

Cornerback Will Allen was one of the few bright spots on last year's 1-15 Dolphins team, even earning All-Pro accolades from *Sports Illustrated's* Paul Zimmerman. He finished the season with 62 tackles, two quarterback sacks, one interception and two forced fumbles, one of which was recovered by Michael Lehan and returned for a touchdown, and he also was one of the most visibly frustrated players in the locker room as the losses continued to pile up.

This year, under Tony Sparano and Allen's college coach at Syracuse, defensive coordinator Paul Pasqualoni, Allen has joined strong safety Yeremiah Bell as the unquestioned leaders of a Miami secondary that started off shaky but has pulled it together for a team that finds itself in the thick of a playoff race.

Allen started his 113th consecutive game Sunday against the New England Patriots and earlier this season had his first career interception return for a touchdown in a 26-17 win at the Denver Broncos. The Giants selected him in the first round of the 2001 NFL draft with the 22nd overall pick, and Allen's best season in New York came in 2004 when he led all defensive backs with 81 tackles (75 solo), third-best on the entire defense.

Under Pasqualoni in college, Allen was a dual threat as a cornerback and

kickoff returner, finishing his career with 142 tackles, four interceptions, 39 passes defended and a 22.7-yard average on 37 kickoff returns. As a senior he was a first-team All-Big East choice and a semifinalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, given to the nation's top defensive back. He also majored in economics.

Away from the field, Allen is very involved with kids, being a father of three (one daughter and two sons). He has been part of the "All-Community Team" each of the last three years with the Dolphins and in his first season with the team in 2006 he donated 20 tickets for every home game to the Parent Academy at the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. While with the Giants, Allen spoke at various schools, Pop Warner banquets and youth football camps while also working with the Ronald McDonald House and at-risk teen boys.

Allen discussed his impressions of this year's Dolphins team, what Sparano is like, how he handles the pressure that comes with the cornerback position, and what the biggest misconception is about his ability to intercept passes, among other things, during an exclusive one-on-one interview with *Digest* correspondent Andy Kent for this installment of *First-and-10*.

1 So what is your reaction to everything that's happened this season, specifically the new regime and turnaround?

I think the change was good. I think it was well needed. Just going to the games and the way in which we practice, I'm excited about it. I think we can do some good things this year and for years to come. I think everybody's ultimately trying to win. Everybody tries to win on Sunday, but they're trying to win during the week and they're trying to get better.

2 One final look back at last season: How difficult was it for you to deal with?

Super difficult. I feel like I've never lost anything in my life, and I think everybody in here looks at themselves as a winner and to lose like that — and each week you're just losing, losing and losing — that's a hard thing to deal with, especially if you've never done it before.

3 How good is this team right now and how good can it be with one more draft class?

That's really hard to say. I think the way this league is going, teams are up and down so much each and every year, but I think this team right now has the capability of being a pretty good team. Definitely having no mistakes is the key. You can't kill yourself before you try to beat another team, and I think that's one of the most important things that we don't do as much as we did before. But I think it all starts during the week. I think we practice better than we had been practicing and I think that translates on game day.

4 How do you make sense of this secondary having trouble early in the season and now having seemed to turn it around?

I just think there were a few miscues early in the season. The Jets game we had a couple of miscues, with the — I don't know what you want to call it — the pass that Brett (Favre) threw. And the Arizona game, we had a miscue early in the game and I just think those were just miscues; those weren't representative of our secondary, and I think now what you see is basically what we have back there.

5 People always talk about playing cornerback as if you are on an island. One mistake can be fatal. How do you look at the pressure of your position?

That's what I live for. I live for pressure and pressure situations all the time. I've always been like that. I'd wait and save my homework until the last minute and see if I could

See ALLEN, next page

