered, as most teams overlooked his abilities as a player and his drug rehab attendance. Despite this, Bruce Arians actually related to Tyrann’s struggles, having been “once kicked out of high school” and, still recognized his potential as an outstanding football player and team leader (*All or Nothing*, 2015). Thus in the 2013 NFL draft, Arians and the Arizona Cardinals recruited Tyrann Mathieu as a starting safety and took quite a bit of heat for their decision in the process, due to Mathieu’s disciplinary record. Such instances go to show how caring Arians is towards his players as individuals, which is a rare characteristic in an NFL coach, especially when it involves putting their own credibility and public appearance on the line.

Following Carson Palmer’s retirement in early 2017, Bruce Arians announced his retirement as well, following the conclusion of the Arizona Cardinals season with an 8-8 record. In 2019, however, after fans had believed that he had left for good, it was announced that Arians would be taking over as the head coach for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and in the 2020 season, he lead the team to their second Super Bowl victory.

At 68 years old, Bruce Arians is now the oldest coach in NFL history to win a Super Bowl, and with a track record such as his, he has most definitely earned such a victory. As

Tampa Bay continues with their 2021 NFL season, there's no doubt Arians and his team is aiming for a second championship. What remains in question is when Arians will finally hang up his headset and playbook for good, as this veteran coach has clearly proven to have the brains and personality to be remembered as one of the greats.