

COMMENTARY: Neal Driscoll

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[Predicting the Dolphins Record](#)

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11-5 in 2008. What will be the record in 2009?

It seems like the media is always against the Dolphins and this year is no different. Every magazine you read and every show you watch has already given the AFC East to the New England Patriots. The Dolphins have the hardest ranked schedule in the league according to the NFL but what does that mean? Does that automatically eliminate them from playoff contention? I recall the Pittsburgh Steelers having the hardest ranked schedule in the NFL last season and the last time I checked they were Super Bowl Champions. The “experts” who rank the schedule strength do so before the season, before the pre-season, so unless they have psychic abilities like Miss Cleo they are just guessing. On the schedule right now we play the Saints, Colts,

and Patriots twice but if Tom Brady , Peyton Manning, and Drew Brees tear their ACL than the strength of difficulty for that game decreases majorly. It doesn't even to best the teams' best player but we cannot ignore the fact that injuries happen every season and they are not the only thing that effect schedule strength. For example we play the Steelers Week 17 at home but by then the Steelers could have won their division and resting their players for the playoffs. My point is that no one is Nostradamus and you can only play the games week by week. I can say that the Dolphins are a much improved team this year than they were as the 2008 AFC East Division Champions.

How? Well let's start with the coaching staff. I think that Bills Parcels, Jeff Ireland, and Tony Sparano have had a chance to weed out the players who do not fit their system and have had the opportunity to bring "their guys" on board. Chad Pennington has had a full off season to build continuity with his receivers like Ted Ginn Jr. and Davone Bess. Ronnie Brown is a full season removed from his ACL injury. The Dolphins made some improvements in areas they seriously lacked last season such as improving their secondary with the additions of Gibril Wilson, Eric Green, Vontae Davis, Chris Clemons, and Sean Smith; they bolstered their line by adding Jake Grove to be that physical center that can handle dominant Nose Tackle's such as Vince Wilfork and Kris Jenkins. Justin Smiley, Donald Thomas, and Greg Camarillo all return from injury; in case you forgot let me remind you that all three are starters and Justin Smiley was playing at a very high level before his injury and our offense was never the same after he went down. Speaking of adding talent, Pat White might have been the most talented football player in the entire draft. Maybe he will not be an every down player just yet but the impact that this kid could make in the wild-cat and spread offenses is just scary. Not only does it add the passing element to the wild-cat offense but it also makes up more deficiencies that we have in our offense and will keep teams on their heels; Pat White is a very special player when the ball is in his hands. We drafted Patrick Turner in Round 3 who gives us that big, red-zone threat at receiver who is the perfect complement to our current receiving core. The reviews he has been getting through the OTA's are very promising. The biggest difference is the return of Jason Taylor to Miami. Maybe he didn't have a very productive season in Washington but he was playing out of position. Letting the Redskins rent JT for a year gave is the

draft pick to acquire Pat White and let's not forget that Jason Taylor is one of the best defensive players this decade and the best Miami Dolphins defender of all time. Our current coaching staff will know how insert him into the game and won't waste the opportunity to have JT and Porter on the field as the same time like our previous disaster of a coaching staff. Now take for granted that my opinions could change with one injury but let's assume everyone stays healthy which rarely happens. I think the Dolphins are a playoff team again this season and might even be capable of winning a playoff game. Let's take a look at the schedule and see how hard it really is...

The reality of the NFL is that no game is easy and it is apparent when a team can turn around from a 1-15 team to winning their division the next season. We open the season on the road traveling to Atlanta to play the Falcons who were equal to us in regards of having a major turn around last season. The Falcons have serious talent on the offensive side of the ball with Michael Turner, Roddy White, Tony Gonzalez and their young Quarterback Matt Ryan. They have a very solid offensive line but I think we match up very well against this team. I think Paul Pasqualoni, our defensive coordinator, will throw well developed blitz schemes at Matt Ryan which will force some bad throws. Will Allen will have a tough day with Roddy White but I think he can hold him in check. They will score on us but if we can take away Michael Turner on the ground and put the game in Matt Ryan's hand than I feel very good about our chances. The Falcons defensive is god awful in my eyes. Their secondary is full of very young players in Chris Houston, Chevis Jackson, Christopher Owens, Williams Moore, and Thomas DeCoud whom I think are all very raw and really struggle with speedy receivers. Davone Bess should be able to work the middle of the field and Chris Houston will get eaten alive by Ted Ginn Jr. The Falcons linebacker core is god awful as well. If Jake Long can handle John Abraham this game should be a win for the Dolphins. Ronnie Brown should see big-time holes and our offensive line should be able to handle the Falcons below average defensive line.

My Prediction: I think the Dolphins put up some serious points in this game and I think the Dolphins win 37-24. (Record: 1-0)

On Week 2 the Miami Dolphins make their return to prime time as the play

the Colts on Monday Night Football. The Colts are a team that has went through a lot of changes this off-season which included the retirement of head coach Tony Dungy and Offensive Coordinator Tom Moore. Both of these guys played essential roles to the success of the Indianapolis Colts. Marvin Harrison is no longer on the team and Joseph Addai was a major bust in 2008. Whenever Peyton Manning comes to town you are in for a rough night and even though we improved our secondary dramatically Peyton Manning will still get his. I don't know about this one because we always play the Colts tough and I think this is a game we can win. I know the Colts are among the class of the NFL but we have some solid matchups. The Colts have a solid secondary but their front seven needs some work. Dwight Freeney vs. Jake Long is a matchup that scares me because Freeney is an amazing speed rusher and Long struggles a little with speed. Ronnie Brown should have some holes and I could see Anthony Fasano having a nice game. I think the Dolphins crowd will be fired up as it's the home opener on Monday Night Football and the Dolphins faithful should come out in full strength. I think this one is a shoot out with the Dolphins pulling out an upset.

My prediction: Dolphins win 27-24 as Dan Carpenter hits a game winner. (Record: 2-0)

Then we hit the road as we travel to San Diego to play the Chargers in Week 3. The Chargers are due to beat us as we have beaten them the last two times we have played them. I see Phil Rivers making some plays and Tomlinson ripping some nice runs against us. I think the Chargers defense roughs up Pennington a little with Larry English, Shaun Phillips, and Shawn Merriman chasing after him.

My Prediction: The Chargers win 31-17. (Record: 2-1)

I will start by saying I think the Bills are a very bad football team. I understand they signed Terrell Owens but Trent Edwards took a major step back last season and to be honest

we dominated them in our season sweep of the Bills. Marshawn Lynch will be rusty after serving his suspension but I think our defense takes their Offense down and I think we make some big plays against their young defense. The Bills secondary needs work as Ted Ginn Jr. burnt them for 7 catches and 175 receiving yards on the teams' number one corner. Pennington will play a typical Chad game and complete 22 passes out of 29 attempts and throw a touchdown to Ginn and Fasano. Trent Edwards will be on his back a lot of I expect Joey Porter to get the hat trick with 3 sacks. The Bills have the worst Offensive Tackle Situation in the league and will have two rookies starting at guards.

My Prediction: Dolphins take this one fairly easily. The Bills will be 0-4 and Terrell Owens will start his crying ; Lee Evans will get upset that he is now the number two target and Trent Edwards will have T.O. in his ear demanding the ball. Dolphins win 27-10 (Record: 3-1)

We play another Monday Night game against the Jets in Week 5. Mark Sanchez will be starting by this time and I see the Jets as a team drafting in the top 10 next April. Why? I think Mark Sanchez was a product of being the Quarterback for the best college program in the nation surrounded by talent. He won't have that talent in New York. They let their best Wide Receiver go in La. Coles and didn't replace him. Thomas Jones had a career year last season and he will NOT duplicate those numbers. Calvin Pace will be fresh off a 4 game suspension. I see the Dolphins sweeping the Jets this season as Pennington will torch his old team for the whole world to watch. I see Chad throwing 43 TD passes and I see him catching one from Pat

White in some wild-cat trickery. I expect our secondary to shut down the Jets below average receiving core.

My Prediction: Dolphins dominate the Jets and take this one 31-17. (Record: 4-1)

The Dolphins have a bye in Week 6 and play the Saints out of the bye week and unfortunately I see this as a very tough game for the Dolphins. I could see this game turning out like the Arizona game in Week 2 last season. Drew Brees is among the top passers in the game and the Saints do indeed have some weapons. The Saints have a weak secondary and linebacker core however. I could see us scoring some points but as long as Drew Brees is healthy I am counting this one as loss.

My Prediction: Dolphins lose 10-31. (Record: 4-2)

Week 8 we travel to the scene where we won the division just one season ago and I see this game turning out the same way. I understand the Jets have spent some serious money the last couple of off-seasons but their level of talent is just not there in my opinion. Whether it is Mark Sanchez or Kellen Clemmons it really doesn't matter because Clemmons is nothing more than a journeymen and I think Sanchez is severely overrated. Thomas Jones had a career year last season but I do not think he repeats. I think he takes a step back. Their receiver core is god awful. Their offensive line is solid. Defensively I know they have Rex Ryan calling the shots but the truth is the Ravens defense was good before Ryan was the Defensive coordinator and it will be good after he leaves. The talent for this Jets defense is nowhere near the talent he had to work with in Baltimore. Simply put the Miami Dolphins are a much better football team

than the Jets but the Jets play this one tough at home.

My Prediction: Dolphins win 20-17. The score makes it look closer than the game really is. (Record: 5-2)

Week 9 has disaster written all over it. We play the Patriots at Gillette Stadium where we embarrassed them last season and I think the Patriots will have revenge on their mind. I look for them to use the Brady to Moss combination in an attempt to abuse our young secondary. I think the Dolphins will give the Patriots a much better fight than they think. It will be interesting to see how Tom Brady returns from injury and if we can go to Foxboro and win than we are really turning into something special. I don't think we are there just yet.

My Prediction: Patriots win 38-28. I think our team will put a valiant effort but at the end of the day the Patriots are at home and use this to their advantage. (Record: 5-3)

Week 10 against the Buccaneers at home could be the easiest game on our schedule. The Buccs are going through a major makeover and have rid of some of their mainstays. Their interior defense is just weak and I am shocked their ignored Defensive Tackle in the draft. I think Josh Freeman will be their starting Quarterback by this game and I think he is a major dud. I saw some "experts" compared his game to Flacco but I truly believe he should have gone back to Kansas State for his senior season. He has a live arm but is too raw to make an impact just yet. Derrick Ward was a major off-season signing for them but let's see how he does outside of New York. This is a game where Ted Ginn Jr. can make a serious impact. I think the Dolphins are more physical, more talented, and better coached

and it will show in a big way.

My Prediction: Dolphins win 23-6. Raheem Morris has his work cut out for him in Tampa. (Record: 6-3)

Thursday Night Prime Time game on NFL network against the Carolina Panthers in Week 11 is the Dolphins third Prime-Time game of the season. In the past we have had good luck against the Panthers. I remember Ronnie Brown's rookie season when he busted a 40 plus yarder to seal the deal. That game was the game when I knew Sam Madison was done in Miami as Steve Smith made him look like Jamar Fletcher. The Panthers have the best offensive line in the league for my money and I think DeAngelo Williams and Jonathan Stewart will have some nice holes to frolic through. Jake Delhomme doesn't scare me at all but Steve Smith sure does; so does Julius Peppers. Vernon Carey will have his hands full with Julius.

My Prediction: Panthers win this won 27-16. (Record: 6-4)

Week 12 has us traveling to Buffalo to play the Buffalo Bills and by this point Terrell Owens has turned this locker room upside down. I think there is some offensive talent on this roster with Lee Evans, Marshawn Lynch, and Terrell Owens but letting Jason Peters go is going to be a major mistake for this team. Their Left Tackle is in for a long season which in turn indicates that Trent Edwards might spend more time on his back than Jenna Jameson. Their defense doesn't scare me either. Ted Ginn Jr. touched their secondary last season. Their linebacker core is average and Aaron Maybin has bust written all over him. We proved we can score on them and we proved their Offensive Line couldn't block Joey Porter who accounted for 4

sacks in two games versus the bills last season. With the an improved pass rush in Miami and a weaker offensive line in Buffalo I think Miami fans should get the brooks ready.

My Prediction: 24-21.... Dolphins WIN! (Record: 7-4)

Last year the Dolphins destroyed the Patriots in Foxboro but the Patriots came back for revenge beating the Dolphins in Miami. This game was close for three and a half quarters but in true Bill Belichick style the Patriots ran up the score in the 4th quarter. Well the I have Patriots got avenging their home defeat from a season ago and beating the Dolphins in Week 9 and in turn I have the Dolphins avenging their home defeat against the Patriots and winning here in Week 13. I think the crowd is going to be fired up for this one and I think this is going to be one of those games that Chad Pennington shows how special of a player he truly is. I think the Patriots young secondary will struggle with our young receiver core but by this point Teddy Ginn, Greg Camarillo, Davone Bess, and Patrick Turner should gel into a dangerous group. I guess I am not ready to give the Lombardi trophy to the Patriots just because Tom Brady is back. I think that their defense is mediocre and their offensive line is solid but not spectacular. The way to beat the Patriots is pressuring Tom Brady which the Giants did just two seasons ago.

My Prediction: Dolphins win 31-28. (Record: 8-4)

The next stop on our schedule is Jacksonville to play the Jaguars. I do not think this game will be an absolute cake-walk but I can say that I feel David Garrard is a bad Quarterback. Maurice Jones-Drew does scare me a bit but their Receivers

certainly don't. Their defense isn't the powerhouse it once was as John Henderson's play has declined severely since the departure of Marcus Stroud. I think we will have success running the ball and throwing against the Jaguars. I think this is an absolute ugly game which we grew a custom to last season.

My Prediction: Dolphins win 13-10. (Record: 9-4)

We take a trip to Tennessee in Week 15 to play the Titans which should be a very interesting game. I do not know why but for some reason Kerry Collins doesn't scare me. We always play well against Collins and I see him as a statue for our defense to get after. Their Wide Receivers are mediocre at best so I am not worried about their air attack what so ever but Chris Johnson does scare me. I saw him gash a very good Ravens defense in the playoffs last season and had he not gotten injured in that game than I think we would have saw the Steelers host the Titans in the AFC Championship. There defense is still very good but you cannot make up for a loss of Albert Haynesworth. Haynesworth was without question the best player on their team and they did not draft or sign anyone who can come near replacing Fat Albert. I think this game is severely ugly but think our boys match up well with this team. Courtland Finnegan is a shut down corner but Nick Harper certainly is not.

My Prediction: Dolphins Win 16-10 (Record: 10-4)

The Texans game is the game I want more than any game on the schedule. We always seem to be beating them for three and a half Quarters but lose to them in the end. Last years game left a very sour taste in my mouth and it's hard to imagine that

winning that game would have put us at 12-4 on the season. Andre Johnson is an absolute freak and I wish he was a Dolphin. We have no one who can cover him and if we did he would still catch the ball BUT I think we get our revenge. Their offensive line is a work in progress and Matt Schaub does NOT impress me. Steve Slaton had a great rookie season but I don't like him now that the NFL can study him. Their defense is impressive as Mario Williams is among the best in the league. Their secondary is like paper and we will throw all over them. Dolphins win this game clinching a playoff spot.

My Prediction: Dolphins Win (24-20)

We are not better than the Steelers and if the Steelers have something to play for they are a better team. Big Ben continues to impress me and I think he is among the elite level of players in the league. Their defense is the best in the league and Chad Penning would struggle with Woodley and Harrison breathing down his neck. I hope we do not see them in the playoffs.

My Prediction: Steelers Win 24-10. (Record: 11-5)

Is 11-5 good enough to get us another division title? What do you think? I know some will say I am a homer but we did it last year with a far less talented team. We may lack that superstar on our team but players like Chad Pennington, Ronnie Brown, Jason Taylor, Joey Porter, and Jake Long are among their best at their positions.. this team is loaded with young talent in players like Pat White, Chad Henne, Ted Ginn, Davone Bess, Greg Camarillo, Patrick Turner, Anthony Fasano, Donald Thomas, Vernon Carey, Phillip Merling, Kendall Langford, Vontae Davis, and Sean Smith. I will never doubt this team

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again after the joy they brought me last season. This team has heart and coaching which is something we haven't seen in over a decade. This is not your same old Miami Dolphin team that lacks the hunger and desire that it takes to be great. under Tony Sparano GREAT things will happen.

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