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Don Shula talks about Parcels, the near-perfect Patriots and Texas food

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Don Shula never coached in Texas, but he knows a thing or two about what football is like in the Lone Star State.

Every year he has lunch in the off-season with Texas Longhorns coach Mack Brown in North Carolina, where Brown coached, at UNC. The two coaches are joined by Shula's good friend and former player Bob Griese and about eight other friends.

"Mack is a really great guy," Shula said. "He runs that [team] with a lot of class, and really does a great job. That Vince Young was fun to watch."

Shula, perhaps best known for leading the 1972 Miami Dolphins to the NFL's only perfect season, was in Fort Worth for Wednesday night's opening of his new restaurant, Shula's 347. The restaurant, named for his record-holding number of career NFL wins, is in the lobby area of the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Fort Worth and is the latest in a chain of his steakhouses that started in 1989.

Though the Hall of Fame coach became a restaurateur before he retired in 1995, he admits he'd rather talk about football than food.

In fact, it took one of those visits to North Carolina for Shula to be introduced to a delicacy in these parts -- Texas toast.

"They asked me, 'Do you want some Texas toast?' Shula said. "I was like, 'What is Texas toast?' I'd never heard of it."

Do you think former Cowboys coach Bill Parcells can turn things around in Miami?

When you're 1-15, there's only one way to go. He's been in a couple other situations where he turned a team around. I'm sure that's what made him attractive to Wayne Huizenga, the owner. When Wayne hired him, Parcells says, "I want everyone to know that I'm not going to be the coach and I'm not going to be the general manager." So everybody said, "What are you? What do you do?" He said, "I report to Mr. Huizenga." So it's a pretty good deal. Obviously, I think he's making all the calls. And somebody's got to step up in the quarterback position.

Is quarterback the most important position for a football team?

In all of sports, and there's nothing second. It's unbelievable what a quarterback has to do, mentally and physically. It takes a special guy. I was very fortunate in my coaching career to have such special guys. [Johnny] Unitas, then Griese and then I had Dan Marino. And when any of those guys got hurt I had Earl Morrall. All he ever did was step in and win. It's pretty good to have an insurance policy like that.

What was it like watching both the Dolphins' and the Patriots' seasons last year?

That's the thing that's so mind-boggling, because if they go 0-16, they're going to be remembered forever as having the Not Perfect Season. I think they breathed a sigh of relief when they won that game. I know the owner did. And the Patriots did match us, went 18-0, then lost in the big game.

I think what [teams almost going undefeated] does, is every year the '72 Dolphins get resurrected. Comparisons are made, and Mercury Morris gets a lot of airtime. That's pretty neat that we never seem to go away. Until somebody does what we did or surpasses what we did by going 19-0, we're going to be the standard.

I said this, and I'm sure my players feel the same way: If and when it happens, I'm going to call that coach and congratulate him. Nobody ever wants their record to be broken. They might say that, but they don't really mean it. I can't imagine Joe DiMaggio wanting someone to beat his 56-game hitting streak. But if and when the record does get broken, then you've got to have the sportsmanship to pick up the phone or send a telegram and congratulate him. And I'm sure our players would do it. I know I would.

What did you make of the "Spygate" situation?

It was an asterisk, when they were caught doing what they were doing. And they were fined, and a No. 1 draft choice was taken away, and that means that they had gained an unfair advantage. But after the first game, they went back to competing the way that everybody else was competing and accomplished everything that they did. It was legitimate after that first game. So you give them credit for that, certainly. You don't give them credit for what happened before then. They gained an unfair advantage, and they should've been penalized and they were.

With the economy struggling, was there any reluctance to open up a new restaurant?

The economy obviously is down. I think it's affected everybody in their thinking, but we just feel that if you still do a good job, people are going to want to go out to eat at a nice restaurant and they'll come to yours. Rather than pull in the horns, we're just going to continue what we've been doing.

Have you seen the new Cowboys stadium in Arlington?

It's unbelievable. Jerry Jones, whatever he does is going to be above and beyond. He's had such an influence on the NFL ever since he's been in it. He's looked at how to make it bigger and better, and that stadium is a big part of that.

Whatever it ends up being, it's going to be fantastic. I'm going to want to get here as soon as I can to see [a game in it].

Is having players like Adam Jones or even Terrell Owens a big risk?

You mean Adam "Don't-call-me-Pacman" Jones? I've always been a second-chance coach. I've always believed you should give a second chance. When you look back at your life you realize how many times you've been given a second chance to do something. But then after the second chance you've got to be ready to make the tough decision. I've won doing that, and I've lost some doing that. But when you win you feel good about it. And if you lose you've got to try and cut the cord and move on.

[Owens] is an unbelievable talent. He's smart. Usually when you get a guy like that, you have to understand that you don't want him to be somebody other than who he is. But he also has to understand that you've got rules and regulations for your football team. That you can't have 40-some guys doing one thing and have one guy doing something else. I think Wade [Phillips] has to do that job of letting him know what the rules are.

What kind of thing goes wrong that leads to a Michael Vick situation?

That's got to be unbelievable. How can you not know, if you're coaching the Atlanta Falcons -- or if you're the owner or the general manager -- how do you not know that one of your players was into dog fighting? I mean, somebody had to know that, but I guess didn't think there was anything wrong with it. It was against the law, No. 1, right? That's where information is the key. You've got to know as much about your people as you can.

What do you make of the Brett Favre situation?

I think that he's earned the right to change his mind. He's been such a great player for such a long period of time, and has given Green Bay fans everything he's had to give them. [The Packers] have to understand that somebody can change their mind. But then, [Favre] has to understand that they, too, have to move on. Still, they were a game away from the Super Bowl, you've got to give him some lee-way.

Understand that he's going through a tough time in his life in his decision making. He's earned the right to be able to change his mind. [If I was making the call for the Packers], I would simply say that: "You said you weren't coming back, I told Aaron Rodgers that he would have the opportunity to be the No. 1 guy. But, since you've changed your mind, you're welcome back. But it's going to be competitive."

That's what it is anyway, you're not going to play one guy over the other guy if he's not better. When your job depends on winning and losing, you're not going to be political about anything, you're going to play the best player.