

Preseason Game #1 - Jaguars 17, Dolphins 18

Contributed by Rich Rodriguez
Friday, 08 August 2008

Preseason Game #1 - Jaguars 17, Dolphins 18 In the first preseason game of the Dolphins, the word of the day for the offense was sloppy. And that is to be expected for a team that has basically been practicing a new offensive system for only two weeks. It takes a lot longer than that to develop chemistry with your teammates and master a new system. The first team defense however, looked dominant. Here is my assessment of the different positions and how specific players did.

QUARTERBACK ...

Trent Green looked lost. I can't think of a better way to describe it. His throws were inaccurate and he had that "deer in the headlights" look. I would blame the offensive line, but they actually provided him with decent protection. It simply seemed as if Green was out of his element. It also didn't appear as if receivers were getting open, but even when they were, Green was underthrowing them or throwing passes behind them. He did seem to get into a bit of a groove at the end of the half, hitting Derek Hagan for a 29 yard pass. But the overall picture looked pretty bleak. Green finished 6 of 15 for 60 yards and an interception. What does this mean? Probably nothing right now, but if this type of performance continues from Green, I can't fathom him winning the starting job.

Cleo Lemon's numbers looked solid. He was 5 of 6 for 56 yards. However, I didn't see anything particularly great about his stint in the 3rd quarter. He did have one spectacular throw to Kerry Reed that went for 29 yards, but otherwise seemed to have an adequate outing. I would be interested to see Lemon with the first team to see how he does compared to Green. I'm curious if his performance will make this a legitimate quarterback competition.

John Beck got very limited playing time, but completed 3 of 5 passes for 23 yards. He looked decisive for the most part, and made some plays with his legs. But he did have a fumble. In the end, he led the Dolphins to their game winning drive, although I must point out it was against Jacksonville's third and fourth stringers. However, for his first live NFL action against an opponent, it was an encouraging glimpse of the future.

OFFENSIVE LINE ...

The first team offensive line left quite a lot to be desired. They provided adequate protection for Green, but seemed unable to open up any holes for Ronnie Brown. The most disturbing sign I saw is that they were also unable to open holes against Jacksonville's second team defense. The Miami starters played the entire first half. Vernon Carey left the game with a knee injury, but it turned out to be a contusion, so he will be fine. It seemed as if the interior of Mormino, Satele and Hadnot were simply overmatched by John Henderson and Marcus Stroud. Anthony Alabi seemed to be missing blocks against some of the ends he was facing on the right side. Obviously, there is still a lot of work to do for this unit.

The second team offensive line started getting things going a little bit in the second half. They sprung Jesse Chatman for a 75 yard touchdown run and seemed to provide better protection for the quarterbacks as the game went on. Chris Lewinski stood out to me. But it is also important to remember they were facing back ups and camp fodder themselves. I suspect a shake up on the starting offensive line is soon to come.

WIDE RECEIVERS AND TIGHT ENDS...

Derek Hagan was the star of the show with 3 catches for 47 yards. Kerry Reed and P.K. Sam also got into the action with nice plays of their own. Rookie first round pick Ted Ginn had one catch for 8 yards in what was an obvious attempt to get the ball in his hands. It seemed as if the first team receivers had trouble getting open against Jacksonville's secondary.

The tight ends looked even worse. Courtney Anderson dropped a nice pass from Beck that should have gone for an 18-yard touchdown. David Martin had 1 catch for zero yards. All in all it was a poor performance by the wideouts and tight ends. The offensive line gave Green time to throw, but many times there was simply no one open.

Ted Ginn handled kickoff return duties and to me he looked indecisive. He must have felt his speed and quickness would be enough to dance around and fake out the special teamers of the Jaguars. Hopefully he now realizes that kick off returns are about making your move and going. Once you start running toward the sideline or hesitating, your return is basically over.

RUNNING BACKS AND FULLBACKS ...

Ronnie Brown had 8 carries for 8 yards. At that rate it will take him 1000 carries to gain 1000 yards. Not what you want out of your starting running back. However, it is important to note that the starting offensive line gave Brown no room

whatsoever to run. He was usually being met by defenders in the backfield.

Jesse Chatman had an explosive 75-yard touchdown run and showed he belongs on this team. He finished the night with 6 rushes for 88 yards and a touchdown. Some will start to say he needs to be considered for the starting running back position. I find the notion silly. Remember he got his big run against second teamers.

Patrick Cobbs also had a solid outing with 7 carries for 34 yards and a touchdown. He also ran in the 2 point conversion that won the game for Miami.

Both fullbacks got in on the running action. Corey Schlesinger ran the ball once for 2 yards. Doesn't sound like a lot except it was 4th and 1 and he got the first down. Same thing for rookie Reagan Mauia, who had two carries for 4 yards and a 7 yard reception. All in all, the fullbacks produced and the back up running backs produced, while Ronnie was simply getting stuffed all night.

Noteworthy: Lorenzo Booker didn't see much playing time. A good summary of his action for the night would be to say he fair caught a few punts.

DEFENSIVE LINE ...

From the very start, the Dolphins first team defensive line dominated the line of scrimmage. I must point out they did so without Keith Traylor and without Jason Taylor. Matt Roth and Rodrique Wright got sacks on Byron Leftwich early on and there was little running room for Jacksonville's running backs. Vonnie Holliday got in on the action, nailing Leftwich on one play as he was throwing. For some absurd reason, he was called for roughing the passer even though he was simultaneously hitting Leftwich as the ball came out. Something needs to be done about this rule. I understand the idea of protecting a quarterback, but it's almost as if the NFL wants the quarterbacks to be touched with two hands below the waist instead of being tackled. Rookie Paul Soliai did an adequate job of taking on blockers to open up his teammates.

Steve Fifita and Akbar Gbaja-Biamila also spent time in the Jacksonville backfield harassing their quarterbacks. Overall, all the defensive line units did a good job of stopping the run, although the pass rush seemed to disappear as the starters went to the bench.

LINEBACKERS ...

Channing Crowder started at middle linebacker in place of Zach Thomas. He was joined by Donnie Spragan and Derrick Pope. The linebackers did a good job of cleaning up after the defensive line blew up the run blocking. They also did an adequate job of run blocking.

Rookie Abraham Wright got his first sack as an NFL player and also contributed with two tackles. Other noteworthy contributors were Edmund Miles and Jim Maxwell, who spent some time in the Jacksonville backfield. Since both Zach Thomas and Joey Porter were out for this contest, there weren't too many interesting things to say about this unit.

SECONDARY ...

Jacksonville's wide receivers once again seemed to have a field day against the Dolphins secondary. Matt Jones finished with 2 catches for 43 yards. Ernest Wilford had 2 catches for 29 yards. But the star of the night in the passing game for Jacksonville was rookie John Broussard, who had 3 catches for 66 yards.

Dom Capers had the secondary play mostly man-to-man coverage and it seemed as if at times Jacksonville's wideouts were wide open. This is not a good sign. You're not supposed to have busted coverages when you're playing man-to-man.

Strangely enough, what seemed to be the lone bright spot in the secondary was the play of Jason Allen. I must first point out that Allen was not burned deep, which in itself is encouraging. But he also laid quite a hit on LaBrandon Toefield and forced a fumble. An encouraging night for Jason Allen, though he will have to do more of this to convince people that he isn't well on his way to being a first round bust.

SPECIAL TEAMS ...

Brandon Fields has a monster leg. Though he "only" had a 43 yard punting average, it was in part to one of his punts being blocked and still managing to go about 30 yards. There was poor protection on that punt, so I don't feel his "slow" delivery was the problem on that play. If you throw out the 30 yard punt, Brandon Fields averaged over 45 yards a punt. His long was 54 and he also pinned Jacksonville inside the 20 three times. Special teams coverage, particularly on punts, was also pretty solid.

Jay Feely kicked one field goal for 26 yards and on his lone kickoff he drilled the ball 5 yards into the endzone.

A solid night for the coverage teams, though the return game left a lot to be desired.

Overall ...

The Dolphins won the game and guess what? It means absolutely nothing. This was a practice game. While it was nice to see some of the youngsters like Derek Hagan, Abraham Wright, Rodrique Wright, Matt Roth, Jason Allen, and John Beck stand out, this is no indication whatsoever of how this team will play in the regular season. The offensive is still clearly a work in progress, particularly the offensive line. The secondary still needs work. And of course the Dolphins coaching staff did not gamemplan for this game. If you notice, the offensive did not even go in motion once and did not switch formations. The gameplan was extremely vanilla and to take anything out of this game regarding the play of Trent Green, Ronnie Brown and the other starts doesn't make sense.

Over the next few weeks, we will start to get a better idea of the direction of this team as we begin to see gameplans materialize.

The most important thing in tonight's game is that the Dolphins didn't lose any players longterm to injury