AFC East Kingpin New England travels to Miami

Contributed by Tony Simmons
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The 8-3 New England Patriots, leaders of the AFC East travel to Miami to take on the 5-6 Dolphins in a 1:00 kickoff that will be televised to most of the nation on CBS. The Patriots come into the game off a 49-19 Thanksgiving Day thrashing of the New York Jets in New Jersey, while the Dolphins are coming off a much needed 24-21 win over a good Seattle team in Miami last Sunday. It was the 1st of hopefully many 4th quarter comeback wins for rookie QB Ryan Tannehill and broke a 3 game losing streak for the Dolphins.

Let's take a look at how these teams matchup up in this key AFC East battle.

Miami comes into the game ranked 26th in total yards generating 321.3 yards per game. They rank 22nd in passing at 212.4 yards a game, and come in 16th in rushing offense at 108.9 yards per game. Miami ranks 26th in points scored with 19.2. They face a New England defense that ranks 27th in total defense giving up 390.2 yards a game. They rank 28th in pass defense giving up 289.4 yards a game, and rank 10th in rush defense giving up 100.8 yards a game. They rank 13th in points allowed giving up 22.2. The Patriots do come into the game in the top 5 of the NFL in turnovers margin, as they have 14 interceptions and 18 fumbles recovered.

The Dolphins finally got the run game going last week against the 11th ranked run defense from Seattle last week generating 187 yards against the Seahawks. They face the 10th ranked rush defense today in the Patriots, and once again the run game will be the key for Miami. Getting the run game going will allow the Dolphins to play action pass and attack a very suspect secondary. The Patriots are good at forcing turnovers, and this is a game that the Dolphins MUST protect the football if they are to have a chance of winning the football game.

The Dolphins defense comes into the game ranked 21st in total defense giving up 358.5 yards per game. They rank 26th in pass defense giving up 261.7 yards per game and rank 7th in rush defense giving up 96.7 yards per game. Miami ranks 9th in points allowed, giving up 20.5 points a game. They face the most potent offense in the NFL in the New England Patriots, as they rank 1st in total yards generating 435.8 yards a game. They rank 4th in passing offense at 292.1 yards per game, and rank 6th in rush offense generating 143.7 yards per game. The Patriots are the highest scoring team in the NFL at 37.0 points a game.

The Dolphins defense faces a very potent offensive team in New England, an offensive team that now has balance with a very solid running game to complement an always potent passing attack with QB Tom Brady. Still, nothing changes with what the Dolphins will need to do. Make New England one dimensional and take away the run game. If the Patriots are able to run the ball, the Dolphins will have NO chance to stop New England. Stop the run game and get pressure on Tom Brady. That means DC Kevin Coyle will need to be aggressive and bring the blitz to generate constant pass pressure on a QB that does very well against the blitz, but Miami has no choice. DE Cameron Wake is still the only DL player generating consistent pressure. This indeed would be a game were Jared Odrick would be a welcomed plus in regards to providing additional pass rush along with getting interior push from DT's Paul Soliai and Randy Starks.

Miami faces a very tough task today against perhaps the best team in the AFC in New England. The Dolphins will have to play their best game of the year to have a chance to get a win today. That being said, the Patriots have been beaten 3 times this year, so they can be beaten. Bring your A game Miami.

Go Dolphins.....