

REMEMBERING SHULA



BOB MACK/SUN SENTINEL

Dolphins coach Don Shula talks over play selection with Dan Marino after an incomplete pass against the Bills on Sept. 10, 1989. Marino had two interceptions in a 27-24 loss.

REACTION

A bond built over decades

What Marino, other Dolphins greats are saying about Shula

BY OMAR KELLY

Don Shula coached legendary Miami Dolphins players at different stages of their careers, but the universal theme was that the NFL's winningest coach had a lasting impact on their lives — and got them to do more with their ability than they could have done on their own.

"He lives in every one of our dreams, and sometimes nightmares, to this day," former linebacker John Offerdahl said of Shula, who died Monday morning at 90.

Hall of Fame quarterback Dan Marino, whom Shula selected in the first round of the 1983 NFL draft, said his former coach embodied the "definition of greatness."

"You brought that winning attitude with you every day and made everyone around you better. Thank you for always believing in me," Marino wrote on his Twitter account. "You made me a better player and person. My thoughts and prayers are with the entire Shula family. Love you Coach!"

Fellow Hall of Fame quarterback Bob Griese said Shula started out as his coach but quickly became his mentor throughout the years they spent together as South Florida icons.

"Whether it was his force of will, his organization, his work ethic, sense of integrity or his total focus on winning, he molded us into champions," said Griese, who quarterbacked Shula's two Super Bowl-winning teams. "And the entire time he was doing that he served as a role model for all that was right in sports."

"We lost someone who cannot be replaced, who cannot be equaled and who personified everything that is right, not only about our sport but about the way we all should conduct ourselves."

Larry Csonka felt he was prepared

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— Bob Griese

for Shula's passing, but when his wife called him with the tragic news Monday morning it stirred emotions in Csonka he never knew existed.

"I never really knew until that moment how close that rascal had gotten to me," Csonka said. "I felt a terrible loss, like someone very close to me and my family had passed. Coach Shula was such a rock, so exact in his feelings ... You drew off his strength."

The lessons Shula taught carried on for years after their playing days ended.

Former Dolphins offensive lineman Richmond Webb said win or lose, Shula was always consistent.

"I remember weigh-in day — you didn't want to be overweight because not only did he say your name, but he'd announce how many pounds you were overweight," Webb said. "Not only did Coach Shula know, but everybody on the team knew. You wanted to do whatever possible to not have your name called out in those meetings."



Shula had a reputation for running grueling camps, but former receiver Nat Moore pointed out he never put the team through anything he wasn't willing to experience — if not endure — himself.

"He ran all the gassers [sprints] and calisthenics along with us, and before long we saw that everything he was doing made us all better players," former tailback Mercury Morris said. "I started out being mad at him, but it wasn't long before I became proud to be on his team."

The same could be said about Shula's volunteer work and how he and the team impacted the local community.

"A lot of men come here to play for the Miami Dolphins," Moore said. "Under Coach Shula, most of them never left."

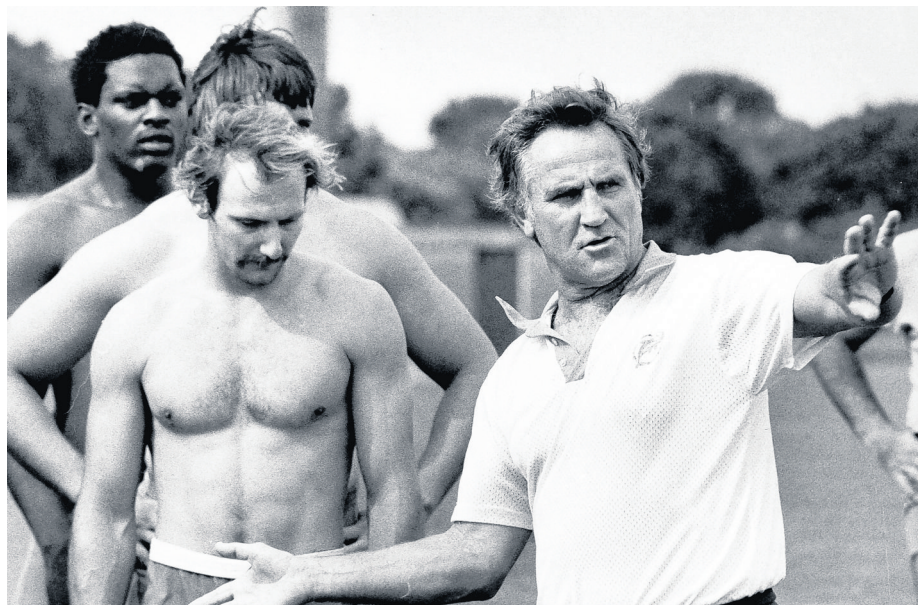
"That was because he always had us out in the community. He always had us be a part of South Florida."

Most of the players who played for Shula considered themselves fortunate.

"He symbolized not only perfection,

"He was willing to make the sacrifices and paid the price to win, and [he] took you along with him."

— Larry Csonka



RICH MAHAN/SUN SENTINEL

Dolphins head coach Don Shula explains to rookies the 12-minute run in April 1982.

but what the pursuit of perfection looks like — looking steadfastly forward to a victorious goal with hard work, an integrated team and a singular purpose," Offerdahl said. "I think for South Florida, it was what we all needed then and still to this day: a belief that in life, as in football, we can do and be better as we strive to reach a victorious goal."



Defensive tackle Bob Baumhower, who played 10 seasons with the Dolphins under Shula, grew up in Palm Beach Gardens. So when the former Alabama star was selected by Miami in the second round of the 1977 draft, Shula made his childhood dream come true.

"He moved me to a position I never wanted to play [nose tackle], and that led to my career being as long as it was," said Baumhower, who was named to five Pro Bowls and is in the Dolphins Ring of Honor. "Because he drafted me, I met my wife, had my children and even went into the restaurant business. He was such an important figure in my life. He will be remembered forever."

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When he was put in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, former Dolphins offensive guard Larry Little asked Shula to give the introductory speech.

"Coach Shula was a man of character, honesty and integrity, and as I quickly found out he let everyone know exactly how he felt," Little said.

"The very first time I met him was at his first press conference in Miami after becoming our head coach. I went up to him to introduce myself and said, 'Coach, I'm Larry Little and I'm your right guard.' He looked at me and asked me how much I weighed. When I told him I weighed 285 pounds, he shook his head and walked off."

"It wasn't long before I got a letter from him telling me to report at 265. I had to lose 20 pounds for that man. But he was right — my career took off after that happened."

Csonka said the greatest impact Shula left was the integrity that he had for the sport he loved.

"He was willing to make the sacrifices and paid the price to win, and [he] took you along with him," Csonka said. "He was driven, and his legacy comes down to the fact he paid the cost to be the winningest coach in the league."

"He symbolized not only perfection, but what the pursuit of perfection looks like."

— John Offerdahl