

Jets Loss Confuses The Picture

Written by Matt Kent

Tuesday, 25 September 2012 12:23

□ What Is Wrong With this Franchise?



It isn't always apparent to see when a team has made the turn toward crating a contending franchise. Sometimes there are obvious big acquisitions such as when the 49ers drafted Alex Smith, Frank Gore, Vernon Davis, Michael Crabtree, etc. And such as when the Saints acquired Drew Brees, Jeremy Shockey, and Jonathan Vilma. Sometimes teams add pieces through the draft and unheralded players with one or two stars and grow a roster like Green Bay did, and like the Giants did. The offseason activity leading up to the 2012 campaign saw the Miami

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Dolphins play their cards close to the chest. When players like Peyton Manning, Alex Smith and Matt Flynn were available we always seemed to either lose out or just walk away. The search for a Head Coach took even longer as the most sought after prospects like Jeff Fischer snubbed the team and left the impression that the make-up of front office/owner/coach was just not an appealing environment...maybe even a "coach killer". So in the end the Miami Dolphins brought in a highly regarded coordinator in Joe Philbin, and waited for the draft. The method that came into focus was that this team would be built via the "grow your own" method and build through the draft and more unheralded players. And that is how it went. That is what we all saw on Hardknocks a new coach, new methods, youth everywhere and an emphasis on the kind of player Ireland and Philbin want for this team. Character over talent, but hopefully both.

Inevitably the biggest measure of success on this method is results. The Miami Dolphins have become the NFL measure for a team failing to rebuild successfully and the fan base is hungry and impatient. The franchise has not been a relevant force in the league for as much as 15 years, depending on your measure of what the term relevant is maybe even longer. Heading into the Jets game the Miami Dolphins 2012 version had the chance to send a message to the league and to the fans that the formula is a good one. Because the Jets are good but not elite they could and should be beat in our stadium. We could then establish that although not "there" we were getting better. Sadly though when the game came to an end the team has more questions than answers. There are some key issues as a fan you just want to know what the answer is. Why we continue to fail. The way I see it, the issues around this years team are as follows:

1. **Is Tannehill the man?** What is interesting is that plenty of the fans and pundits want to support the new guy with comments like "Poised, good arm, poised, knows the offense, poised, athletic ability, poised" everyone seems to like the way he handles the team. However, there has got to be tangible results. In this league and in every sport this is done by statistics and mostly wins. Through three games Ryan Tannehill has a QB rating of 58.2, dead last, and he has thrown only one touchdown to four interceptions and his completion percentage is 28th overall. These are real and meaningful statistics and they have to improve to win the argument that starting Ryan Tannehill over Matt Moore was the right choice.

2. **The Inability to find an impact player Wide Receiver.** The team started the off season feeling it needed someone to compliment Brandon Marshall and spread the field. They signed Chad Johnson. For various published reasons they both were let go after it was deemed they weren't "character" guys. Maybe the plan was that Marshall was never going to be here. But, it doesn't change the fact that the team had a strong need at the position, especially considering they presence of a rookie QB behind center. So neither through the draft, or the off season did the Dolphins acquire a legitimate starting talent. What is frustrating is when we watched HBO Hardknocks THEY knew they didn't have talent there. No moves were made. We stocked up on

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picks, but no moves, no trades. Nothing. When you follow that all the way through to game day, the lack of a performance at the position is frustrating and is hurting this team. And what is mysterious is that the only Wide Receiver who impressed during the preseason, Rishard Matthews hasn't even been put into play.

3. **Miami hasn't had a good secondary in years.** First of all let's start with the safety position. This has been a need for the Dolphins for years, and years, AND years. Yet we do not solve it. Watching Safety Earl Little play for Seattle last night I was reminded of exactly how much of an impact a great safety can make. This continues to burn the Dolphins as they give up deep plays, long runs, and most importantly fail to turn the ball over. As far as corner goes, the team did try and address this with Vontae Davis and Sean Smith a few years back and many thought it was one of the best young tandems in the league. But the hype appeared to be premature as the two became just mediocre, and Davis was then traded to the Colts during preseason. Once again the expectation was that the team would make a move to replace him. But nothing. Absolutely nothing. So we started the season with athletes who were and have been back-ups now responsible for starting roles. In today's pass happy league it seems like a disaster. Currently Miami is ranked 29th in pass defense.

4. **The pass Rush is not happening.** So what happens when you can't cover and you can't get pressure? (for the answer look at the last line in item #3). Miami Drafted Jared Odrick with a first round pick to bring a pass rush. That same year Koa Misi was drafted with the reputation as a "pass rushing" linebacker. Neither of these have proven to be able to bring those credentials to the NFL. Last year's pass rushing star Cam Wake has not been able to get it going this year either. Watching games you can clearly be reminded that the rules favor the offense and if you can not get some heat on these passers than you are not going to be able to win. All in all there appears no answer in sight on this need either.

There are plenty of promising things, like Reggie Bush and the running game and the run defense. But at some point there has got to be a sign that this team has got a clue about how to add talent in much needed areas. No one expects it to be done in one year and Philbin deserves time to develop things. Jeff Ireland though needs to start delivering some playoff caliber starters, and a few star playmakers to this roster if Coach Philbin is to get a fair chance at proving he can lead the Miami Dolphins back into contention.

There is a lot made about Miami having "bad fans". They don't show up, they aren't loud enough, etc. etc. Asking fans in this economy to throw down about \$300-400 to go to a game and watch a product that is no better than what we have been given is a lot. It's not a lack of caring. It's just year after year after year of spending money to walk away feeling bad while visiting fans gloat in your face as you do the walk of shame down the ramp to the parking lot.

There is still a lot of football left to be played. Perhaps the team will play better and by the year's end we will have the answer to some of the issues above. In the meantime we will tune in and

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look. Search every play, analyze it, come to Finheaven and talk about it. Debate it. We will be looking and looking and wondering if this is the game where we start making the turn and finally feeling like there is hope and a path to once again being an elite team.