Training Camp Battles

Contributed by J.P. Friday, 20 July 2012

Training Camp is just one week away and, as usual, the Dolphins have plenty of questions all over the field. Miami, presumably, has a 3-way competition at QB, (although I doubt the staff is stupid enough to split reps between 3 people for any significant period of time), several young WR's battling for just a couple of roster spots, an open competition at RG and RT, a lot of bodies at TE and RB, and a defense which scheme-change naturally leaves for some competition. Before getting into the battles and my predictions for those starting and back-up spots, here is what we think we know right now: Jake Long, Richie Incognito and Mike Pouncey make up 3/5 of the offensive line. Hartline and Bess are locks to be "starters" in Miami's base 3-WR set offense, and Reggie Bush is an obvious starter at RB. Defensively, the DL will be Wake, Starks and Soliai, with Odrick playing DE in a base 43. When Miami shifts into their sub-packages on passing downs, Odrick will replace Soliai inside, and Vernon will take Odrick's place on the edge. McDaniel will rotate as well. Dansby and Burnett make up 2 of the starting LB's, while Smith, Vontae and Marshall will all "start" in every package. Now to the battles... Quarterback - SHOCKER!!!! The Dolphins aren't going into camp with an established starter. While there are three players who have been told they have a shot at starting, it's likely a two-horse race. Unless Tannehill surprises the staff early on and earns first team reps, the battle for the starting spot is between Matt Moore and David Garrard. It's an interesting battle because Moore has the respect of the locker room and is probably the better player at this stage. That said, Garrard's skill set fits the system much better and with neither being anything more than average, the system-fit will likely win Garrard the job. Runningback - Bush, Thomas and Miller are locks to make the roster. The battle is between Jerome Messam, Steve Slaton and undrafted rookie Jonas Gray for the 4th RB job, (if there is one). With Messam having Off Season surgery, Slaton not providing anything last year for Miami, and given Gray's potential, I'd expect Gray to win this job. In fact, I think in 2013 we'll be talking about a backfield featuring Gray and Miller, rather than Bush and Thomas. Wide Receiver - There are two battles here. The first is Chad Johnson vs. Legedu Naanee for the 3rd WR job. The winner may as well be considered a "starter" while the loser will likely get cut. My money is on Chad Johnson. While Naanee could provide special teams help and an ability to stretch the field, Johnson seems highly motivated and provides the bigger short-term upside. The second battles is between Clyde Gates, Roberto Wallace, Marlon Moore, Jeff Fuller, BJ Cunningham, Rishard Matthews and Julius Pruitt for the last 2-3 jobs. From what I have seen over the years, Moore simply can't play in the NFL. Same with Wallace. While they have some talent, they don't have NFL fluidity; they're awkward, plain and simple. Pruitt made headlines at minicamp, but he did the same last year...and the year before...and the year before that. I'd expect him to finally get cut. Given that Clyde was a 4th round pick just last season and given that he's the only burner on the roster, he'll be given more than a fair chance to win a starting job. I also think Matthews wins a job because of his special teams ability. The battle then becomes Jeff Fuller vs. Cunningham; they're similar receivers, but Fuller isn't trustworthy and is likely just a nice transition-piece for Tannehill to work with at the bottom of the depth chart. I think Gates, Matthews and Cunningham win the last 3 spots, Tight End - I'll say this; if Egnew is as good as Ireland thinks he is, (personally, I don't see it), and can show that early in August, Fasano might not make this team. That said, I think it's unlikely that Egnew is good enough early on to steal Fasano's starting spot. The only real question here is whether Les Brown will make the 53 man squad as a 4th TE, (very unlikely given their desire to keep 3 QB's, 4 RB's and 6 WR's), or be put on the practice squad...if he clears waivers. RG and RT -I'll make this one short and to the point. John Jerry will get first crack at the job. If he blows his chance, (a very safe bet), Artis Hicks and Nate Garner will likely battle it out, with the winner being Hicks. At RT, Murtha will get a "chance" to start, but Martin should beat him out for two reasons: 1) They need Murtha as a swing tackle. 2) Martin was a high 2nd round pick; at that position, you better start from day 1. Look for there to be changes as the season goes on along the OL though. LOLB - I have no idea what Miami plans on doing if Dansby or Burnett get hurt. They literally have no depth at the position. That said, they may not even have a 3rd starter. Koa Misi's best position, in my opinion, is an OLB in a 43, hopefully dropping some weight from his days as a pass rusher. But Koa is extremely unreliable and it seems from the outside that the organization is losing patience with the former 2nd round pick. Still, I think he'll win the job simply from a lack of competition. Gary Guyton is the only other player worth mentioning, and he was kicked to the curb by the worst defense in the NFL. Safety - The only other starting battle on Defense is at safety. I expect Richard Marshall to start at FS in a base 43 Defense. He'll likely then move to CB in the nickel and dime. When he does though, Sean Smith will likely take his place at Safety, and Nolan Carroll will then play the boundary corner position. Regardless of how they work the combinations though, I'd be surprised if Miami didn't have either Smith or Marshall at safety at least 50-60% of the time. It seems that Jimmy Wilson is thought of as a hybrid safety-corner, and will likely be used as a situational player. Culver has been solid in the past, but I think the staff is looking for more upside. Chris Clemons and Reshad Jones should be the pair out there when Marshall and/or Smith are at CB. I'd expect Jones to be the SS when Smith or Marshall are at FS. He's got more versatility and better ball skills than Clemons, which I think are the two attributes the staff will look for. What's great, (and bad for my predictions), about having a new staff is that we really don't know anything. Hell, they could move Reggie Bush to a full-time WR for all we know. Between the camp battles and Hard Knocks, it should be an entertaining August.