

Dolphins 17, Saints 38 - The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Contributed by Rich Rodriguez
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The Good

About the only bright spot in this game was the running of Lamar Miller in the first half. Miller averaged 5.6 yards per carry, had a long of 20 and scored a touchdown. The only problem? He only carried the ball 11 times. I realize the game got out of hand, but the Dolphins need to go ahead and make Miller the feature back. He is more explosive than Daniel Thomas and gives the Dolphins more in the running game.

The Bad

Ryan Tannehill had a terrible game. In one play, he scrambled out of the pocket to avoid the sack and was running up the field in what appeared to be a nice gain when all of a sudden the defender stripped the ball and caused a fumble. A few series later, he forced a pass that was intercepted by Jabari Greer. The pass was a short pass to Hartline on a quick slant and Greer jumped the route. You have to mix it up, especially against experienced cornerbacks. If you've completed a couple of slants against a guy, he's going to start trying to stop those. That is why SLUGGOS were invented. As the game went on, Tannehill began getting happy feet and losing accuracy on his throws. He missed a wide open Wallace in the middle of the field on one play with a throw that was high and behind him. He began holding onto the ball too long. He simply lost his cool, which is not typically, and the pressure of the moment was too much for him. I'll forgive him because it was his first game on Monday Night football, against elite level competition and in one of the toughest places to play in the NFL. Hopefully it is a big learning experience from Tannehill.

Offensive playcalling must be singled out once again. Clearly, Sherman put together an excellent scheme before the game, using Tannehill in a modified pistol, running out of the shotgun, incorporating the read option and finding plays that allowed Lamar Miller to run in space and Ryan Tannehill to get rid of the ball quickly with a clean pocket. Everything was going well until an ill-fated playcall on 3 and an inch. With a 6'4 quarterback, a Pro Bowl center and a running back who was hot in Lamar Miller against a defense getting pushed off the line of scrimmage, Mike Sherman decides to bring in Daniel Thomas, a big for nothing running back who likes going into the line of scrimmage while running backwards. Even worse, Sherman calls a stretch play to the left. Stretch plays have not worked all season for the Dolphins and Daniel Thomas has never proven to be able to play to his size or demonstrated power as a runner, and yet that was the decision. They could have sneaked it, they could have run it with the fullback or simply handed it off to Lamar Miller, who was in a good rhythm. They could have even gone play action with the four options they have at receiver and tight end. So many possibilities on 3rd and an inch, and Sherman managed to go with the worst one. This drive set the stage for the rest of the game. So while the Saints were going straight for the jugular, the Dolphins were attempting to rely on a bullet ricocheting three times before hitting its target and having to settle for flesh wounds.

Defensive schemes were also lacking. The Dolphins did a nice job of stopping the run, and early on they were bringing good pressure on Brees. They were mixing it up well, sometimes bringing the blitz, sometimes dropping 8 into coverage. Unfortunately, the Dolphins did a terrible job of game planning for Darren Sproles, who was typically being covered by a linebacker. Sproles set everything else up for the Saints and cannot be overlooked. He may be the smallest player on the field, but he is the most dangerous. The Dolphins were so concerned with Graham and Colston that they forgot about Sproles and later on they were so worried about Sproles they forgot about Graham. Kevin Coyle needs to do a better job of scouting the opposition. His heavy reliance on zones against a QB like Brees is concerning. On one example, I saw Brent Grimes on Colston and he had good coverage, but then peeled off because Colston was out of Grimes' zone. Except there was no one there to pick up the coverage and Colston was essentially open. It is nice to mix in zone coverage here and there and if you are blitzing and want to confuse young QBs it is a great scheme to use. It is also effective in the red zone, where the field gets significantly smaller. But when you're outside of the redzone and you rely heavily on zone against an elite QB, you're going to give up plays and allow that QB to get into a rhythm. Also, zone is useless if you're not pressuring the QB. At least good man coverage makes the QB hold onto the ball a bit longer.

Mike Wallace pulled a disappearing act. I put a lot of the blame for this on Mike Sherman not finding more ways to get Wallace the ball. Corners are constantly playing off Wallace and yet he is not being used on quick slants at all. It is puzzling to me that Sherman and/or Tannehill are not seeing this. However, he's also quitting on the team as I see it. He was running half-hearted routes and making weak attempts at catching the ball. Wallace was targeted 7 times and had 3 catches to show for it.

Phillip Wheeler has been a huge disappointed so far this season. He had a game with 6 missed tackles last week and followed it up this week with some seriously poor coverage on Darren Sproles. Wheeler has not lived up to his billing as a guy that covers well. In fact, in limited snaps, Jelani Jenkins did a better job of covering Sproles and he barely plays.

The Ugly

The entire game and how it went downhill after turnovers. This team wilted under the pressure of bright lights and a national TV audience. The bottom line? Not ready for prime time.

Overall it was an ugly game. It was a game in which you burn the film and forget it ever happened... or get really angry and play with a chip on your shoulder next week against the defending Superbowl champs. It was a complete, utter failure from the coaches to the players. That being said, I think what is even uglier is the portion of the Dolphins fan base that turns nasty after a game like this. The coaches and players deserve criticism, but some in the fan base go overboard. It is almost as if these people were waiting for this type of moment to spit out the vitriol they had to contain when this team was 3-0. Now they have their chance and this is when they are truly at their happiest.