

The Blame Game (The NFL on REO)

Titans Talk



Sunday's game in Miami was brutal to watch. The Titans were never able to find any offensive rhythm under backup QB, Matt Cassel. It is no surprise, that after a 16-10 loss to a painfully bad Miami Dolphins' team, many people in the Titans' organization are getting blamed. And there is plenty of well-deserved blame to go around. Unfortunately, most of the local writers, radio talkers, and fans are pointing their fingers in the wrong direction. That is where I come in. Consider this the official Blame Index for the debacle in South Florida.

Officials: 50% of the blame.

I am not a "blame the refs" kind of guy. I will complain about the refs. I will criticize the refs. I will yell at the refs. But in almost every game, the refs do not ultimately decide the outcome. There are always plays that can be made to overcome bad officiating. But what we witnessed in Miami was so awful and so game-changing, that it has to be number one on this list. There were multiple examples of incompetence throughout the game, but the sequence late in the 1st quarter

proved to be the most damaging so we will focus on that.

With less than a minute left in the 1st quarter, down 0-3, Matt Cassel did something no one watching that game thought he could do: He completed a pass more than 10 yards down the field. In fact, he threw a decent ball down the field to Delanie Walker for a 59-yard touchdown. Titans' fans celebrated. Then we saw the flag. As all fans of the Tennessee Titans know, you don't cheer for the team until you are completely sure there is no flag on the field. (On a personal note, my oldest son will wait a minute or two before he celebrates because he is convinced that the refs will never allow anything good to happen to the Titans. Thanks for killing my son's spirit NFL.) We waited for the call from the officials...and were rewarded with one of the most spectacularly wrong-headed penalties in the history of the game. Pass interference on Jonnu Smith, rookie Tight End of the Titans. "That doesn't seem like that bad of a call," you say. "If he interfered with the defender, perhaps that is how Walker got open." If only it were that simple. No, Smith and his defender (the defender who initiated contact by the way) were TWENTY yards away from the catch. (Watch the play [here](#).) There was less contact, less hand-checking than in virtually every pass play in every game in the NFL this season. That's only a slight exaggeration. It was minor contact, by both players, that literally had nothing to do with anything that happened on that touchdown pass and catch. But the officials think that everyone watches NFL games to see them throw flags and awkwardly talk to the crowd so...

It was a bad call. But it was a back-breaking call for the Titans in this game because that one play could have been the very play that allowed them to get the offense on track. I'll explain.

Up until that point in the game, and throughout the rest of the game, the Titans struggled to do much on offense. With Cassel as your QB, your options are limited at best. The Miami

defense did not respect the Titans' passing game and with good reason. So, they were stacking the box, daring the Titans to throw. If that TD to Walker stands, the entire defensive strategy changes for the Dolphins. Suddenly, they now know the Titans can throw the ball over the top. Putting eight or nine guys in the box is no longer an option on every play. That opens up the running game, which is exactly what the Titans wanted. If the TD stands, the Titans take a 7-3 lead and start to control the game on the ground. This serves two goals: Wear down Miami and keep your defense fresh. But the refs decided that an obvious no-call should take away the biggest play of the day for either team.

Two plays later, Cassel drops back and gets hit while he is throwing the ball. The ball travels a good 10-15 feet forwards in the air. Of the 22 players on the field, all but one stop playing. The pass is clearly incomplete. A lone Dolphin runs and picks up the ball and runs it to the end zone. Most of the refs have stopped officiating. One ref half-heartedly follows the Dolphin player but stops before he gets to the end zone. Dolphins' players from the sideline make their way onto the field while the ball is still being carried to the end zone. The refs huddle for two minutes and when it is all said and done, they announce that they ruled the ball a fumble and then a touchdown for Miami. (You can watch the play [here](#).)

There were probably 20 things wrong in how the officials handled that call. I don't really want to waste anyone's time going through all of them. I'll keep it simple by saying the refs were just as confused as the players and the fans and they really had no idea what happened in the play and they used the replay system to bail them out. It's the most cowardly and incompetent form of officiating out there and more and more NFL referees are doing it. They are relying more on the cameras than their own abilities and it is hurting the game.

Regardless of the details, this two-play sequence took 7

points off the board for the Titans and put 7 points on the board for the Dolphins. Without Marcus Mariota, the Titans just don't have enough offense to overcome that kind of scoring swing.

Coaches: 25% of the blame.

They ran the ball 18 times on Sunday. They threw the ball 32 times with a back-up QB. That's all you need to know about how the coaches did on Sunday. Unacceptable.

Matt Cassel: 10% of the blame.

I have heard way too many people put all the blame on Cassel. That's insane. He played poorly. But he did enough (before the refs pratfalled their way into the game) to win. IF the Walker TD stands, he ends up with 200 yards passing, 69% completion percentage, and 2 touchdowns. Not a bad day for a second string QB. But, he does deserve a little blame because he showed no pocket awareness, taking way too many sacks, and just didn't have the ability to make the big pass when his team needed him to in the 2nd half.

Offensive Line: 10% of the blame.

I realize they lost Taylor Lewan for the majority of the game and they were trying to protect a statue for QB, but this unit has to play better. If they don't get it figured out, this season will be a major disappointment and will set the Titans back a year in the development.

Roger Goodell: 10% of the blame.

Because in any conversation, Goodell deserves criticism.

Cracks in the Hull: Leadership

A few weeks ago I wrote about some things the NFL needs to do to improve its image. I highlighted a few areas, one of which was leadership. You can read that article [here](#). I've covered a [few of the issues](#) in the intervening weeks and would like to spend a little time on the leadership problem today.

Roger Goodell has finally issued a statement sort of saying that the players should stand for the National Anthem. Too little and too late. If Goodell was even average at his job, this is an issue he would have handled a long time ago. Instead, he tried to play politician for too long and it has cost the league dearly.

He needs to go. Now. I've been saying it for years. The decisions he has made as Commissioner will eventually ruin the league. We are starting to see the first signs of that. If the NFL wants to survive and thrive 20 years from now, they have to get rid of Goodell as soon as possible.