

to win, and I think that's the type of team we're becoming."

Because he was brought in by Bill Parcells, and because of Parcells' track record, Sparano came to the Dolphins already having the benefit of the doubt from his players.

But it didn't take Sparano long to show those who didn't already know him what he was all about.

"Coming in here, I didn't have any notches on my belt one way or the other, there's no question I had to earn their respect, and that was important to me," Sparano said. "And I told them that. I met with them individually and when I brought them up I said, 'Look, you don't know me, I don't know you, but at the end of this thing, I'll earn your respect because I know what we'll do as a coaching staff to do those kind of things and what our work ethic will be.'"

As with everything he does when it comes to the Dolphins, Sparano went about that task with fervor.

"I think the first time that I really realized how intense he was was the moment that I came here on my (free agent) visit when they brought me in, shook hands with him," said guard Justin Smiley. "I'd heard about him because I knew that he was a well-known offensive line coach, well-respected offensive line coach around the league.

"From the moment that I met him, just the intensity in his eyes, how he talks. He has that Jersey accent. Remember, I'm from the South, so I'd never really been with anybody from the Northeast, and I thought about the old mobster movies and stuff, just the intensity and the passion. You can kind of feel it. That energy that he gave off, it was pretty cool and it was one of the deciding factors in me coming here and playing here."

For guys like Jones, Anthony Fasano and Jason Ferguson, this was nothing new.

They already knew all about Sparano. And what they saw in him as an assistant with the Cowboys is what they're seeing now.

"He's still the commanding guy he was in Dallas," Jones said. "I didn't interact with him in Dallas, but I heard him. He wasn't talking to me, but I could hear him. It was funny. He kind of has a very distinctive voice, so you can't miss him.

"Obviously, he's done with the job what he's commanded to do, step forth, be a leader, take charge of this team and get us to where we've got to get to. Other than that, he's the same guy and that's what's good about him. He hasn't changed, he hasn't gotten a big head over himself. He's the same guy, still humble and still just loves football. The passion is there, the same way it was in Dallas."

Passion. That's a word you're going to hear often when you ask players about Tony Sparano.

In fact, "passionate" is what Smiley and tight end David Martin both said when they were asked for the one word that best described their head coach.



Sparano's players made sure to give his first NFL regular season victory, the 38-13 rout at New England, the proper exclamation point.

Photo/DAVE CROSS/Miami Dolphins

As Sparano often says when he talks about some of his players' best attributes, it's important to him.

"I love every part of this job," Sparano said. "I really do. I love coming to work and getting up early in the morning. I love staying up late at night. I love dealing with the players. I love dealing with the administrators here. I love setting up the schedule for team meals when we're on the road. It matters. It all matters to me. I love it all."

Sparano loves his job enough that he will watch game tapes after the Dolphins play — three different times. Not surprising then that Sparano says he can

remember every single play the Dolphins have been involved in.

Another thing Sparano is fanatical about is stats. He is big on numbers. When players come in to begin preparations for an opponent, they will be greeted with a stack of relevant stats.

A big stack.

"I've never seen that before, but I like it," said wide receiver Greg Camarillo. "It breaks the game down to the bare essentials of where you're doing well and where you need to improve."

In so many ways, Sparano has been a nice change of pace — a breath of fresh air, really — after the short stints of the reviled Nick Saban and the ridiculed Cam Cameron.

The most striking difference is that Sparano looks like he's part of the team, almost like he's one of the guys, whereas both Saban and Cameron looked too professional.

"It's almost as if he's in the game," said Camarillo. "I feel like if you just gave him a helmet he'd run out there and make the tackle for you. I don't know, I've never had a coach like that, but it's fun, especially when you're doing well. It's always good to come back to the sideline and get love from the coach."

In every respect, Sparano appears to relate better to his players than either Saban or Cameron.

SPARANO VS. THE REST

How Tony Sparano compares through his first 11 games with other Dolphins head coaches in their first year

Coach	Year	Record
George Wilson	1966	2-9
Don Shula	1970	7-4
Jimmy Johnson	1996	6-5
Dave Wannstedt	2000	8-3
Nick Saban	2005	4-7
Cam Cameron	2007	0-11
Tony Sparano	2008	6-5

See SPARANO, page 17