

A TRIP BACK IN TIME



When you hear the name Earl Morrall, who do you remember? Many of you remember the back-up quarterback of the 1972 undefeated Miami Dolphins, but is that all Earl Morrall was?

Roberto's Fin Fridays

Written by Roberto Yanes
Friday, 02 April 2010 13:07

For this week's edition of Fins Friday we are going to take a trip back in time and find out exactly who Earl Morrall was. Like many young Dol-fans who were not alive to witness a team of perfection, I have spent a part of my life researching everything about the '72 Dolphins. The stories are amazing, the coach, the young quarter back, the wide receiver, a team of no-names, a trio of running backs and the veteran back up quarterback. A lot of young Dol-fans do not know the story of the veteran back up QB, but you will today, as it was once told to me.

When I was about seventeen years old, I used to go shoot pool at a local pool hall every weekend. The caretaker of the pool hall, called Duffy, was an old skinny man with no teeth, dark aviator sunglasses and a thick southern accent. Everyone considered ol' Duffy a drunk, but he was not. The few who knew him well, knew he was a HUGE Dolphins fan. He was my source whenever I wanted to know something about the good old days of Miami Dolphins football.

One night in our many Dolphins discussions, Duffy asked me if I knew who Earl Morrall was. Which in reply, I said no. Duffy went on to tell me the story of Earl Morrall.

Duffy began his story on April 25, 1972, the day Earl was claimed off waivers by the Miami Dolphins and reunited with his old coach, Don Shula. He continued to tell me how on October 15, 1972, quarterback Bob Griese went down with a broken leg and a dislocated ankle in a game against the Chargers. Morrall was named Griese's replacement in the win against San Diego. Earl Morrall went on to lead the Dolphins to an undefeated season and AFC Championship game. In the AFC Championship game, Morrall was replaced by a healthy Bob Griese after struggling against the Steelers. The Fins were victorious in that game and advanced to SuperBowl VII to become the only undefeated team in NFL history. Ol' Duffy's story was amazing and the guy truly knew his Dolphins football. After that night I had to know more about this backup QB who played for a team of perfection.

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Earl Morrall was born May 17, 1934 in Muskegon, Michigan. Morrall played football for Muskegon High School and led them to a state football championship in 1951. After high school he attended Michigan State University and played three seasons for the Spartans, including a 9-1 record in 1955 and a Rose Bowl win in 1956. Morrall was quite the athlete. While at Michigan, he played college baseball and made it to the College Baseball World Series as a shortstop and third baseman. Earl earned the opportunity to play professional baseball, but chose football instead.

Morrall played twenty-one seasons in the NFL for six different teams. His first team was the San Francisco 49ers, after making him a first round selection. On September 16, 1957 Morrall was traded to the Steelers. A year later he was traded to the Lions, where he spent six seasons. His best season came in 1963 when he threw for 24 touchdowns and 2,600 yards. After suffering a season-ending injury the following year, he was dealt to the Giants. The year he was traded to the Giants, Earl threw for 22 touchdowns and passed for 2,446 yards. On August 25, 1968 Earl was traded to the Baltimore Colts. In Baltimore he became the starter after Johnny Unitas went down with an injury in the final exhibition game. He led the Colts to a 13-1 record and two playoff victories. That year Morrall won the NFL's Most Valuable Player award and led the Colts to Super Bowl III, in which they lost to the New York Jets. That game is still known as "The Greatest Upset Ever." Earl then went on again to replace Unitas in Super Bowl V, this time helping Baltimore achieve a victory.

The rest is history. Earl played five seasons for your Miami Dolphins. His best season as a Dolphin came in 1972, where he had 11 TDs and threw for 1,360 yards. He was awarded the American Football Conference Player of the Year Award along with NFL Comeback Player of the Year Award in 1972. Morrall retired a Miami Dolphins on May 17, 1977.

'Till this day, I thank Ol' Duffy for teaching me who Earl Morrall was. It was his story that helped me appreciate the history of the 1972 Dolphins and their great backup quarterback. He also

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inspired me to write this column today. I hope you all have enjoyed this week's edition of Fins Friday and this trip back in time. If anyone ever asks you who Earl Morrall is, you tell him what he did for the Fins, but make sure to let them know Ol' Earl is the greatest backup quarterback in the history of the NFL.

Source: Duffy, NFL.com, Wikipedia.

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