

New Beginnings

In spirit of FinHeaven's new beginnings, I felt compelled to write about my thoughts on what the new beginnings of what the Miami Dolphins under Bill Parcells might bring. Looking at my own life, on the eve of starting my first ever "real" job tomorrow (not waiting tables or being an intern for the Anthony Munoz Foundation) I've found myself asking a few questions. I think I know the answers to those. I've also asked myself a few questions about the Miami Dolphins. I have my own answers to those, and I'm sure those who read this have their answers as well, which is why I love this site.

I've seen a few threads wanting to know about Tony Sparano and his coaching abilities, and while curious myself; I won't delve into that until we at least get some flavor of OTA's, mini camps or training camp itself. The issues at hand here presently are more personnel issues than coaching or front office, so I'll tackle them in the order I think is most important, and in this edition, it'll be the O-line and an assessment of draft prospects that could go to us with the first overall pick.

The Offensive Line

Let's start at offensive tackle or for that matter the O-line as a whole. No unit may be more important to a football team than these five guys. So far as I can tell, we have 3 capable starters, Vernon Carey, Samson Satele, and Justin Smiley. I think it's pretty apparent that Smile will be a starting guard for us, probably at right guard where he played the past few years in San Fran, though he's got experience at left guard, so the versatility is nice. Samson Satele show flashes of brilliance last year at center and may end up a Pro Bowler there in the not too distant future, or he may find a home at left guard, where he played for two years at Hawaii amongst a year as center and seeing some work at left tackle. But, for the moment let's assume he's our center.

Vernon Carey will start at tackle, the question is, right or left? Personally, I felt he played near a Pro Bowl level at RT in 2006, and if not for Willie Anderson's reputation, would indeed have been in the game. He looked alright last year at left tackle, surrendering only three sacks, but I think his

skillset is better suited for the right side. So what to do about the left side? There's a blank at the tackle and guard spots over there, but with Satele at center, Smiley at right guard and Carey at right tackle, one side of the line is pretty good – it's just not the side that will be protecting the quarterback's blindside, but we'll save that debate for another time. Another guard still needs to be added, but it's a certainty that we won't take one with the first overall pick so I'll save that for later and focus on the critical left tackle spot.

The Bryant McKinnie Scenario

The quick and easy answer is simple; draft one. We'll get to that in a minute, but I think there just might possibly be another angle we haven't discussed yet. I've not seen or heard it mentioned in mainstream media, but I have a friend who has reported hearing the Minnesota Vikings ownership is fed up with LT Bryant McKinnie, and has reportedly offered McKinnie and a 2008 3rd round pick for Jason Taylor and a 2009 3rd rounder. Again, this is from my friend, a Vikings fan, so don't shoot the messenger, but I think it could possibly happen, especially considering Rick Spielman is their GM. McKinnie is 28 years old and has proved to be pretty durable considering the only games he missed were when he was holding out during his rookie season.

He does have a pretty fat contract though, with bonuses that push it over the \$50M mark, so I question whether owner Ziggy Wilf, who stresses high character, will want to continue paying top dollar for a man who's gotten into trouble twice during Wilf's watch. I think the level of discipline Parcels and Co., combined with a return to the Miami area may do some good for "Mount McKinnie". That's one possibility, though I highly doubt anything would transpire, and if it did, it won't come until closer to draft time.

Drafting Jake Long: [Jake's Bio](#)

So, back to drafting a left tackle; the questions I'll raise here have been debated back and forth – is Jake Long worthy of the #1 overall pick? Is he a pure LT or is he destined to become the next Jon Runyan? Well, I'll answer the latter question first; I do believe he can play LT in the NFL quite effectively. I don't think he's going to dominate anyone in the pass-blocking

department like we've seen in Walter Jones, Jonathan Ogden, or even more recently, Marcus McNeil, but I do believe he'll be effective. Having seen him in person, his pass-blocking skills make me think a better version of Matt Light, which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

However, I still ask myself, is it worth taking a tackle number one overall when there certainly isn't a Walter Jones, Orlando Pace, Jonathan Ogden type of prospect that is clearly visible in this draft? Obviously, if the McKinnie rumor does come to fruition, then we don't have to worry about that question, and it frees up the pick at #32 as well as giving us an extra pick in 2008, not to mention giving us a pretty nice LT in Bryant McKinnie, which would be my personal preference, but if it doesn't happen I'd rather target someone in the second round, all things being equal to Jake Long.

Examining the rest of the candidates...

Chris Long: [Chris' Bio](#)

Seemingly the favorite prospect of the majority of posters at FinHeaven, and rightfully so, the reigning Ted Hendricks award winner might be the best defensive player to come out of the NCAA this year (though Glenn Dorsey might have something to say about that) and had a tremendous senior campaign. The rap sheet on this guy is pretty well known, and this time of year all the info is pretty well known on these guys and with the senior campaign he just posted, I'd be thrilled if Miami drafted this kid. I just have one concern with this beast...what about the first three years of your college career? Posting only 7 sacks and 24 tackles for loss in three years, then 14 and 19 respectively in his senior year? I don't question the player or the drive of this kid, but the numbers don't lie. Is he really the best prospect to play the 3-4 outside linebacker position?

Granted he was a 3-4 base defensive end at UVA, but he was moved around quite a bit to maximize his chances to wreak havoc. My biggest concern is not whether he can adapt to a new role in the NFL, I believe he can and by all means, will, but whether he is capable of doing it to a better effect than the next prospect...

Vernon Gholston: [Vernon's Bio](#)

Who was once a darkhorse to be the number one pick has definitely made the race interesting, and with Matt Ryan's pro day, and the reports of John Beck's drive throughout the offseason thus far, I think Vernon makes it a three-horse race, with the two Longs being his competition. After seeing garbage time as a freshman and redshirting after breaking his hand, in 2006 Gholston became a full-time starter and registered 8.5 sacks and 15 tackles for loss, better numbers than Chris Long's first three years combined and put up 14 sacks and 15.5 tackles for loss as a senior in a defense designed to funnel plays to the linebackers, much like we ran under Jimmy Johnson.

The knock on Vernon is his inconsistency. Living in Ohio, I've seen my fair share of Buckeye games on TV and in person and he is consistent at being inconsistent. For the most part, he's dominating when he wants to be and is the only player I've seen give Jake Long trouble throughout his collegiate career, but he just disappears at times when he's on the field. I think some of that is due to the somewhat vanilla scheme run by OSU, but there's no real explanation for it. However, I came away mightily impressed after

seeing his combine and pro day workout numbers, and interviews. He's already been wined and dined so I think at the very least; he'll be under considerable consideration right up to the draft.

Matt Ryan: [Matt's Bio](#)

I think "Matty Ice" is still in play at this point, though it may only be to try and entice some team like Kansas City or Baltimore to try and jump up and get him, though I think even that's unlikely at this point. I like what I saw from Matt Ryan when I saw Boston College play, and I think he's a top 10 prospect; just not number one overall material. He's got an adequate arm, top intangibles, but he just doesn't seem like a sure-fire, can't-miss prospect. And if I'm going to take a quarterback with the first overall pick a year after drafting one in the second round, something that's never been done before, he better be the next Peyton Manning, Tom Brady or Carson Palmer.

I've seen a lot of comparisons of Matt Ryan to Ben Roethlisberger, especially from Mike Mayock, who seemingly can't get enough of this kid to a point where it's almost scary...the point being; would you want Ben Roethlisberger at number one overall? I don't, and I

think you have to take that into consideration when you have two players who could be a Mike Vrabel or Shawn Merriman, and possibly the next Joe Thomas on the board as well. Considering how bad the defense was last year, the only offensive player that should even be considered in my opinion is Jake Long.

Glenn Dorsey: [Glenn's Bio](#)

I don't think the conversation can be complete without mentioning Dorsey. He won more defensive awards than any player, and in my opinion, is the best prospect in this draft. However, his size factors into the equation and he'd have to bulk up to be an effect 3-4 NT. Now, if we still ran the "hybrid" scheme...things are different, it's a no-brainer Dorsey is the pick. I just can't justify drafting a 3-4 nose tackle or a 3-4 defensive end with the first overall pick in the draft, even if it is someone who is as good as Glenn Dorsey. That said, he's still got his pro day at LSU coming up, and depending on his size and what the Dolphins representatives see in him, I don't think we can count him out of the race just yet.

Well everyone, I gave it my best effort to produce a

pertinent and interesting commentary for my first attempt. Please, post or PM me any feedback or questions that you have, I'd like to know what I can do in the future to improve upon my work. Hopefully you found this interesting, and I'll try and sneak in a few more works before the draft, provided I can find ample time between work, school, and graduation preparations. Thanks, hope you enjoyed it.

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