



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHULA'S STEAK HOUSE

A Winning Tradition

With a playbook filled with CAB® steaks, Shula's Steak House is taking the nation by storm.

by Deanna Scrimger

It's been 30 years since the Miami Dolphins rocked the sports world with their perfect season. The team still holds the spot in the record books as the only National Football League (NFL) team to claim that honor. Today, the legendary 17-0 season is scoring touchdowns on another front — with diners.

The same hard work and winning spirit Don Shula inspired during his coaching career drives his restaurant operations these days. Shula's Steak House, with locations across the United States, continues the winning tradition by delivering the perfect dining experience.

The restaurant décor is a tribute to the 1972 Dolphins. The winning team spirit is brought to life in each restaurant with autographed black-and-white photos, Super Bowl trophies and a menu hand-painted on

an official NFL game football. The football menu is signed by Coach Shula and delivered to each table on a kicking tee.

The Shula name may draw consumers to the door, but scoring points and building repeat business require a well-developed game plan. "We view our celebrity status as a way to get attention because customers are curious about the name. We have to deliver on the experience, or they'll never come back," explains Dave Shula, president and owner of Shula's Steak House.

The youngest coach in the NFL when he began, Dave logged 15 seasons and was the first son in pro sports history to face his father in a game where both were head coaches. Dave now calls the plays for the celebrated restaurant concept recently listed as one of *Restaurant Hospitality* magazine's fastest growing full-service chains.

The playbook

The *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand is the concept's playbook secret to winning fans. "Our association with CAB has been a tremendous success. It's a quality product that is consistent in every location," Dave says. "Our staff are very supportive of it because their customers end up happy. They know they only need to execute the meal. They don't ever have to worry about product quality. It's a great thing to have in your back pocket."

Matching product quality with superior delivery has scored the restaurant endless touchdowns and opened the door for many expansions. The original Shula's location opened in 1989 in Miami Lakes, Fla. Today, sports enthusiasts can curb their beef cravings at 23 locations in 12 states, many of which are in major NFL cities.

The flagship concept with 16 locations is Shula's Steak House, positioned as "America's Steak House. Still Undeclared." The expansion plan has included the addition of two, more casual concepts: Shula's Steak 2, with one Panama and four U.S. locations serving CAB burgers exclusively, and Shula's on the Beach, with two locations serving many CAB entrées.

The Westin in New York City is the most recent to join the ranks of opening a Shula's Steak House. Its recent grand opening there attracted the clout of NBC's *Today Show*, the most watched morning news program. Coaches Don and Dave appeared on the Nov. 6 *Today Show*, grilling CAB steaks in the plaza and highlighting the beef-dominated menu.

Sports celebrity restaurants have come and gone. A December 2001 *USA Today* article lists 18 restaurant concepts that lacked staying power. But Shula's has proven it can feast on its reputation by successfully implementing the restaurant game plan using a focused strategy. That starts with its positioning as America's No. 1 celebrity steak house and the first such concept to feature the CAB brand exclusively.

Creating raving fans

Its mission is to create raving fans by delivering outstanding atmosphere, the finest quality food and top-notch service. They are not only raving; they're driving sales at each steak house location past the \$3 million mark annually. In total, fans are devouring more than half a million pounds of CAB brand product each year. The majority of that is steaks — primarily ribeyes, prime rib, strip loins, porterhouses, T-bones and filets. The volume of beef used correlates to the middle-meat cuts from 6,500 CAB-qualified cattle.

Excited and satisfied fans are the best advertising. Consumers are more apt to try a new restaurant when it's highly recommended by a friend or family member as a place for great steaks. More than 20,000

► **Above:** The Shula name may draw consumers to the door, but scoring points and building repeat business require a well-developed game plan, say coaches and restaurateurs Dave (left) and Don Shula.

raving fans have joined the 48-oz. Club™, formed when that first Shula's opened, to honor America's true beef lovers. The club's initiation is the simple task of finishing a 48-ounce (oz.) CAB porterhouse. After the great steak, new club members are welcomed with a picture of Coach Don, a personalized letter from Dave, and their name displayed on Shula's Web site.

Shula's is expanding communications with ecstatic fans through an updated Web site and a recent push to add more e-mail addresses. The company does not hold back on rewarding its guests. To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the perfect season, one lucky fan will win a Mercedes-Benz E320 sedan, marking the company's largest customer promotion to date. Special events every Monday night through the end of 2002 included members of the 1972 team signing autographs at the original Miami Lakes location.

Building success

Important elements of the Shula's branding philosophy are winning, success and integrity. The CAB brand was a logical choice when launching the original Miami Lakes location because of ownership ties with Graham Angus Farm, Albany, Ga. They knew firsthand the excellent reputation of



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the brand. Today the brand's product performance and integrity ensure its remaining a permanent restaurant feature.

"We depend on CAB to continue to find new sources and maintain the quality. You are our industry watchdog. We are the end users that rely on the specifications set and the certification process it uses. The product's integrity is vitally important to our success," Dave explains.

"We've learned people will spend money for quality and value," he says. "There are pressures to cut corners, but that is only a short-term solution and a long-term disaster." He encourages everyone in the beef

industry to adopt the same commitment to quality: "We can never cut the expectations of the quality beef we serve. This has to be reflected in the entire process, from breeding all the way through feeding."

The restaurant's future expansion will stick to the game plan. "We'll keep the business model consistent and focus on doing it right. We are going to grow where it makes sense, probably [adding] a couple of locations next year (2003)," Dave says.

The concept has experienced success with franchises located in hotel properties, where the restaurant becomes a drawing card for the hotels. Many fans are exposed to the hotel because they dine at Shula's and then choose the hotel the next time they are in town.

Shula's esteemed marketing, dedicated staff-training program and reputation for great steaks earned the company honors as Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) 2002 Chain Restaurant Marketer of the Year. Shula's core values have guided the restaurant to success. More importantly, it has proven it's more than just a great name — it is the place for great steaks — it's America's Steak House, Still Undefeated. The winning partnership is driving sales and awareness of the CAB brand and Angus cattle, not just of football.

