Miami travels to Arizona to take on undefeated Cardinals

Contributed by Tony Simmons
Sunday, 30 September 2012

The 1-2 Miami Dolphins travel to 3-0 Arizona to take on the Cardinals in a 4:00 kickoff this afternoon. The Dolphins are coming off a tough 23-20 overtime loss at home to the New York Jets, while the Cardinals are coming off a solid 27-6 thumping of the Philadelphia Eagles.

Miami will be facing an Arizona offense that ranks 31st in total offense generating 262.3 yards a game. They rank 26th in rush offense, generating 86.3 yards a game and rank 29th in passing offense, generating 186.0 yards per game. They are 19th in points scored at 22.3 points a game. Miami comes in 22nd in total defense giving up 373.7 yards a game. The Dolphins rank 3rd in rushing defense giving up 58.7 yards a game, but rank 29th in pass defense, giving up 307.3 yards per game. And while the secondary deserves some of the criticism they are receiving, the Dolphins rank 27th in sacks with 4.0 sacks. You don't get pressure on the quarterback, you give up the type of passing number the Dolphins are giving up.

You can see this is not a very good offensive football team in Arizona. They have some weapons in All Pro Wide Receiver Larry Fitzgerald, but they have been trying to find their quarterback of the future since Kurt Warner retired. Kevin Kolb and John Skelton have gone back and forth at the position and neither has really done much to distinguish themselves.

Once again, I believe the Dolphins will contain the Cardinals run game, but can they generate enough pass rush to disrupt the passing game. They were able to do that in the 1st half against the Jets and were dominate. In the 2nd half, a shaky Mark Sanchez got more time on the pocket and was able to get some chunk plays and it cost the Dolphins. To have a chance in this game, the defense has to generate CONSTANT pressure.

Offensively, the Dolphins face a Cardinals defense that ranks 10th in total defense giving up 316.0 yards per game. They rank 18th in rushing defense giving up 108.0 yards per game and rank 9th in passing defense giving up 210.0 yards per game. They do a great job of getting after the quarterback and rank 3rd in the NFL in sacks with 12.0 sacks and they rank 2nd in scoring defense, giving up 13.3 points a game. Miami comes into the game ranking 12th in total offense generating 369.3 yards per game, ranking 4th in rushing offense at 175.7 yards per game and 25th in passing offense generating 193.7 yards a game.

The Cardinals will want to try to take away the run game from Miami, so it will be key for the Dolphins to stick with the run game against the Cardinals. The Jets loaded the box against the Dolphins and even with the injury to Reggie Bush in the 1st half, the Dolphins ran for 185 yards. Also, some how, some way, the Dolphins have to go down the field against the Cardinals in the pass game.

Ryan Tannehill has made progress and for the most part has played well for a 1st year rookie starter, but he had an interception return for a touchdown last week against the Jets. Rookie or not, those type of plays get a team back into a game or can bury you in a game. The Dolphins were in control of the Jets game, but that interception return for touchdown got the Jets back into the game. Ryan has to stay away from the turnovers if the Dolphins are to have a chance in this game this afternoon.

We don't talk about special teams often, but it is a big part of the game, and in this game it will be even bigger. Arizona features one of the more dynamic return men in the game in CB/PR Patrick Petterson. The coverage teams will be key today, as a return for touchdown is always a recipe to get beat.

Miami has a tough game against a surprise team in Arizona. I think they have a chance in this game, but I'm picking the Cardinals in this game.

Go DOLPHINS...