

PANTHERS

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more than a quarter before he is replaced by John Friesz on Thursday night.

Michael Bishop, who offers a scrambling style that contrasts with the tradi-

tional dropback of Bledsoe and Friesz, had mixed results last week following Bledsoe, throwing a 32-yard touchdown pass but also giving up a touchdown on a fumble when he wasn't touched.

"It's still, in my mind, 50-50," Friesz said. "I don't know that it comes down to how I play. ... Obviously, I hope I'm here. If I'm not, I feel confident that there are other places that need players."

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Crowd of 50,000 pays tribute to Marino

STEVEN WINE
AP WIRE

MIAMI — Dan Marino is at ease in the spotlight only when he has a football in his hands, and so Wednesday was not really his kind of night.

A sellout crowd of more than 50,000 gathered at Pro Player Stadium to hear Don Shula, John Elway, Terry Bradshaw and others pay tribute to the most prolific passer in NFL history. Marino mostly played spectator, a role to which he's still adjusting.

"It's kind of overwhelming," he said. "Thinking about all the terrific times I've had in this stadium, the emotions are tough."

The three-hour program was arranged by the Miami Dolphins after Marino reluctantly retired in March. The scope of the event reinforced the reality that his career is over after 17 NFL seasons, de-

spite chants from the crowd of "One more year! One more year!"

"For sure you have second thoughts," Marino, 38, said. "I've played football my whole life. Obviously you're going to have second thoughts. But I believe in my heart I made the right decision."

Shula, who coached Marino from 1983 to 1995, warned that the transition to retirement won't be easy for his former quarterback.

"All of a sudden on Sunday afternoon, there's nothing to do," Shula said. "It's sort of a helpless feeling. There's nothing you can do to fill the void that's left from doing something so exciting for so many years."

The tribute brought together for the first time all six members of the quarterback class of 1983 — Marino, Elway, Jim Kelly, Ken O'Brien, Tony Eason and Todd Blackledge. They're remembered as the best group of quarterbacks to be

drafted in one year.

"When Danny came in his rookie year and set the world on fire, he set the bar awful high for the rest of us in the class," Elway said. "From that point on we were all chasing Danny."

"When he was on the other sideline," Kelly said, "he brought fear to everybody."

The six former quarterbacks and their wives had dinner together Tuesday, swapped stories and ended the night dancing.

"The stories get better and better as you get older," Marino said with a laugh.

Also attending the tribute were more than 50 former Dolphins. There was a performance by Marino's favorite band, Hootie and the Blowfish, and the night was to end with a fireworks display. Fans paid \$2 apiece, with proceeds going to the Dan Marino Foundation, and many in the crowd paid tribute to him by wear-

ing a Dolphins jersey with his number — 13.

"The love you show Dan tonight is unprecedented," Bradshaw told the fans. "Hats off to Miami."

The crowd booed when Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga was introduced. He's still a target of scorn in South Florida for dismantling the Florida Marlins' 1997 World Series championship team before selling that franchise.

But otherwise it was a night of cheers and a few tears. The event gave Miami fans a chance to thank Marino — and vice-versa.

"Playing in one city for 17 years and fulfilling some of the dreams you had as a kid, being a professional quarterback, wanting to be successful in front of the fans in Miami, it's a special relationship," he said. "I feel I'm part of the atmosphere of this stadium."

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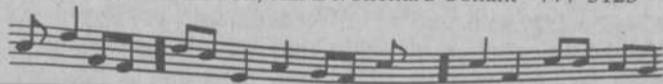
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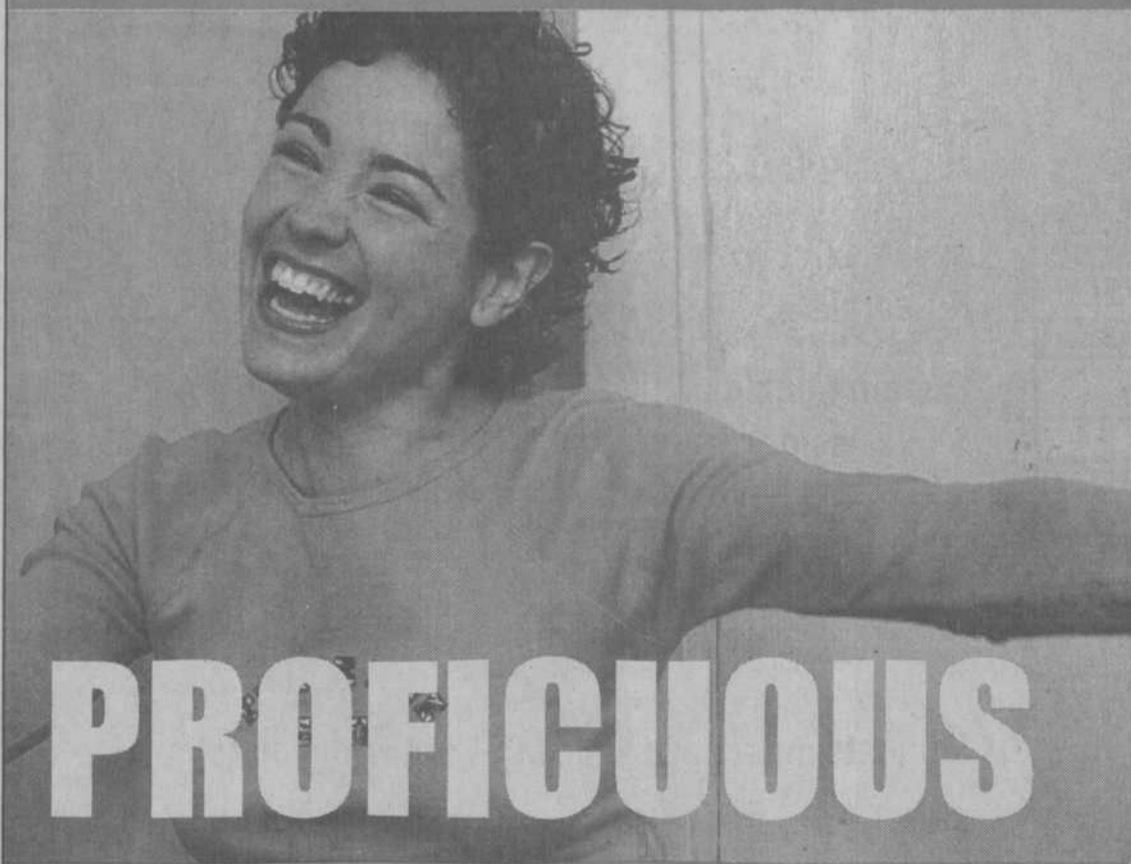
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