

Bring on battle of unbeaten

by Jerry Magee

Guaranteed to happen: Some computer geek will get one of those things humming and will have it project how a game between the unbeaten 1972 Miami Dolphins and the current New England Patriots, not yet all-victorious but just wait awhile, would come out.

Computer skills, I must admit, are a mystery to me, but I do have my memory. I saw a good bit of those Dolphins. The Patriots would outscore them, I have to say, which I do reluctantly because I am not an admirer of Bill Belichick, the person. Of Belichick, the coach, certainly.

Improved nutrition and training methods have made football players bigger and faster than they were 35 years ago. Opposing these Patriots, the '72 Dolphins would be outsized and outsped, but not, I want to say, in the degree that those who do not possess the perspective of history would suspect.

To support this notion, I would invite anyone believing that the '72 Dolphins would be roundly outscored by Belichick's athletes to walk through the corridors of football's Hall of Fame. Cast in bronze in the Canton, Ohio, shrine are the busts of six Dolphins who went through a 14-0 regular season and went on to outscore the Washington Redskins 14-7 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in Super Bowl VII.

How many of the current Patriots, do you suppose, are going to be admitted into the hall? Quarterback Tom Brady, without question. Wide receiver Randy Moss, very likely. Linebacker Junior Seau, again very likely, but Seau's most productive period was his time with the Chargers. He is a good deal less visible as a member of the Patriots.

Other than those three, I haven't observed any of the Patriots doing things that one day would place them with the game's gods. Belichick's team is made up in large part of role players that the coach has ingeniously fitted into his array. For talent, Belichick's side does not compare with Don Shula's '72 squad.

Shula's quarterback, Bob Griese, is in the hall, although I sometimes have wondered what he did to get there. When I was watching him, he almost always was handing off. In Super Bowl VII, to make this point, he aimed only 11 passes, completing eight. Two of Griese's offensive linemen, right guard Larry Little and center Jim Langer, have been enshrined and the argument can be made that a third, left guard Bob Kuechenberg, should be. Kuechenberg may yet arrive in Canton; this year he is among 26 semifinalists eligible for election.

Griese could throw to Paul Warfield, one of the most distinguished receivers of his time. Warfield eight times was a Pro Bowler. In his career, he caught for 8,565 yards and scored 85 touchdowns. He is a Hall of Famer, as is running back Larry Csonka, a 235-pounder who finished with a career total of 8,081 yards

rushing and 68 touchdowns. Csonka was the MVP of Super Bowl VII.

Defensively, the '72 Dolphins were named as "the no-names." It was a misnomer. After the team had bested the Redskins in Super Bowl VII, defensive tackle Manny Fernandez said this:

"We should have whipped them by more than 30-0. We call ourselves 'the no-names,' but I don't think there's a defense in the league with as many good guys at their positions."

Shula's side included middle linebacker Nick Buoniconti, who is in the Hall of Fame. It also had two exceptional safeties, Dick Anderson and Jake Scott.

The current Patriots running away from this team? I think not. Professional football, I would argue, was superior in 1972 to what it is now. It was not as diverse in its schemes as it is at the moment, but in '72 players were much more apt to hang around a team for years than they are in this day and age of free agency.

Continuity is an import element in football. Players who line up shoulder to shoulder for an extended period gain a sense, one with the other, of what the fellow next to them is doing.

Where the Patriots of 2007 would have an advantage over the 1972 Dolphins would be in Brady's excellence. Griese was an orchestrator. Brady is a good deal more. He might be the best ever.

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