

PERSPECTIVES - CHAD PENNINGTON

Chad Pennington perfects the art of grace under pressure. But can he take the Dolphins to another winning season?

By Aimee Dingwell; Photography by Dania Graibe



Chad Pennington has the knack to walk into a room and set anyone at ease, even during his own harried photo shoot with a 5-year-old in tow. Maybe it's his effortless gait or his knowing, wide smile. Maybe it's his slow, Southern drawl as he handles introductions with what has become his trademark humility. Whatever it is, it's a clue into the power and effect he has on his team, both on and off the field.

About to enter his 10th year in the National Football League, the Miami Dolphins quarterback has seen much. He possesses a comfort that comes from knowing who he is and who he is not, having walked through fire and achieved success on his own terms. After all, he has been named the NFL's Comeback Player of the Year twice—most recently last year. Admittedly content to not to win this award again, Chad has come back from injury and slight. "In 2007, when I lost my starting job, I didn't want to play anymore. I felt like it was a grind. Football

wasn't fun anymore. So I really took some time and reprioritized my life."

While second chances never come free, there seems to be a redemptive quality to this comeback. Here in the land of sunbathers and snowbirds, Chad is miles away from that cold fear creeping back in. "I enjoy playing now more than ever. Coming to play here in South Florida has been an oasis for me. A new place, a new start. And playing with an organization that is hungry to win and fans that are hungry for a winner has been great," he says.

Some may say the honeymoon is over, and Chad acknowledges that the test of true fan support will come with this new season. But it doesn't stop him from reaching his audience. A self-professed people pleaser, Chad confesses he enjoys talking to fans on the street in the off-season.

"They say to me, 'I really appreciate what you do.' That is a refreshing change to the media," which he says is often subjective. "I think it can be hard for fans to tell the difference between what is fact and what is not."

But no one can deny Chad's exacting arm. In addition to having the most accurate arm in NFL history, with a 66% pass completion rate, last season Chad made NFL history by taking a team with the worst season record in 2007 to winning the American Football Conference East division title in 2008. And in less than one season, Chad has earned the trust and respect of his teammates through composed, calculated leadership. But don't mistake his calmness for weakness or a lack of drive.

"Although I may be calm on the outside, I am like a tornado on the inside, with emotions and feelings that are going through my mind... nervous energy. So you have to be able to harness that in and then show a calming effect, because the other guys will be looking at you in the huddle for leadership and direction. To me, it's part of being a veteran leader and showing the young guys what it's all about."