

7 Thoughts on the Dolphins During 'Patriots' Final Week

Contributed by Dave Blake
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1. Will the Dolphins play past week 17 in my lifetime?

This is it: the final week of the season. Well, it is for Miami Dolphins fans once again. I am not even asking if the Dolphins will make it to the Super Bowl in my lifetime. I am asking about a playoff appearance. Aside from an accidental slip in 2008 when the Dolphins luckily picked up Chad Pennington off the waiver wire at the end of the preseason and magically won the AFC East, this team has not even sniffed at the playoffs. In fact, before the last time they made an entrance into the playoff system was in 2001 when the Ravens once again brushed us easily aside.

While this year was a good growing year for our Dolphins, I have to admit I was ready for the season to be over. I was starting to wonder if the Dolphins were even worth 3 hours of my time and would I be better served spending that time with my family. No kidding. Those of you who know me know that this is not me at all as I watched every game faithfully during the 1-15 season in 2007. Losing is really starting to wear me down, and I do not like it.

So, I ask myself, will the Dolphins play past week 17 in my lifetime? I really don't know.

2. Will GM Jeff Ireland fill a lot of holes in 2013?

Now THIS is a good question. A lot has been said about the Dolphins having a lot of resources next year to add some talent to this team ... to fill some of the many holes. With all eyes on GM Jeff Ireland, will he feel the pressure to throw Ross' wallet around to add key free agent players?

My hope is that he does not go too crazy with this. He needs to have another good draft as he had this year. He has added key players the past two years in the draft, and this team is young with potential. He does need to open the wallet to bring in a very good free agent wide receiver. No bargain spending ... PLEASE. He may even want to draft a WR somewhere in the first two rounds as well. The Pro Bowl is overflowing with players drafted in the first round. This team needs playmakers. No trading down for good when you have the chance for very good to excellent in the first round. Heck, package a couple of picks and move up to draft another first rounder.

* 41 percent of the Pro Bowl players (32 of 78 every-down selections (no special teamers) were picked in the Top 15 of the draft.

* 58.9 percent (46 of 78) of them were taken in the first round. (Dave Hyde)

Why do I say that the Dolphins should not go crazy throwing money around in free agency? Chemistry and trying to meet expectations. The Dolphins need to make some moves but not too many "big" ones. I think the Bills and Eagles are examples of overhype and chemistry issues. We can look no further than our own history when Shula signed a bunch of players his last year trying to get that last Super Bowl. That team played inconsistently and was embarrassed by the Bills in the first round of the playoffs. That team fought within itself and even Shula lost control of them. We do not need a Dream Team ... we need a TEAM.

3. Can the Dolphins get to 8-8?

Dang, I start talking about the playoffs and now I'm talking about breaking even. That's because being 8-8 is the here and now, and the Dolphins have not broken even since 2008 (the fluke year), and if they do not beat the New England Patriots on Sunday we will be below .500 in 6 of the last 7 years. That is the best recipe to undo everything that Don Shula did in making the Dolphins one of the premiere teams in the NFL. I'm in North Carolina and I rarely see a Dolphins jersey or bumper sticker. I see a lot of Steelers and Patriots team logos though. It is because they win consistently.

So, what about Sunday's game? If you ask Patriots QB Tom Brady which team he hates to play he will tell you that the Dolphins are one of those teams. While the Patriots still own the AFC East, they've had their surprise losses to the Dolphins several times during the 2000's despite making the playoffs 10 times in the last 12 years.

Will Bill Belichick rest his starters? Not a chance. Even if he wanted to, he still is playing for a first round bye and home

field advantage.

New England clinches a first-round bye:

- 1) NE win + DEN loss
- 2) NE win + HOU loss

New England clinches home-field advantage:

- 1) NE win + DEN loss + HOU loss (nfl.com)

I think the game is winnable for the Dolphins, but I really do not see it happening. Belichick and Brady hate to lose, the temperature will be in the 20s, and the Dolphins will be without Davone Bess once again. Still, I am going to hit a Sports Bar for company and wish for the best.

4. Did Punter Brandon Fields get 'jobbed'?

If you asked any Dolphins fan during the last 5 years of Jeff Ireland's rebuilding program who the best player was on the Dolphins, more than likely you would have said punter Brandon Fields. It's been a sad fact that this team does not have a lot of playmakers. Fields was actually a Randy Mueller/Cam Cameron draft pick as the Dolphins drafted him in the 7th round of the 2007 NFL Draft. Of course, we remember that 'Ted Ginn and family' were drafted in the first round that year. Ouch!

This year, Brandon Fields ranked #1 in the NFL with a 50.3 punt average, but below Chiefs Pro Bowl attendee Dustin Colquitt in net punting average. To me, Brandon Fields is the greatest punter the Dolphins have ever had on their roster and I am happy that we locked him up this past summer until 2016. Unfortunately, what the fans and coaches remember most when voting for punters is not just the incredible length of a punt and hang time, but the frustration of a fantastic punt that pins their team inside the 20 yard line. Fields hit 26 punts inside the opponents 20 yard line, but Colquitt has done that 42 times this year. No kidding.

I remember watching Ray Guy punt for the Raiders many years ago. Back then he was incredible and worthy of going into the Pro Bowl in my opinion. But, I think we are in the golden age of punters and we aren't even noticing it. Check this out:

Most punts inside the 20: Chiefs punter Dustin Colquitt got his 42nd punt inside the 20 on Sunday, tying an NFL record. That was only the record for a few hours before Cardinals punter Dave Zastudil broke it by landing six punts inside the 20-yard line on Sunday against the Bears, upping his season total to a new NFL record of 44. Zastudil may add to his record on Sunday, or Colquitt may surpass him, giving us a reason to watch two good punters on two bad teams on Sunday. (PFT)

Here are Pro Football Focus ' top 10 punters up to this week. These staticians are insane. They even keep hangtime stats (HT).

5. Good news! The game is nationally televised.

Thanks to what this game could mean to the Patriots playoff position, and the other available 4pm games being on the suckish side, the Dolphins/Patriots game is the nationally televised game on CBS. Not bad.

6. Are the Dolphins really going to change the official logo?

I really think they are. There has been a lot of talk about it, and the Dolphins did mention to the fan sites when we were there a couple months ago about it.

An attaboy goes out to DolfansNYC for getting the scoop on what could be the new logo. Thanks to every media outlet out there that actually mentioned their site in their reporting.

Here's the logo (which the Miami Herald cleaned up) ... which would be good on some merchandise, but I do not like for our official logo.

I like something more like the following image, as it is a new aggressive look that still holds onto some of our tradition. One of our forum guys found it on Facebook, so, I do not know who created it.

7. Big Dave turned 51.

Yep, I'm getting up there. My little brother and his wife have been married for 25 years. She, being a Redskins fan, had to remind him the other day, "You know, honey. We have been married for 25 years and the Dolphins have not been in the Super Bowl." That's a depressing thought, isn't it? Well, I am not going to harp on that right now. I want to make the playoffs first as I stated in #1.

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