

A Rebuttal: Joey Porter

Contributed by Rich Rodriguez
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It seems like many "experts" have weighed in on the Joey Porter signing, and the reviews are not positive. Below are some comments I've heard about Porter with my rebuttal to each one.

"Porter had a down year in 2006."

Porter had 55 tackles, 7 sacks, and 2 interceptions in 2006. He averages about 58 tackles, 7.5 sacks, and 1 interception a year for his career. I fail to see where the drop off is. Additionally, what these "experts" fail to mention is that virtually every player in the NFL who is a pass rush specialist has "down" years. Sacks are stats that fluctuate from year to year. Just ask Dwight Freeney, who only managed 5.5 sacks in 2006 or Trevor Pryce, who had 13 sacks last season. The last time Trevor Pryce put up double digit sacks before 2006 was in 2000.

"Porter had games in 2006 where he only had 0 or 1 tackle."

Ok, first of all, Joey Porter is not a middle linebacker. He is an outside linebacker who is mainly used as a pass rush specialist or to cover tight ends and backs coming out of the backfield. He's not a tackler, he is a pass rusher and a disruptor. Second of all, in 2005 Porter also had games where he only had 0 or 1 tackle. How does he go from one of the best linebackers in the NFL to a guy who is on the decline based on this?

"The Dolphins need offense, not defense."

That is not entirely accurate. The Dolphins released roughly 14 sacks this offseason by releasing Kevin Carter and allowing guys like David Bowens and Keith Traylor to leave via free agency. The Dolphins also desperately need another pass rusher opposite Jason Taylor so that he does not face the constant double and triple teams he gets on every play. Also, Porter is clearly an upgrade over Donnie Spragan. Any upgrade you can make to your team is always a good thing. Additionally, which free agent on offense was worth signing over Porter? You have guards getting \$49 million contracts. Guards! There is no marquee wide receiver or quarterback available. Porter was the best player available in free agency, he fills a need, and he fits right into the system Miami runs.

"If you watch film of Porter, he was out of gas in 2006."

Could it possibly have anything to do with the fact that Porter injured his hamstring in October? A hamstring can become a nagging injury that does not go away until you fully rest it for an extended period of time, much like a sprained ankle. Could it possibly have anything to do with the fact that the entire Steelers team seemed to have a Superbowl hangover? Ben Roethlisberger had his worst season as a pro in 2006. Should we start wondering whether he ran out of gas?

"\$20 million is too much for a 30-year old linebacker."

\$20 million is a lot of money, no doubt. But the true guaranteed money is in a \$12 million signing bonus. It is still a lot, but when you jump into free agency and go after one of the top guys, you will have to pay. It doesn't hurt to do this once in a while, as long as the team doesn't make a habit of it. Additionally, 30 is not exactly old for a linebacker. It isn't like the running back position, where 30 usually means ready to retire. Tell Zach Thomas or Jason Taylor, who are both approaching their mid-30s, if they are too old. There are plenty of examples throughout the NFL of 30+ year old players having success.

"Porter is more show than substance."

The guy is only the second player in NFL history to have 60 tackles and 10 interceptions. Is he a Hall of Famer? I don't think he is, but he is a bonafide star and a guy who can impact a game. Beyond the sacks, Porter is simply a disruptor. The sacks do not always accurately indicate how much pressure Porter actually gets on a quarterback. There are no numbers to indicate how well he can cover tight ends.

Another intangible Porter brings to the table is leadership. The guy is vocal and his fiery personality on the field usually infects his teammates. He is also an intimidator and a force to be reckoned with.

Will Porter succeed in Miami? He fits into the system and knows how to play, but it is no guarantee that he will. However, chances are he will and regardless of what happens, watching the Miami Dolphins in 2007 will be a lot more interesting than it ever was in 2006.