

## **SHULA'S CONNECTIONS**

By Tim Holland

In 1948, the Cleveland Browns, coached by Paul Brown, became the first professional football team to finish a season undefeated and untied when they won the AAFC championship with a 15-0 record. Twenty-four years later, the Miami Dolphins became the first team to finish an NFL season undefeated and untied going 17-0 in 1972.

The Dolphins were coached by former Browns player Don Shula. Along the way to this historic achievement, Shula the coach would have to deal with the team that drafted him, the Browns, along with the other two teams that he played for, the Washington Redskins and Baltimore Colts. He would also have to deal with Cleveland Brown alumni many times over his coaching career.

It began in Baltimore, where Shula got his first head coaching job in 1963. The next year he lost in his first championship game appearance to the Browns by a score of 27-0. The head coach of the Browns was Blanton Collier, an assistant coach in Cleveland when Shula was a player. In 1968, Shula got his revenge by winning his first NFL title over Collier and the Browns by a score of 34-0, only to lose to another former Browns assistant, Weeb Ewbank of the New York Jets, in Super Bowl III. Two years later, he became the head coach of the Miami Dolphins. His first trip to the Super Bowl with the Dolphins would come at the expense of the Colts when Miami defeated Baltimore in the AFC championship game, 21-0, in 1971. However, Shula would have to wait until 1972 and '73 to settle all scores with his former teams and the Browns.

In 1972, after beating Ewbank's Jets and his old Colts twice during the undefeated season, the Dolphins drew the Browns as their first round opponent in the playoffs. Miami would beat Cleveland 20-14 for the right to play in the AFC championship game against Pittsburgh, who were being coached by former Browns teammate and Shula assistant at Baltimore, Chuck Noll. Miami defeated the Steelers, 21-17 and then went on to defeat the Redskins in Super Bowl VII, 14-7 to complete the undefeated season. Washington had been the last team that Shula played for before becoming a coach.

The next season it all came full circle when Shula's Dolphins defeated the Cincinnati Bengals in the first round of the 1973 playoffs. For the coach of the Bengals was none other than Paul Brown. The first coach to go undefeated and untied and the first coach that the great Don Shula played for in his pro career in 1953.