

THOUGHTS ON THE DENVER VICTORY

By Chris Kouffman (CKParrothead)



□□ *Joey Porter and the Dolphin Defense have been fired up and making plays*

First off, the team really does need to be congratulated on executing their second two-game win streak of the season.

Win Streaks. Twice this season the Dolphins have shown that they can come off the emotional high of a big victory against a top division opponent, and still come back the next game and handle business against good teams. Credit that straight to the man, Tony Sparano, who sets the tone for this team's practice habits and game demeanor.

Game ball goes to...Andre Goodman. I know, you're going to want to give the ball to like a Greg Camarillo or certainly a Chad Pennington, but the bottom line is defense won this game, and while I would like to give the game ball to Jason Ferguson for the role he took in stopping the run, I felt like the "sombrero" as they called it was really on Andre Goodman, who ended up singled up on Brandon Marshall an alarming number of times, and played cornerback like a man with his hair on fire. He was in the hip pocket constantly, he hit receivers as the ball got there, he swatted the balls away, he was really tested the whole game and came through in spades. The truth is that since Goodman had that excused absence from practice for a personal emergency...Goodman has played relatively lights out. He played extremely well a week ago against Buffalo, and now he had the best game I've probably ever seen him have. I don't know what that situation was, when Sparano explained it to the press it sounded very personal and he sounded very sympathetic, as if it was a problem in his family or something like that. Whatever it was, it's got to be possible that Goodman is drawing strength from it.

Jason Allen. Right away we have Jason Allen making the same kind of big plays he made a year ago when our coaching staff finally wised up and put him out there. But, we also saw why I kept trying to tell people to restrain their desire to see Jason Allen matched up on someone like Brandon Marshall all game long. When Allen finally did get matched up on Marshall, Cutler went to him right away and Marshall started to get going. Then on that deep play, let's face it...Allen got

lucky that the refs called that offensive pass interference. It isn't that I feel the call was complete BS, it was just sort of borderline and I've seen it not get called. Now imagine if JA had the unfortunate duty of getting matched on a WR of that caliber an entire game. Marshall would have been thrown the ball 20 times. JA did really well on James Hardy, a rookie WR that was probably Buffalo's 3rd or 4th best guy. You don't just throw him from junior varsity high school into the Pro Bowl all the sudden and expect him to come out on top. As much as patience is not the "in" thing for Jason Allen because this is his third year, fact of the matter is his being constantly moved back and forth HAS set him back...so we're much better off letting him go from covering James Hardy one week to Brandon Stokley the next week.

Yeremiah Bell. There's a reason Yeremiah Bell has only one career interception, it's sad to admit. I am getting a little tired of his total inability to put his mitts on a ball and pull it down. The guy could give Will Allen lessons on failing to pull down an errant pass, and that says a lot. We clearly need another playmaker in the secondary not named Will Allen or Yeremiah Bell. I'm all for giving Bell an extension and I think he's a good player, but he'll never be a Pro Bowl caliber player until he can learn to pull down the ball.

Ryan Clady. He did ok today, but I've seen people getting a little carried away with how he did against Joey Porter. What I saw was that Porter was putting veteran moves on him and affecting Jay Cutler in the pocket on a regular basis. Cutler is a guy that is going to get rid of the ball before he takes a sack, and is going to run away from pressure. He's got that presence, he'd only taken 5 sacks before tonight. However, getting pressure on him and hitting him still absolutely has an effect on his play level and I saw Porter get pressure on Jay Cutler today. I saw him cause Cutler to move up in the pocket, be uncomfortable, and you know what? Cutler throws 3 picks today. That's not a coincidence. In fact, that final pick was directly attributable to Joey Porter beating Ryan Clady, forcing Jay Cutler to step up in the pocket and try and make some ridiculous throw to a well covered Stokley as he's stepping to the side, picked off by Culver. Stuff like that is on Ryan Clady. Too much emphasis is placed on the actual sack. Affecting the quarterback has a lot more to it than just the sack.

Pressure. I will tell you, yes, there were moments when Miami's offensive line allowed pressure, or sacks. But, at times, I was flat out alarmed at how much TIME Pennington had to sit around and figure out what to do with the football. This is not your Dave Wannstedt offense, where we always had to deal with the Wade

Smiths and Spencer Folaus at left tackle, throwing the ball on constant rhythmic three step drops and doing all kinds of things to try and soften the pass rush. This is an offense where they like to drop Pennington back, and have him sit there and try and find someone while the offensive line keeps the defensive line off his back. They don't work too many moving pockets, max protects, bootlegs, etc. This is what I was trying to point out to people at the beginning of the year when everyone seemed to want to pick on Miami's offensive line and say they were struggling or that Jake Long was struggling. You have to understand what these guys are being asked to do. They are calling this offense almost as if they have Kansas City's infamous OL from their heyday about 4 years ago. Chad Pennington's yards per completion have been on the decline every year he's been a starter, from 11.4 to 11, down to 10 and even at a paltry 9.7 his last year in New York. That has JUMPED back up to 12.2, the highest it's ever been in his career. Why do you suppose that is? I am telling you right now it's because on a pure talent basis this might be the best offensive line that he has ever had. They might not have perfect consistency yet, but they're working toward it.

Switcharoo. Did anyone else notice that in a lot of third downs and second downs they switched out Ikechuku Ndukwe in favor of Evan Mathis? Personally, I didn't like it. On the play where they picked on Carey for getting knocked flat on his butt by Ebenezer Ekuban, that thing I thought about that play was that Mathis probably should have picked up Ekuban as he stunted over right guard. He didn't, and it resulted in a sack. Then on another play, Mathis was clearly just beaten outright for a big pressure on Pennington. I don't know if I'm a huge fan of that switching, but it's possible they did it because of the thin air. Sparano raised the concern before the game that the one area of the team that could get hurt by the thin air, because they are not actively rotated, is the offensive line. Perhaps he thought switching Evan and Ndukwe would help mitigate it.

Time of Possession. Say what you want about the overall offense's effectiveness in terms of putting points on the board (they put up 19, against what was supposed to be a "bad" defense)...but don't say they didn't do their job overall. This was a lot like the San Diego game, when I felt that the offense's effect on the game went WAY beyond just the total number of points they put on the board. Miami possessed the ball 61 percent of the time. That's amazing. Even more amazing is that they (once again) executed a KILLER time possessing drive to ice the game. They did this against San Diego, when they ran out the final 6 minutes of the game preventing a comeback. They did it against Buffalo, after the safety put them up 22-16 (one score away), as they ran out a good 4 minutes and kicked

a field goal that put the Bills two scores away from a comeback with about 3:30 remaining. Heck, I felt like they did it against Houston, when they ran out over 4 minutes en route to a go-ahead touchdown, leaving the Texans offense only a minute and a half to get a touchdown or they lose the game. The offense can't help it if the defense decided to collapse on that one. That's three of the last four games where the offense has executed in the fourth quarter, with the game on the line, running out the clock and scoring necessary points. They didn't really have that kind of opportunity against the Ravens, because the Ravens ran out to too much of a lead.

Henne who? Chad Pennington is playing better football than any quarterback in Miami since well BEFORE Dan Marino retired. Yes, I mean that. At this point, we've got to start wondering about Henne's immediate future, too...because Pennington only just turned 32 years old and will only be 33 next season. I'm not sure age is going to be a factor for him for another two years, and right now he's playing every bit as well as Drew Brees started playing for New Orleans when we made probably the biggest mistake in franchise history passing on Brees in favor of Culpepper. Before I had sort of felt some of his QB rating was a little inflated, that he's been very good but not necessarily 100+ QB rating good. Today was the first time he walked out of a game with what the numbers say was a bad day, with a 69 rating...yet he did a lot better than the rating says.

Tentative Ronnie. I wonder if Ronnie Brown tweaked something today. That's what I kept thinking as I watched him run in the second half and toward the end of the first half. He looked more tentative than I've seen him in quite a while. No, he's not back in danger of being a bust, but something clearly rattled him and it was tough to see what it might have been.

Greg Camarillo. At some point we're going to have to start giving this WRs unit more credit. Camarillo is proving to be every bit the player Wes Welker was for us, maybe even better. He's on pace for 86 catches and 966 yards. It ain't top tier, but it's clearly something...especially in an offense that likes to spread the ball around as much as Miami does. It seems like every week the offense asks another person to step up, be it Ronnie (New England, San Diego), Patrick Cobbs (Houston), David Martin (Baltimore), Ted Ginn (Buffalo) or Greg Camarillo (Denver). Camarillo makes physical catches, and really he runs extremely crisp routes. That 1st & 10 throw on the final touchdown drive of the game, where Dierdorf couldn't get over Henning's aggressive play calling...that was an extraordinary job of putting the cornerback off balance with your body position and

hips, on the hitch.

Schedule Musings. We have five games coming up against opponents that are a total of 9-31 (.225). On top of that we have two games against teams that they have already beaten once (Pats and Bills). The Pats game is at home. Take care of business against the bad teams, and you waltz into a 9-7 record. Do that, and steal one against a division rival, and your 10-6 record should be good enough for the playoffs. I'm just saying, just saying. This is a unique experience. I can't remember the last time I looked at the second half of a Miami schedule and not seen any single game that the Dolphins "should" lose. They "should" have lost to San Diego and Denver, IMO...they didn't. But then again, they "should" have beaten Houston and Baltimore, right? Maybe not so. Baltimore is now 5-3 with the best D in the league, coming off a horrible loss to the Colts where the D was looking for payback. The Texans are 3-5 with a couple of close, stolen losses, and their win against Miami kicked off a 3-game win streak. We lost to the Jets, who are now 5-3. We lost to the Cardinals, who are now 5-3 and running away with the NFC West. The combined record of the teams we've lost to is now 18-14 (.563). The combined record of the teams we've beaten is now 17-15 (.531). The combined record of our remaining opponents is 24-40 (.375). So, maybe there isn't as much to this theory that Miami plays down to its bad opponents and up to its good ones. It's something to think about, because I think the biggest fear out there has to be Miami losing to the host of teams that are supposed to be "bad". Maybe that's not as much of a concern as originally thought.

Draft Order. We'd better start changing our mindset on the draft order. We'd been focusing on having a top ten pick. As of this moment, we could be picking anywhere between #12 and #17, depending on the tiebreaks and whatnot. With the combined record of the 8 opponents we've played being 35-29 (.547) and the combined record of our 8 remaining opponents being 24-40 (.375), a reasonable person would conclude that our draft standing is much more likely to sink than rise.

Clint Sintim. I've gone on record with ten players I think Miami could look at in this next draft. I should have included Clint Sintim on that list, but when I made the list I believe we were like 2-4 and looking at a #6 overall pick. With how the picture looks right now, Sintim has to be heavily involved in the picture. The Groh-Parcells connection is strong and explicit. Parcells very nearly hijacked the 2008 #1 overall pick to get Chris Long, by imposing an early hard deadline by which Ireland and Sparano could get their boy Jake Long signed otherwise they switch to his boy

Chris Long. Clint Sintim was a friend of Chris Long's and Long believes he is more talented. He's the leader on a defense that is playing very well after having a pair of crappy performances at the beginning of the year as they tried to get use to the absences of Chris Long and Jeffrey Fitzgerald. Sintim is no slouch, he leads the ACC in sacks with something like 10 and I believe he's got like 15 or 17 TFLs. The beauty about him is that he already plays the position that Miami would ask him to play, which is strong side outside linebacker. He is a senior. He has a great couple of first steps that give him the ability to burst around the edge, but he also has good hands an array of pass rush moves. He can rush with his hand on the ground or from an up position. He can fight through TE and RB blocks, double teams, and he's got genuine strength at the point of attack in sealing the edge. He appears pretty chiseled to me. When you take a Vernon Gholston, you worry that the guy will be useless for a couple of years until he finally "gets it". Clint Sintim already has the mental game down in the position he'll play in the pros. His transition should be minimal, unlike a Gholston...or even a Greg Hardy, Michael Johnson, Brian Orakpo or George Selvie. It should be apparent that Miami needs another pass rushing pressence aside from Joey Porter. Sintim could replace Charlie Anderson in 4-man DLs, and then replace Matt Roth in 3-4 alignments, and he's already use to being an every down player for the Cavaliers. As things stand, with Miami looking at a mid first round pick...Sintim seems perfect. You can kiss guys like Michael Crabtree and Malcolm Jenkins GOODBYE. I doubt they'd get a crack at Terrance Cody if he came out. Not quite sure yet where Johnson, Hardy, Selvie and Orakpo will grade...but Sintim has to appear tempting even next to those guys. Sen'Derrick Marks and Demarcus Granger probably have to be the top DT targets for now, until Terrance Cody recants on his vow to go back to school. Peria Jerry might get a shout. For now though, I think the signs have to point to Sintim until we get a better and clearer vision of how things will shake out from a draft ordering and from a draft stock perspective. Thats about it.

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Chris is a long time member and contributor to FinHeaven and is one of the webs

leading authority on the team and the NFL Draft.

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