



It was the day after the presidential election when Tony Sparano was doing his regular press conference. As the last question thrown at him that day, a reporter asked Sparano whether he had watched the election coverage the previous night.

Almost apologetically, Sparano replied with a little smile on his face: "No. I've got to be honest, I was watching the Seattle Seahawks."

That Sparano would bypass election coverage in favor of watching game film of the upcoming opponent might have seemed surprising to some, but it certainly wasn't to his players.

Andre' Goodman wouldn't have expected anything different. Not after what he remembers Sparano telling some of his players in training camp.

"I don't know what you guys do on your break, but there has to be something in you that makes you concentrate on football all day long," Goodman recalls Sparano saying. "For me, in my free time, when you guys are thinking about other things, off-the-field issues, you know what I'm thinking about? Third down."

That, Goodman says, might be the best way to describe Tony Sparano.

Or, more simply, "That, to me ... he's a football guy."

Yep, Tony Sparano is a football guy.

We knew from the moment he was hired he looked the part of a football head coach and he also sounded like one.

Now, 11 games into his first season with the Dolphins, it also should be obvious he plays the role very well.

There are a lot of reasons the Dolphins are exceeding all expectations and are having their best season in a long time, and Tony Sparano most definitely is one of them.

Looking back, the Dolphins clearly missed with the hirings of Nick Saban and Cam Cameron. It seems they've hit — maybe hit big — with Sparano.

"He knows the game and he loves the game, and the passion he brings to the game and to the meetings and out there on the field is something that I think our team is starting to develop a little bit," said cornerback Nathan Jones, who played in Dallas when Sparano was an assistant there. "They say your team takes after your leader, and I think we are. He's a tough guy, he loves

"It's almost as if he's in the game. I feel like if you just gave him a helmet he'd run out there and make the tackle for you."

See SPARANO, page 15