



CHAD PENNINGTON PERFECTS THE ART OF GRACE UNDER PRESSURE. BUT CAN HE TAKE THE DOLPHINS TO ANOTHER WINNING SEASON?

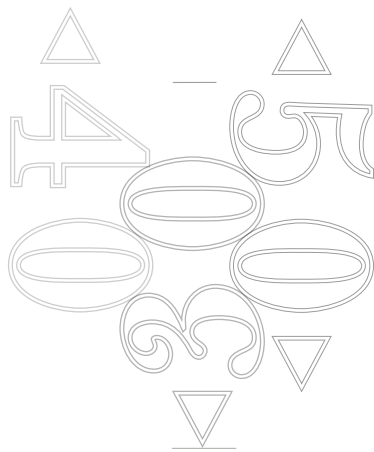
Chad Pennington has the knack to walk into a room and set anyone at ease, even during his own harried photo shoot with a 5-year-old in tow. Maybe it's his effortless gait or his knowing, wide smile. Maybe it's his slow, Southern drawl as he handles introductions with what has become his trademark humility. Whatever it is, it is a clue into the power and effect he has on his team, both on and off the field.

About to enter his 10th year in the National Football League, the Miami Dolphins quarterback has seen much. He possesses a comfort that comes from knowing who he is and who he is not, having walked through fire and achieved success on his own terms. After all, he has been named the NFL's Comeback Player of the Year, not once but twice—most recently last year. Admittedly content to not to win this award again, Chad has come back from injury and slight. "In 2007, when I lost my starting job, I didn't want to play anymore. I felt like it was a grind. Football wasn't fun anymore. So I really took some time and reprioritized my life."

While second chances never come free, there seems to be a redemptive quality to this comeback. Here in the land of suntans and snowbirds, Chad is miles away from that cold fear creeping back in. "I enjoy playing now more than ever. Coming to play here in South Florida has been an oasis for me. A new place, a new start. And playing with an organization that is hungry to win and fans that are hungry for a winner has been great," (continued page 84).

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Chad (continued from page 80)

Some may say the honeymoon is over, and Chad acknowledges that the test of true fan support will come with this new season. But it doesn't stop him from reaching his audience. A self-professed people pleaser, Chad confesses he enjoys talking to fans on the street in the off-season. "They say to me, 'I really appreciate what you do.' That is a refreshing change to the media," which he says is often subjective. "I think it can be hard for fans to tell the difference between what is fact and what is not."

Chad is not without hecklers and naysayers. "I feel like I am constantly fighting media perceptions," referring to those who challenge his arm strength. "But I am not in the business of defending my game. I let it speak for itself."

And no one can deny Chad's exacting arm. In addition to having the most accurate arm in NFL history, with a 66% pass completion rate, last season Chad made NFL history by taking a team with the worst season record in 2007 to winning the American Football Conference East division title in 2008.

"Football is a game full of human experience and human beings. There is no cookie-cutter type of player. Each of us is a different kind of athlete who brings something to the table," he says. "My edge comes from my work ethic. For me, it's about being the best at whatever I am working on, to be the best I can

CHAD ON... WOMEN'S SPORTS

"The female athlete I admire the most is Candace Parker. She is a winner and a champion, and she has amazing basketball skills."

Chad also frequently follows the University of Tennessee Lady Volunteers basketball team. He is a native Tennessean, after all.

be, competing against myself. If I am working on strength, I want to be the best weightlifter. If I am working on speed at the track, I am challenging myself to be the best runner. I always have preparation and a plan, and that is where my confidence comes from."

Chad's other weapon is his strategic mind. "One attribute I have is that I look at the game from the perspective of the coach. I grew up in a coach's family. I have taken on the coach's personality."

This former Rhodes Scholar candidate has also started thinking like a coach. Last season, Chad began implementing his own position meetings with his players—receivers, offensive linemen, tight ends. "Football relies on communication off the field before the game starts. Once the game starts, often there is no time to communicate on the field. Coaches cannot take the field with you. There must be a plan. And they believe the responsibility to execute that plan falls on the quarterback. If I do my job, then I can understand what the roles of the other 10 guys are. And if they ask for help, it is my job to help them."

Still, such meetings are unlikely to occur, never mind be meaningful, without buy-in from his players. In less than one season, Chad has earned the trust and respect of his teammates through composed, calculated leadership. But don't mistake calmness for weakness or a lack of drive.

"Although I may be calm on the outside, I am like a tornado in the inside, with emotions and feelings that are going through my mind... nervous energy. So you have to be able to harness that in and then show a calming effect, because the other guys will be looking at you in the huddle for leadership and direction. To me, it's part of being a veteran leader and showing the young guys what it's all about."

Back on set, Chad continues to deliver, doing his part to make the shoot feel more like a family barbecue than work. (After two hours, I was catching Pennington passes and singing Alan Jackson's *Chattahoochee* with his son.) At the end of the day, our attempts to check if the music was right and the food was to his liking were superseded by Chad genially asking us if we were comfortable. No matter the chaos around him, Chad is a rock. Statuesque even. Like the NFL's version of Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*... a moniker he is no stranger to. **S**

Misty (continued from page 83)

Many athletes who find themselves not competing would probably go stir-crazy. However, Misty's looking at opportunities to experience things she couldn't do while training, like playing tennis, golf, maybe taking up tae kwon do or boxing, and even simple things like seeing family. "I'm just enjoying myself," she says. "I've kind of stayed away from volleyball because I've been doing it for so long... It's not that I don't like it, but I'm not going to go down (and watch a tournament) for a weekend when I can go to a spa, which I haven't done in a long time!" And of course, there's also more time with her husband, Detroit Tigers catcher Matt Treanor, who had hip surgery in May. "Out of our four-and-a-half years of marriage, this is the first time we've seen this much of each other," she says.

That doesn't mean she's done with volleyball. Even during her recovery, she has found time to coach and do some clinics. "If I had to enter a tournament tomorrow, I think I could beat teams without even hitting, just because I'm not that off on my passing and defense," she claims half-jokingly. "For some players it's hard to coach because you need the patience and you really have to break down the game. And I think that's what's kept me in." It also helps to have grown up with the sport and developed the mindset of an athlete, with hard work and goals as her foundation. "It always frustrates me because everybody's always like, 'Oh, she's a natural at her sport.' And I just don't believe anybody's natural at their sport," she says. "They don't see the hours I put in... You always have to work at something. There's a lot of work that goes into it."

LOOKING AHEAD

Misty's injury and her hope of beginning a family have many in the volleyball world guessing whether she will make a third showing at the 2012 London Olympics. "I wouldn't have to decide until 2011. I mean, I would like to, but... I'm leaving my options open. And I feel like if I can stay in shape, I've still got the game up here," she says, pointing at her head. "So, I would like to, but you never know what's going to happen."

Throughout her rehabilitation, Misty has stayed as physically fit as possible by working with nutritionists and physical therapists to create exercise routines that complement her recovery. "Not being able to do cardio, you can't eat the things you normally eat," she says. "I'm not as fit as I was, obviously, heading into the game. But I'm glad I can start jogging now. I can't wait till I can start sprinting... I try to be active, doing something every day."

Keeping fit has been a priority, but Misty has also found the time to dabble in other projects, such as a book about her challenges and accomplishments that's currently in the works for next year. She and husband Matt are also in the process of starting the May-Treanor Ohana Foundation ("ohana" means "family" in Hawaiian), dedicated to helping a variety of causes that touch them on a personal level, including providing sports and mentoring programs for disadvantaged, underprivileged or disabled children. "People battling different diseases that live life to the fullest. Those are the people who inspire me every day," she says.

In spite of all these downtime achievements, would she dance on TV again and risk another injury? "In a heartbeat, yeah," she responds. "If you fall off a bike, are you going to not ride a bike anymore? No. You're going to try it again. Except I would wear heels starting now!" **S**