

# **DON SHULA**

## **All-Time Winner**

By Joe Horrigan

In 1951, a rookie defensive back trying to earn a spot on the Cleveland Browns' training camp roster, caught the watchful eye of Head Coach Paul Brown. "Nice tackle Taseff!" barked the coach after witnessing the young defensive back's hard hit on fullback Marion Motley.

The confident rookie-hopeful swiftly rose from the pile turned to his coach and announced, "The name is Shula. Shula," he repeated, "S-H-U-L-A!"

Brown, undoubtedly stunned by the bold rookie's response, sarcastically replied, "I'll try to remember."

No one that day could have possibly imagined that that confident rookie would eventually become the winningest coach in National Football League history and in the process make "Shula" a name that no one would ever forget. His 347-173-6 record as head coach of the Miami Dolphins (1970-95) and before that the Baltimore Colts (1963-69) stands as the standard by which every past, present, and future NFL coach will be measured.

Donald Francis Shula was born January 4, 1930, in Grand River, Ohio and was raised in Painesville, Ohio. Don was the youngest of three children when his mother, Mary, gave birth to triplets. "My dad was making \$15 a week in a nursery so he had to find a better paying job," recalled Shula. "He went on to work in the fisheries by the lake and as soon as I was big enough, I followed him there." Don's father, Dan, was by most accounts a quiet, hard-working man. He was the breadwinner, while his wife Mary, who was disciplined and dedicated to detail, was the vocal leader of the household. Their son Don was obviously very much influenced by both.

As a youngster, Don -- not unlike other boys his age at Harvey High School -- wanted to play football. However, fearing his mother would not approve, he forged her signature on the required school permission form. A natural leader, he went on to star in football and track. Roy Kropac, who attended school with Shula from the third grade through college at John Carroll University in Cleveland, said his former classmate "was captain of everybody in high school."

Even then Shula demonstrated a seemingly insatiable drive to excel. "That's been a part of my makeup," he once said. "I enjoy a laugh on the field, as much as the next fellow, but not at the expense of success. As a young boy, I'd get upset if the others didn't work and study." At John Carroll, Shula led the small Jesuit school to its heights in football. In 1950, John Carroll beat highly-favored Syracuse 21-15 as Shula rushed for 125 yards.

A ninth-round pick in the 1951 NFL draft choice, he and John Carroll teammate Carl Taseff were the only rookies to make the 1951 Browns squad. Shula played a year and a half with the Browns before being called to active duty by the National Guard during the Korean crisis.

In 1953, the Baltimore Colts, in the franchise's first-ever player deal, sent five players to Cleveland and received 10 in return, among them, three quarters of a defensive backfield in Shula, Taseff and Bert Rechichar. Under Head Coach Weeb Ewbank, Shula, who already was regarded as a "coach on the field," became the only defensive back in the league who called the defensive signals. As veteran sports writer John Steadman wrote, "Shula was all but a defensive coach without portfolio."

Shula played seven seasons in the NFL -- Browns (1951-52), Colts (1953-56), Washington Redskins (1957) -- before joining football's coaching fraternity. His first opportunity came at the collegiate level as an assistant at Virginia in 1958, and Kentucky in 1959. He returned to the pros in 1960 as the Detroit Lions' defensive coach under George Wilson. During Shula's three-year stint with the Lions the team

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posted a 26-13-1 record and developed what many observers felt was the toughest defensive unit in the game.

In 1963, he was named to replace Weeb Ewbank as the head coach of the Baltimore Colts. At 33, he was the then-youngest head coach in NFL history. "He was hailed as a brainy type who was destined for a bright future as a grid tutor," the team's press release read. "Now, perhaps earlier than he had ever anticipated, he gets a shot at the top job."

The young coach didn't disappoint. Under Shula the Colts enjoyed seven consecutive winning seasons. The team reached the NFL title game in 1964 and 1968, after 12-2 and 13-1 campaigns, and the 1967 Colts posted an 11-1-2 record. Those three powerhouse teams averaged almost 30 points per game.

An imaginative coach, Shula frequently demonstrated his ability to make necessary game-day adjustments. However, in 1965, his resourcefulness was put to the test when late season injuries sidelined both Colts' quarterbacks, Johnny Unitas and Gary Cuozzo. Shula, with no signal-caller for the final game against the Los Angeles Rams, was forced to call on halfback Tom Matte to fill-in. Matte, with a simplified game plan from his cautiously optimistic coach, and a wristband with basic plays written on it, went on to direct a 20-17 upset win over the Rams. The win forced a playoff game between the Colts and the Green Bay Packers to break a first-place tie. The gallant but out-manned Colts fell 13-10 in overtime.

In 1970 Shula left Baltimore to become the head coach of the Miami Dolphins, a team that had won just three games the previous season. "One of the things I said in my initial press conference was that I didn't have any timetable," Shula recalled. "The goals or objectives were to do the best I could every day."

The no-nonsense coach wasted little time. At times his methods seemed extreme. His routine included four-a-day workouts in the late-summer Florida heat. "He treated all the players the same," remembers former Dolphins' linebacker Nick Buoniconti. "All he looked at in a person was his ability to play the great game of football..." Shula, according to one writer, "unified and adrenalized" the young Dolphins.

"We played our first preseason game at Pittsburgh and won the game, and they gave me the game ball -- after working them the way I had." "That," Shula said, "told me I had a group that was willing to work and willing to do the things I thought necessary." With five rookie starters on defense, the 1970 Dolphins won 10 of 14 games and advanced to the AFC playoffs, before losing 21-14 to the Oakland Raiders.

The next year Shula's Dolphins slipped past Baltimore to win their first-ever division title. On Christmas Day, they faced the defending NFL champion Kansas City Chiefs in the first round of the playoffs. "We were going against a team that was heavily favored, the team that had won the Super Bowl," Shula reflected. "We had all that against us, and we went into overtime, and Garo's kick won it (Yepremian hit a 37-yarder after 22:40 of overtime). That was the foundation of our 1972 season."

The 1972 season was, without a doubt, Shula's ultimate achievement in a career filled with accolades and honors. In just three seasons, Shula took a team that was seemingly going nowhere and transformed it into one of the most dominant teams ever. The 1972 Dolphins rolled through the regular- and post-season schedule unbeaten and untied -- a perfect 17-0. This despite the fact that Shula had to rely on 38-year-old Earl Morrall to direct his offense after starting quarterback Bob Griese went down with an ankle injury in the fifth game.

"When Bob went down, it had to shake everybody up," Shula offered. "Earl just calmly came in and gave us great leadership." For the next nine regular-season games and the first round of the playoffs, a 20-14 win over the Cleveland Browns, Morrall and the Dolphins were perfect.

"It wasn't that unlikely if you knew Morrall," explained Shula, who had signed the veteran off the waiver list. "I knew him, and that's why I brought him down here. He did the same thing for me in Baltimore when Unitas was out -- he helped take us to the Super Bowl."

However, in the third quarter AFC title game against the Pittsburgh Steelers with the score tied 7-7, a struggling Morrall gave way to Griese. Though Griese's ankle had healed it had been nine weeks since

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the Dolphins' starter had played. Shula's decision to make the change was a gamble, but the gamble paid off as Griese sparked the Dolphins to a 21-17 win and the chance to meet the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl VII.

During the regular season, running backs Mercury Morris and Larry Csonka each rushed for more than 1,000 yards, an NFL first for teammates in the same season. In Super Bowl VII, it was the combination of Csonka's running and the superlative play of the Dolphins' "No-Name Defense" that enabled Miami to outlast the Redskins 14-7, completing the perfect season. "Shula impressed upon us that we couldn't be champions until we won all three seasons -- the regular season, the playoffs, and the Super Bowl," a jubilant Morris said afterwards.

"It's hard to compare this team with other great teams of the past, but this team has gone into an area that no other team has gone into before," the victorious Shula related. "In the past there was always the feeling of not having achieved the ultimate. This is the ultimate."

The Dolphins won a second-consecutive NFL title in 1973, defeating the Minnesota Vikings 24-7 in Super Bowl VIII. The win resulted in a an overall record of 32-2 in those back-to-back seasons, a two-year mark that has yet to be surpassed.

Following the strike-shortened 1982 season, the Dolphins returned to the Super Bowl for a fourth time. This time, the Redskins got their revenge with a 27-17 win.

Shula led the Dolphins to yet another Super Bowl, his fifth with Miami and his sixth overall, following the 1984 season. Although second-year sensation Dan Marino passed for 318 yards, the Dolphins fell short to the San Francisco 49ers, 38-16, in what would be Shula's last Super Bowl appearance.

Don Shula's career is full of seemingly untouchable milestones. During the early to mid-1990s, the name "Shula" rose to the top of virtually every NFL career coaching statistical category. In many instances he equaled or replaced records held by the immortal George Halas. On September 22, 1991, with a 16-13 win over the Packers, he joined Halas as the only other NFL coach with 300 or more career wins. He won his 300th regular-season game of his coaching career on December 27, 1992, with a 16-13 overtime win over the New England Patriots.

On November 14, 1993, Shula passed Halas to become the most successful coach in NFL history when he registered victory number 325, a 19-14 win over the Philadelphia Eagles. A year later, on Christmas Day, he won his 319th regular season game, surpassing Halas' 318 wins. "He's like the Lou Gehrig of the NFL," veteran coach Ted Marchibroda said of Shula. "But, I don't think there'll ever be a Cal Ripken to break his record."

In 1990, Shula also entered the NFL's record book -- joining Hall of Fame coaches Halas, Curly Lambeau, and Tom Landry -- as one of just four coaches to experience 200 or more regular season wins with one team.

"It will be a very, very long time before a coach is able to put up the record that Don Shula has over the years," said Landry. "He has been a great tribute to the Dolphins and the entire NFL. Anytime the league has had to have somebody step up and have a vision for the future, it has been Don."

Shula left his mark on the game in many different ways including as an innovator of defensive complexities and situational substitutions. The now popular "no-huddle" offense was a part of Shula's thick playbook as early as 1984. The leadership skills he's demonstrated over more than 30 years of coaching has amazed even his most ardent supporters. "Styles may have changed, the situations may have changed and the players may have changed," Kansas City Chiefs' Head Coach Marty Schoffenheimer declared. "What didn't change was Don's ability to win no matter what the circumstance has been."

"The important thing is not what Don Shula knows or what any of my assistant coaches know," Shula once offered. "The important thing is what we can transmit to the people we're responsible for. They're

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going to be tested on Sunday afternoon, and the fact that we win on Sunday afternoon indicates that we're getting through to them. That's what coaching is -- the ability to transmit information."

For more than three decades Don Shula "transmitted information" like few others before.

## DON SHULA'S COACHING RECORD

Year	Team	L	W	L	T	Post-Season
1963	Bal	N	8	6	0	
1964	Bal	N	12	2	0	0-1
1965	Bal	N	10	3	1	0-1
1966	Bal	N	9	5	0	
1967	Bal	N	11	1	2	
1968	Bal	N*	13	1	0	2-1
1969	Bal	N	8	5	1	
1970	Mia	N	10	4	0	0-1
1971	Mia	N#	10	3	1	2-1
1972	Mia	N+	14	0	0	3-0
1973	Mia	N+	12	2	0	3-0
1974	Mia	N	11	3	0	0-1
1975	Mia	N	10	4	0	
1976	Mia	N	6	8	0	
1977	Mia	N	10	4	0	
1978	Mia	N	11	5	0	0-1
1979	Mia	N	10	6	0	0-1
1980	Mia	N	8	8	0	
1981	Mia	N	11	4	1	0-1
1982	Mia	N#	7	2	0	3-1
1983	Mia	N	12	4	0	0-1
1984	Mia	N#	14	2	0	2-1
1985	Mia	N	12	4	0	1-1
1986	Mia	N	8	8	0	
1987	Mia	N	8	7	0	
1988	Mia	N	6	10	0	
1989	Mia	N	8	8	0	
1990	Mia	N	12	4	0	1-1
1991	Mia	N	8	8	0	
1992	Mia	N	11	5	0	1-1
1993	Mia	N	9	7	0	
1994	Mia	N	10	6	0	1-1
1995	Mia	N	9	7	0	0-1
			328	156	6	19-17

\* NFL champions

# AFC champions

+ AFC champions; won Super Bowl

## 1972: A PERFECT SEASON

S-17	A	Kansas City Chiefs	20-10
S-24	H	Houston Oilers	34-13
O- 1	A	Minnesota Vikings	16-14
O- 8	A	New York Jets	27-17
O-15	H	San Diego Chargers	24-10
O-22	H	Buffalo Bills	24-23
O-29	A	Baltimore Colts	23- 0
N- 5	A	Buffalo Bills	30-16
N-12	H	N. England Patriots	52- 0
N-19	H	New York Jets	28-24
N-27	H	St. Louis Cardinals	31-10
D- 3	A	N. England Patriots	37-21
D-10	A	New York Giants	23-13
D-16	H	Baltimore Colts	16- 0

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## Divisional Playoff

D-24 H Cleveland Browns 20-14

## AFC Championship

D-31 H Pittsburgh Steelers 21-17

## Super Bowl VII

J-14 A Washington Redskins 14- 7

## COACHES WITH 100 CAREER VICTORIES

Coach	REGULAR SEAS			POSTSEASON			CAREER			PCT.	
	Yrs	WON	LST	TI	WON	LST	TI	WON	LST		TI
Don Shula	33	328	156	6	19	17	0	347	173	6	.665
George Halas	40	318	148	31	6	3	0	324	151	31	.671
Tom Landry	29	250	162	6	20	16	0	270	178	6	.601
Curly Lambeau	33	226	132	22	3	2	0	229	134	22	.623
Paul Brown	25	213	104	9	9	8	0	222	112	9	.660
Chuck Noll	23	193	148	1	16	8	0	209	156	1	.572
Chuck Knox	22	186	147	1	7	11	0	193	158	1	.550
Bud Grant	18	158	96	5	10	12	0	168	108	5	.607
Steve Owen	23	151	100	17	2	8	0	153	108	17	.581
Dan Reeves	16	141	106	1	8	7	0	149	113	1	.568
Marv Levy	16	137	102	0	11	8	0	148	110	0	.574
Joe Gibbs	12	124	60	0	16	5	0	140	65	0	.683
Hank Stram	17	131	97	10	5	3	0	136	100	10	.573
Weeb Ewbank	20	130	129	7	4	1	0	134	130	7	.507
Marty Schottenheimer	13	125	73	1	5	10	0	130	83	1	.610
Sid Gillman	18	122	99	7	1	5	0	123	104	7	.541
Bill Parcells	12	109	81	1	10	5	0	119	86	1	.580
George Allen	12	116	47	5	2	7	0	118	54	5	.671
Don Coryell	14	111	83	1	3	6	0	114	89	1	.561
Mike Ditka	11	106	62	0	6	6	0	112	68	0	.622
John Madden	10	103	32	7	9	7	0	112	39	7	.731
George Seifert	8	98	30	0	10	5	0	108	35	0	.755
Buddy Parker	15	104	75	9	3	1	0	107	76	9	.581
Tom Flores	12	97	87	0	8	3	0	105	90	0	.538
Vince Lombardi	10	96	34	6	9	1	0	105	35	6	.740
Bill Walsh	10	92	59	1	10	4	0	102	63	1	.617