PreDraft Musings: Offense

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When columnists analyze team needs, they usually focus on personnel. But team needs go far beyond that. As a matter of fact, every team is built by the person choosing the players. Everything trickles down from the man in charge of, as Bill Parcells would say, shopping for groceries. So technically, the biggest need for every team, the most important person in the organization, is the general manager or director of personnel, whichever title you want to choose.
The Miami Dolphins have historically given personnel powers to the head coach. While this business model produced championship teams in the early 1970s, it has never found the same amount of success again since, and has in fact proven to be a hindrance for the franchise as a whole.

This time around, things are a bit different as personnel powers are being divided between head coach and general manager, with Randy Mueller being in charge of personnel in conjunction with head coach Cam Cameron. The only problem is Mueller's contract expires in 2008. So the biggest team need, in my opinion, continues to be addressing who picks the players for this franchise in the longterm. But beyond that is, of course, the need to fill gaps in talent throughout the roster.

The most important offensive position on the roster is the quarterback position. Since Marino retired in 1999, the position has been the equivalent of a walk through a wasteland with no water, no food, no sunlight, and no end in sight. There is no quarterback of the future waiting in the wings. There is no proven leader who is playoff tested and knows how to win the big game when it matters. Is this depressing enough? Of course not. You have a quarterback who used to be a winner and a great player at his position. But now he is a huge question mark with his lingering knee problems and his perceived crushed confidence. You have a quarterback who just can't seem to figure out the NFL game. And finally you have a quarterback who is unproven, unpolished, and inexperienced. Not a recipe for success at the most important offensive position on a football team. It is imperative that the Dolphins take a quarterback in the draft. Whether it be in the 1st round if one is available, or later in the 1st day.

The second most important offensive position on a football team is left tackle. Left tackles protect the blindside of the most important position on the team. Left tackles are also essential in the ground game. If the left side of the line can produce running lanes for the running back, it also does wonders for blindside protection on playaction passes.

The third most important offensive position is at wide receiver. A top wide receiver can help stretch the field, taking the 8th man out of the box and helping to open up the running game. A top wide receiver also offers his quarterback a safety blanket and reliable target.

Where do the Miami Dolphins stand as far as these three vital positions are concerned? Well, the fact is that the Dolphins have glaring weaknesses at all three. It is no wonder that the Dolphins offense continues to be one of the worst in the league.

The truth is that the Dolphins have potential at two of these three positions. At quarterback, Daunte Culpepper could provide a spark if he returns to form. When at 100%, Culpepper not only possesses a rocket arm with great accuracy, but he is mobile and athletic enough to create plays with his legs. He is also huge enough to break tackles.

At wide receiver, Chris Chambers has freakish athletic ability. He can go up and make the difficult catch. He is great at tip-toeing the sidelines. He is also fast enough to get open downfield. The problem with Chambers is not physical, but rather mental. He seems to lose focus and drop easy catches. He seems to disappear for huge portions of games and seasons. But then he turns around and flashes superstar ability for a game or two.

These two positions, with a little luck, some hard work by the players, and some good coaching, could turn into strengths.

The position that is absolutely bereft of talent is left tackle. The Dolphins need to make it a point to address this position, not with a stopgap player who can fill it for a year or two, but with a player that can fill it for years to come. A franchise left tackle is the staple of good offenses. From Walter Jones in Seattle to Orlando Pace in St. Louis and Tarik Glenn in Indianapolis, great offenses tend to have excellent players at the left tackle position.

Fixing the offense is something that will probably take more than one season. But there are some pieces in place that, if they click, could provide a well-balanced offense. You have a quarterback that may return to form. You have a wide receiver that might have a chip on his shoulder and feel he has something to prove. But you don't have a left tackle that can shut down the other team's best pass rusher. If a top quarterback is not available with the 9th pick (i.e. Brady Quinn), then the Dolphins have to go with a player that can fill a huge hole for years to come at a vital position, and that is Levi Brown. There is plenty of speed at wide receiver later in the first day, but there are no players like Levi Brown.

Here's to hoping the Dolphins finally address this important position, if one of the top two quarterbacks does not fall to their laps.