

## Baltimore at Miami in a key AFC matchup

Contributed by Tony Simmons  
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The 2-2 Baltimore Ravens travel to South Beach to take on the 3-1 Miami Dolphins in a key game in the AFC, in a 1:00 kickoff. Both teams are coming off of losses, the Ravens at Buffalo 23-20, the Dolphins losing their 1st game of the season at New Orleans 38-17. This is the final game of as tough of an opening stretch of games as a team could have, as the Dolphins opened the season at Cleveland, at Indianapolis, home to Atlanta, at New Orleans and they close today at home with the Ravens before getting a much needed bye.

Let's take a look at the two teams and how the matchup and keys to the game.

Miami comes into the game offensively ranked 24th in total offense, generating 322.2 yards per game. They rank 18th in pass offense at 240.8 yards per game, while ranking 24th in rushing offense at 81.5 yards per game. Miami is averaging 22.8 points a game, which comes in at 17th in the league. Miami will be facing a Baltimore defense that ranks 15th in the league in total defense, giving up 345.8 yards per game. The Ravens rank 16th in pass defense giving up 239.0 yards per game, while ranking 17th in run defense, giving up 106.8 yards per game. The Ravens rank 12th in points allowed, giving up 21.8 points per game.

Miami is coming off of their worst performance of the year on the road at New Orleans, and in particular, QB Ryan Tannehill. Tannehill was responsible for 4 turnovers in the game, 3 interceptions and a fumble. As Miami got further behind in the game and had to become a pass 1st team, the OL begin to wilt under the pressure and gave up 4 sacks, getting this unit up to 18 sacks given up for the year. This is a game in which Ryan has to come back with a solid, bounce back game, and I think he will. Baltimore is in the middle of the pack in regards to stopping the run, and Miami got off to a very good start in the 1st half running the ball in New Orleans. They need to feature RB Lamar Miller more this game, as Miller is a dangerous weapon that needs to see the ball more. He had 11 carries for 62 yards, averaging 5.6 yards per carry and had a TD in the Saints game. This will help the OL immensely, as this unit becomes a huge liability when this team faces an obvious passing down. Also, WR Mike Wallace needs to become more of a factor in the Dolphins offense, and both he and the offensive coaching staff have to step up to get him more involved. In obvious passing downs, the Dolphins will need to be well aware of where on Terrell Suggs is located. He comes into the game with 4 sacks, and is a force as a pass rusher, and the Ravens as a team has 13 sacks. With that said, this still is not your typical, dominant Ravens defense. Miami can have success if they execute their game plan.

Defensively, the Dolphins come into the game ranked 27th in total defense, giving up 395.2 yards per game. They rank 24th in pass defense, giving up 296.8 yards per game, while ranking 10th in stopping the run, giving up 98.5 yards per game. The Dolphins rank 17th in points allowed, giving up 22.8 points per game. Miami faces a Ravens offense that comes into the game ranked 27th in total offense, generating 317.5 yards per game. The Ravens rank 13th in pass offense, generating 253.5 yards per game while ranking 28th in rush offense at 64.0 yards per game. Baltimore is scoring 22.8 points a game, which ranks 16th in the NFL.

QB Joe Flacco is perhaps coming off of one of his worst games as a pro, as he threw 5 interceptions in the game in Buffalo last week. He comes into the game with 5-7 touchdown to interceptions ratio. More problematic for the Ravens, is their anemic running game. Ray Rice is one of the premier running backs in the league and Bernard Pierce is a quality backup running back. That said, the Dolphins need to keep the Ravens running game in check, and if DT Paul Soliai plays the way he did in the New Orleans game, Miami will do just that. Soliai was dominant in that game, and the defensive front really did a great job of containing the Saints run game. Flacco, while a very good QB, he has shown that he will throw the interception, see Buffalo. The Ravens have given up 12 sacks, and made a trade just this week to bring in OLT Eugene Monroe from Jacksonville. Miami has to put pressure on Flacco, and as of right now, OLB Cameron Wake is still questionable. DE/OLB Olivier Vernon had a very good game against the Saints, and he along with the rest of the DL will need to bring the pressure, as the Dolphins come into the game with 11 sacks. Rice is good as a pass catcher, and while he is not in the Darren Sproles category, I can see the Ravens trying to attack Miami in this manner, and the Dolphins need to be prepared to deal with this. LB Darnell Ellerbe and Phillip Wheeler are still learning the scheme, and they have been up and down in their play. The secondary, which is still banged up, had their struggles against the potent Saints offense. The Ravens are not the caliber of offense that the Saints are, so this is a game I think the Dolphins defense can have a good day.

I will be the first to say that if Miami came out of that first 5 game stretch at 2-3 or 3-2, I would have been happy. Miami is at 3-1, and have a great chance to finish at 4-1 going into the bye week, which is much needed. Miami is still trying to show people they are a legitimate team to contend with, and this is another chance to show that against the defending Super Bowl Champions. It also a very big game for the Dolphins in regards to possible playoff positioning in the AFC conference. The Ravens will come into the game very much looking at this game as a must win, as they will not want to go under .500. Both teams will play with a sense of urgency, but I believe the Dolphins will want to show that the game against the Saints was not the true picture of what this team is. I'm picking the Dolphins to win this game 27-17.

Go Dolphins.

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