

What happened to the run game?

Contributed by J.P.
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In Weeks 2 and 3 against Oakland and the Jets, respectively, the Dolphins were dominant running the football. Reggie Bush averaged a combined 6.5 yards per carry, and the Dolphins rushed for a ridiculous 448 yards in those two games. Even in the opening game against the Texans, Bush managed to run for 4.9 yards per carry against the 9th best run Defense in the league.

Weeks 4 and 5 were a different story. While the passing game was certainly more effective, the Dolphins weren't able to run the ball with nearly the same consistency or generate chunk yards like they were previously. Miami ran for a total of just 154 yards in the last two games, including just 68 yards against Cincinnati's bottom ranked run defense; that was despite running the ball 35 times, (1.9 yards per carry).

So what happened? In this blog I'll attempt to find the issue and come up with a solution (although it turns out to be pretty simple).

Given that Bush was clearly dealing with ill-effects from his knee injury against the Cardinals that he had suffered the previous week vs New York, let's focus on the Bengals game where we saw (or at least should have seen) a healthier Reggie Bush.

Also keep in mind that I am only evaluating Reggie Bush's runs...I give up on Danielle Thomas. He's awful. I'll automatically put all the blame for his lack of success on him...entirely...without hesitating.

The major reason doesn't need a lot of tape study to figure out. Arizona committed to stopping the run. The table I constructed is pretty telling. The "vs 7" indicates that the defense had 7 men in the box, and "vs 8" obviously then means they had 8 in the box. Each of the numbers below is the amount of yards Bush carried on each individual run, in order.

The Dolphins ran the ball fine against just 7 men. Outside of a poor decision by Bush on one run to cut back and a blown block by Jonathan Martin on another, the Dolphins were nearly flawless running the ball against a standard 43 defensive look.

But why run the ball when there are 8 men in the box? Not only did Tannehill not check out of the called run play, but on several of those runs he audibled TO a running play (whether it be from a passing play, or another run). The Bengals were clearly gearing towards stopping the run and forced Tannehill to beat them with his arm...which he did. But the Dolphins have to do a better job of recognizing 1 on 1 match-ups on the outside and exploiting them.

Should too much blame get put on Tannehill? Not necessarily. The coaching staff should have told him to call out of run plays at half time (or sooner). In fact, after the first half the Dolphins had just one more run play against 7 men as against 8 men (5 to 4). Considering how the ending totals came out, you are safe to assume that the Dolphins did a worse job of checking out of the run in the 2nd half. For this reason I put plenty of the blame on the coaching staff for not making an obvious adjustment.

I do want to question why the Dolphins have gone away from Lamar Miller the past two weeks. The rookie got a combined 19 carries against Oakland and New York, but just 4 against Arizona and no snaps at all against the Bengals. It's not a coincidence that you saw a decline in the run game overall.

I've beat this horse dead, removed all it's limbs, castrated it, and used it's testicles as ornaments to hang from the rearview mirror of my car...but I'm going to beat it a little more; Lamar Miller can run. Danielle Thomas cannot. It's that simple. I don't care what deficiencies Lamar has in pass protection...it's a stupid excuse to not have him out there. Leave Lane or Clay in the backfield with him to pick up blitzes...Have Lamar do what he does best. Either run the ball when he's in the game, or have him go out for a pass. You can manufacture ways to leave him out of uncomfortable situations. I'm not asking for him to be a full time starter; just 15 snaps a game (preferably all 15 coming in place of Ms. Thomas). If Miami coaches can't do that then they need to come up with a better list of excuses than just the one lame one.

Even if Lamar is caught in one bad situation while he's out there, and gives up a QB pressure, I would gladly make that sacrifice if it meant Miller touches the ball 10 more times, and Thomas 10 times less over the course of a game.

Unfortunately I'm too busy this week to give you guys a nice video break down of the run game. Those take a while to record, piece together, upload, etc. Here are a few notes from quick film study though: Richie Incognito and Jake Long are consistently declining, in both pass protection and the run game.

The excuse with Long's play in the first couple of weeks of the season was that he had just recently suffered the MCL injury...Five weeks later, and he's gotten worse every week. It hasn't gotten to the point where he's a liability, but he's certainly not a strength of this team anymore.

Incognito is a down hill, physical offensive lineman. He's not very nimble on his feet and I don't think he's fitting the new zone blocking scheme very well, which calls for smaller, athletic lineman.

I think it's very possible that Miami has two new names on the left side of the offensive line next season.

The three MVP's so far in the run game for the Dolphins from a blocking standpoint have been Mike Pouncey, who is turning into an elite center and his skill set is being maximized by this blocking scheme, John Jerry, who is improving every week (especially in pass protection), and Javorskie Lane, who is destroying people in the hole and has the athleticism to get outside the tackle and seal the edge for Bush; it's fun to watch.

While Bush was tremendous at picking and choosing his spots to take the play outside against Oakland and NY, he did a poor job of it against the Cardinals and Bengals. It was way too often that Bush attempted to bounce the play outside for a big gain when there were positive yards to be gained by keeping it in-between the tackles, and the plays resulted in a loss of yards or very minimal gains. Could it be that he's nervous about taking more hits inside because of the knee? Possible. Is it from a lack of practice? Also possible. It's impossible to tell from the outside looking in.

That's it for this week. I'll end the blog with this: I'm five for five picking games this season and am confident I'll be six for six heading into the bye week.

Miami 20

St. Louis 13