

ANSWER AT SAFETY MUST COME SOON



Ask a Dolphins' fan what position worries them the most going into the season and they will say only one word, safety. The safety position has become a huge concern for Miami fans everywhere. The fins have failed to

find a quality safety since Brock Marion departed in 2003. Many have come and gone, but the position remains one of the most, if not the most unstable position for the Dolphins. Just last year, Miami believed they had found the solution to their problem at safety. They did not re-sign Renaldo Hill and signed high-priced free agent Gibril Wilson which proved to be one of the worst decisions made by the Trifecta, to this day. Wilson struggled mightily in covering receivers and tight ends, missed tackles, lacked leadership and communication skills required to man his position.

When free agency began, Miami wasted no time in getting rid of Gibril Wilson. They went on a search for the next Dolphins' starting free safety, offering deals to the likes of Antrel Rolle and Ryan Clark, only to miss out on both. The Fins also contacted Indianapolis about safety Antoine Bethea, but the price was just too costly. After not finding an answer in free agency, Miami would then look for their answer in the draft. They drafted safety Reshad Jones out of Georgia in the fifth round and signed UDFA Jonathan Amaya. The Fins also have last year's fifth round pick Chris Clemons & veteran Tyrone Culver. All four players are expected to compete for the starting position, but they all have question marks and none has been a consistent starter in the NFL. The safety position has me seriously concerned.

It is encouraging to hear OTA reports saying Clemons has improved and impressed, but may I remind you that last year OTAs had him looking like a star as well. Then there is the fact that the reason Clemons started all 256 snaps at the free safety position was because Sparano said he knows what he has in Culver and needed to see what Clemons brought. Listen, I want Clemons to develop and become a star, but I cannot hide the concern I have of going into the season with him as the starter. For me to feel comfortable, I would need to see him shining in training camp and pre-season games. I don't think the concerns with Clemons are his physical abilities, to me it is the mental and leadership role a free safety has to have and it's unclear if Clemons possess that.

Tyrone Culver is a player I really like and I feel like he can win the position, but I have my concerns with him as well. I keep asking myself why he could not steal the position from Wilson last year. Culver is a very versatile player. He can play both safety positions, man the dime position in dime packages and is a gunner on special teams. Tyrone is pretty much the Patrick Cobbs of the defense. He reminds me of a young Jeremiah Bell, shining every time he was given a chance. But again why has he not started and is he just a real good situational player?

Reshad Jones is a player I am really excited to watch in training camps do to the physical abilities he showed in college. The kid was a leader, ball hawk and an aggressive hitter in college, but let's be honest, going into the season with a rookie free safety is something I don't think this organization is prepared to do. A free safety is often called the quarterback of the defense and I believe starting Jones would bring the rookie mistakes this team cannot afford to have.

There were also encouraging reports out of the OTAs on rookie undrafted free agent Jonathan Amaya. Sparano praised him for his ability to find the ball and for the few mental mistakes he has committed, but like Jones, I just don't feel comfortable enough to have a rookie starting at safety.

One option that remains, which I think a lot of Dolfans can agree me, is Oshiomogho Atogwe. By now, you all know he is a free agent and are aware of what he can bring to this team. To me Atogwe is one of best ball-hawking safeties in the NFL. O.J.'s 19 interceptions in five years show for it. It is not only his ball-hawk abilities that are intriguing, it is his ability to strip the ball from opposing players. In his five years in the league he has 14 forced fumbles. Atogwe is a turn over machine. He is also regarded as being extremely smart and a leader in the Rams' defense.

I truly hope the Fins make a run for Atogwe, but conflicting reports on the Dolphins interest in O.J. are showing signs that nothing will happen anytime soon.

The Miami Herald's Jeff Darlington and Barry Jackson report that Miami is not interested in Atogwe, this according to a team source. They say the only reason he is being linked to the Dolphins, is due to Miami's inexperience at the safety position. On the other hand Adam Schefter and John Clayton of ESPN have both said that Miami is interested in Atogwe.

According what I have been told, the word on Atogwe is the Fins remain interested, but will not make a run for him until he lowers his asking price. As one source told me, "the guy is getting no attention because he wants the dough." If Atogwe lowers his asking price, I am told there is a possibility Miami will make a strong push, but as of now they are dark horse. There is also the possibility he can still re-sign with the Rams and I've been told the Lions and Redskins could be interested if the price drops as well.

Those are just more uncertainties in the Dolphins potential interest in Atogwe. Whether it is Clemons, Culver, Jones, Amaya, or the signing of Atogwe, one certainty remains; the Miami Dolphins most find an answer at safety, sooner, rather than later.

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Roberto's Fin Fridays

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