

COMMENTARY: Neal Driscoll

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Good Teams Get Better Through The Draft

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Eddie Moore, selected in 2003, is considered one of the biggest draft busts in team history

How did the Dolphins go from one of the top organizations in all of professional sports to the disaster that occurred from the 2004-2007 NFL seasons? In four seasons the Dolphins combined for three head coaches in Dave Wannstedt, Nick Saban, and Cam Cameron and a combined record of 20-44. Sure none of the above mentioned coaches were Don Shula's or even Brian Billick's but the fact of the matter is that all of them failed

miserably through the draft. I want to start looking at our drafts starting in the 2000 season and just analyze how poor our draft classes were. A badly run front office, bad coaching but without question our biggest area of concern was talent. I have heard it many times that the NFL is a talent acquisition business and if you do not have talent you do not win.

The Dolphins did not have a 1st Round Selection in the 2000 NFL Draft but in Round 2 with the 53rd pick the Dolphins selected Todd Wade an Offensive Tackle out of Mississippi. In my opinion Todd Wade was an above average player for us for quite some time and I value him as a solid draft pick. In Round 3 the Dolphins selected Cornerback Ben Kelly out of Colorado with the 84th

pick in the draft. Kelly never panned out and he eventually found himself released from the team, not a very good selection here. Round 4 saw the Dolphins grab fullback Deon Dyer out of North Carolina and despite fans taking a liking to Dyer because he could really lay some lumber his time was short-lived in Miami and he never did catch on anywhere else. Round 5 the Dolphins snagged Arturo Freeman, a safety out of South Carolina. Freeman had some solid games but never developed into a full-time starter and as soon as Defensive Coordinator Jim Bates left Miami, so did Freeman. In round 6 the Dolphins selected Ernest Grant, a Defensive Tackle from a Division 2 School who never panned out at all. I barely remember this guy being on the field and he probably never even made the CFL to be honest. Jeff Harris, a Defensive Back out of Georgia was our 7th round Selection and once again.. Who? So to sum up the 2000 NFL Draft for the Miami Dolphins; Simply horrible. One solid player and 6 guys who couldn't even bounce around the league is what the Dolphins got in April of 2000. If I had to put a grade on this draft I would give this an F.

The 2001 NFL Draft was an absolute disaster for the Miami Dolphins. In the first round the Dolphins drafted Jamar Fletcher with the 26th pick of the draft. We needed a Quarterback since Dan Marino had retired just two seasons

prior and our starting Quarterback was Jay Fiedler. I do not hate Jay Fiedler like most but we had a chance at Drew Brees and we took Jamar Fletcher. Jamar Fletcher never became more than a Nickel corner and bounced around a few times. We struck gold in the 2

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Round with Chris Chambers. Chambers was a bit inconsistent but he put up big numbers and made highlight reel catches. In 2005 Chris Chambers did make it to the Pro-Bowl in a season which he has 1,118 receiving yards and 11 touchdowns. We needed up trading him to the San Diego Chargers for a

2

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Rounder but Chris Chambers delivered for the Miami Dolphins in a big way. Travis Minor was a 3

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Round selection and I see him as a major disappointment. I remember in his rookie season he took a screen for an fifty yard plus touchdown against the Colts. I really liked him at Florida State but he never panned out to be more than a 3

rd

down back. He was a good special teams player but in Round3 you look for a little more. We didn't pick again until Round 5 where we took Shawn Draper who was an converted Tight End out of Alabama. Draper never made an impact of any sorts. He was not around too long. Round 6 saw the Dolphins select a couple duds in Brandon Winey who was an Offensive Tackle out of Louisiana State, Josh Heupel who was a National Championship winning Quarterback out of Oklahoma, Otis Leverette who was an Defensive End out of Alabama-Birmingham, and Rick Crowell who was a linebacker out of Colorado State. I don't know what our scouting department was doing during the NCAA season but we were a perfect 4 for 4 in draft duds in Round 6. I mean not one of these guys ever starter or played extensively in an NFL game. The only thing that saves this draft for me was Chris Chambers and if they had not selected him in Round 2 I would have seen this as one of the worst drafts in the history of the NFL. This draft grades as a D-.

We didn't have a First Round Pick in the 2002 NFL draft because we traded it to the Saints for Ricky Williams. Ricky Williams was an absolute monster for him but lacked in character. We should have done our homework a bit more but Ricky was a Top 10 player in the game at this point so if he didn't flake out this trade would have been a good move; Ricky did flake out and retired out of nowhere. This was major setback to our franchise and one that it took a long while for us to recover from. Our first pick in this draft was Seth McKinney in Round 3. McKinney was a Center out of Texas A&M who came with high regard. He never really panned out. The next pick in the draft was the Eagles selecting Brian Westbrook. In Round 5 the Dolphins took a Defensive Back out of Washington by the name of Omar Lowe. Who? He was a complete turd who never made an impact of any sort. We took Sam Simmons as a compensatory pick in the 5

th
Round. Simmons was a receiver out of Northwestern who never panned out as well.

Our final selection was Leonard Henry a Running Back out of ECU who never made an impact of any sort at all. How can I grade this draft at anything higher than an F? I can't.

2003 was another draft where the Dolphins didn't have a 1st Round pick. This pick was also involved in the Ricky Williams deal. Ricky ended up costing us two 1

st
rounders and really burned us. So we come into Round 2 with a need at Wide Receiver and Anquan Boldin is staring us right in the face and we select.. Eddie Moore, Linebacker out of Tennessee? I remember this like it was yesterday. Who? Why? Where? Just two seasons after passing on Drew Brees in favor of Jamar Fletcher we pass on Anquan Boldin for Eddie Moore. Moore never did anything in Miami. He was a complete bust and missing out on players like Brees and Boldin eventually led to the Dolphins becoming the laughing stock of the NFL.

Wade Smith, an offensive Tackle out of Memphis, was the first of our two 3

rd
round picks. Smith was serviceable and made a few starts. I remember him getting abused big-time by Dwight Freeney. With that said he did make the All-Rookie team and was not too bad of a pick. Taylor Whitley, a Guard out Texas A&M, was our other 3

rd
round pick and this guy couldn't stay healthy. He never started, never played, just another terrible pick. I liked our 5

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Round Pick Donald lee who was an athletic Tight End out of Mississippi State. We gave up on him too early and now he plays for the Packers and is a solid #2 Tight End. As a compensatory pick we selected Wide Receiver JR Tolver. Tolver came out with high marks but could never crack the Wide Receiver rotation. Round 6 saw the Dolphins draft Strong Safety Corey Jenkins, Offensive Tackle Tim Provost, and safety Yeremiah Bell. Provost and Jenkins are complete waste but Yeremiah Bell really turned out to be a good player for us. He played at a pro-bowl level in 2008 landing him a long term contract with the Dolphins. Round 7 led to another dud in Davern Williams who was a Defensive Tackle out of Troy State. Only one player out of this entire draft class ending up being a good player for the Dolphins. It's almost not fair how bad these last three years of drafting were fr this franchise. I really like Yeremiah Bell but no 1

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Rounder and Eddie Moore in gives this draft class a failing grade of an F.

Things got a little better for us in the 2004 NFL Draft, Vernon Carey was our first round selection. Carey has turned out to be a very good player for us starting at Both left and Right Offensive Tackle positions. Carey recently was signed to a lucrative long-term contract and is still playing at a Pro-Bowl level for the Dolphins. In Round 4 we took Will Poole who was a very good corner out of USC. Unfortunately Poole couldn't stay healthy which lead to his release. I think this was a solid draft selection. Tony Bua was an undersized linebacker out of Arkansas who was not a good pick but he did light up a

player on the St. Louis Rams on a Punt return. Rex Hadnot was a solid pick in Round 6 as Hadnot eventually ended up being a Starting Guard for the team. He was adequate and under performed but was a good pick at this time of the draft. Round 7 landed us a dud in Tony Pape but a solid special teams player in Derrick Pope. I'd give this Draft Class a C+.

The Dolphins selected #2 in the 2005 NFL draft and despite many feelers that Braylon Edwards would be the pick the Dolphins selected Ronnie Brown. Ronnie Brown would replace the player who burnt them in Ricky Williams and filled a major void at the Running Back position. Ronnie Brown made his first pro-bowl in 2008 and I think there are some to follow. Ronnie Brown is a tough runner, a good blocker, and a great pass catcher making him one of the NFL elite all around Running Backs. In Round 2 the Dolphins selected Matt Roth who now starts at Outside Linebacker for the Dolphins. The Dolphins have entered contract extension negotiations for both Brown and Roth. Channing Crowder was a 1st Round talent that fell to us in the 3rd Round. Crowder just got extended and still starts in the middle. Crowder does need to make more plays but is indeed a tackling machine. We took Travis Daniels in Round 4; Daniels starter at Corner for us for a few seasons and was one of the teams' best defensive backs for a few years. He fell out of favor with the organization when Cam Cameron and company came into town and was traded to the Cleveland Browns this past season. Anthony Alabi was our 5

th
Round selection who Dolphin nation had high hopes for. He got hurt and never was the same. Kevin Vickerson was a very good pick in the 7

th
Round and still plays in the league. I grade this Draft Class as a B+. I think they landed three very good players here who are still on the team and making a big impact.

The 2006 NFL Draft saw the Miami Dolphins take another step back in terms of selecting talent. Jason Allen was selected with 16th selection in Round 1

and has show glimpse of being a play-maker but for whatever reason has not seen the field as a full-time starter through 3 regime's of the Dolphins front office. In Round3 they drafted Derek Hagan who drew solid praise coming out of Arizona State. The truth is that inconsistent hands led to his demise in Miami. Hagan had flashes of becoming a solid player but those flashes extinguished quickly. Round 4 we selected Offensive Tackle Joe Toledo who never cracked the starting lineup and had handful of injuries. We had three picks in Round 7 which led to Fred Evans, Rod Wright, and Devin Aromashodu. Rod Wright was a 1

st

round talent that fell to injury and is still on the team. Evans is best known for getting arrested and tazed out of Miami.

How could you give this grade a passing grade? You just can't when you select a special team's gunner in Round 1. F.

Another new regime led by Cam Cameron and Randy Mueller so things should get better? No chance. The Dolphins made a very controversial call when the selected Ted Ginn Jr. at #9 overall when Brady Quinn was staring them in the face. Quinn has failed to impress while Teddy Ginn was an important component of the Dolphins run last season. The player who I really wanted was Patrick Willis is now an all-world middle linebacker but I do see a lot of potential in Ginn. Ginn is working extremely hard to shush the critics and he improved a great deal from season one to season two. Round 2 saw us reach with the 40

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pick for BYU Quarterback John Beck. Beck was horrible in his short stint in Miami. We shopped him prior to last April's draft but couldn't even get a 7

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round pick for this guy. Samson Satele was not a bad pick but bigger Nose Tackles eat this guy up. They traded him to Oakland after they signed Jake Grove to improve their interior run game. The remainder of the draft was horrible with Paul Soiai and Brandon Fields being the only keepers. To this point Fields has lacked consistency and Soliai has made progress but seems to be lazy. Other picks such as Reagan Mauia, Kelvin Smith, and

Abraham Wright were quickly exiled from Miami. The Ginn pick was the only pick that sat well with me. Another failure of a draft for the Miami Dolphins.

The 2008 NFL Draft was the first for the Parcels, Ireland, and Sparano trio. They stuck gold with their first pick in Jake Long. Everyone thought we would go defense with Chris Long or Glenn Dorsey but we filled a decade long need of a quality Left Tackle. Big Jake started from Day one and earned Pro-Bowl honors in just his rookie season. We had two second round draft selections with the first being Phillip Merling. Merling was a Top 15 talent in this draft but fell due to injury. He seems poised to start this season. In Week 17 Merling intercepted a Brett Favre screen pass which he took to the house. When he was in the game you always saw #97 around the ball. The second of our Round 2 selections was Chad Henne. Henne was rated among the top Quarterbacks in this draft and Miami was very high on him. I think they were shocked that he fell into their laps here. Henne is the Quarterback of the future in Miami and has received very strong praise. Unfortunately for him Chad Pennington had something to prove. Kendall Langford in Round 3 was a steal. This guy is the prototypical 3-4 defensive end. He did hit a rookie slump half way through the season but I think we have a pair of book ends in Langford and Merling. We traded a 4

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and a 6

th

Round Draft pick to the Cowboys in exchange for Akin Ayodele, Anthony Fasano, and Jason Ferguson; robbery. We robbed the Cowboys blind as Ayodele started 16 games in the middle, Fasano was major target for Pennington and developed into an upper echelon Tight End, and Ferguson is a very important component to this defense. We drafted Donald Thomas in Round 6 who seems to be a lock as starting Right Guard. Lionel Dotson and Shawn Murphy are depth players who have shown great improvement. Jalen Parnham was signed off our Practice Squad by the Baltimore Ravens. Overall this draft was the foundation to the Dolphins turn around for now and for the future. Acquiring 3 starters for two draft picks was pure genius. I grade this draft as an A.

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It is way too early to grade the 2009 Miami Dolphin draft class but our day one was very successful. Vontae Davis and Sean Smith were two of the best Corner's in this draft and we locked them up. Pat White is the ultimate x-factor and will give defensive coordinators nightmares. Whites ability in the "Wild-Cat" and spread offenses will give us a very dangerous unit. Andrew Gardner was a great depth pick for our Offensive Line and I believe he is good enough o start in a couple of years. Chris Clemons was value pick. John Nalbone, Brian Hartline, and Patrick turner have something to prove. I will not grade this draft class yet but will say I am very happy with the selections with the exception of the Brian Hartline pick.

Hopefully the recent trend of successful draft classes can continue to get this franchise where it belongs, at the top of the NFL.

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