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NFL

Bye week pauses Bills' losing streak

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

The good news for the Buffalo Bills this week is that they don't have to worry about losing for the fourth Sunday in a row.

OK, they can't win either, since they'll be taking this weekend to relax, nurse any lingering injuries and figure out how to get back on course.

Yes, the bye week couldn't come at a better time.

Following three straight losses to Chicago, Detroit and New England, the Bills are reeling and headed for the bottom of the AFC. They could use a break.

"It gives us a chance, a weekend off, to maybe watch other teams, see where we want to go, what we want to do and how we're going to do it, how we're going to stick together, what we're going to listen to, what we're not going to listen to," said quarterback J.P. Losman, who struggled again with two fumbles and an interception. "We've got to get a fire back in us, confidence, and keep it there. We're moving the ball. That's not a problem. We're moving the chains, moving the ball. We just have to figure out how to punch it in."

Sunday's 28-6 loss to the Patriots was a far cry from the 19-17 loss to New England back in Week One. As soon as Buffalo surrendered two touchdowns in the first quarter and failed to capitalize on a red zone opportunity on its opening drive, settling instead for a 40-yard Rian Lindell field goal, it was all Patriots.

Frustrations mounted from the game, as Buffalo continued to make the mistakes that have cost them victories this year. After a brilliant shovel pass to Willis McGahee for a 56-yard gain on the first drive, the Bills followed up with a failed gimmick play with receiver Josh Reed lined up at QB and Losman split out wide left. Then it was a short run by McGahee and a fumble by Losman to set the Bills back to the New England 22.

The Bills also took bad penalties, like the roughing-the-passer call on Chris Kelsay for hitting Tom Brady after the quarterback had gone down to the turf on third and 10 from the Buffalo 21. That penalty set up the Patriots with a first down on the Bills 12. And good teams take advantage of any opportunity.

On the next play, Corey Dillon took the ball around the left side to give New England a 14-3 lead.

"Foolish errors don't really give us much of a chance to win the game, especially against good opponents," head coach Dick Jauron said. "And, obviously, they're a good opponent. So we just got ourselves out of it."

With two weeks to prepare for the Green Bay Packers, the Bills have plenty of areas in need of attention.

The offensive line is struggling, especially now with the injury to left guard Tutan Reyes. Willis McGahee is averaging fewer than four yards per carry. Turnovers continue to plague the offense. The defense is giving up too many points and big plays.

"We'll get an early jump (on Green Bay) and then we'll focus on fundamentals, the basics," Jauron said. "We'll have individual period and work on our form tackling and fits. When it comes down to it, those are the things that win and lose for you. This team has played seven games and clearly we aren't fundamentally hitting our fits all the time and executing our schemes all the time like we need to be. This is an ultimate team sport. Nine guys can execute well and two can fail it and it looks really bad. That's what has been happening. There are certainly stretches where we execute it well. We have to get a lot better in our fundamentals and I have to do a better job preparing them. We've got to execute. We'll spend a good deal of time going back to fundamental football because those are the things that will win for you. If we keep it close, we have a chance. If we don't, if we keep committing foolish errors in the game, then we kill ourselves. It's hard to beat the opponent and ourselves in the same game."

The work ethic on the team is not in question, it's the execution on the field. But games aren't won in the workout room.

"We work so hard, and it's really unfortunate that we're not getting wins," said left tackle Larry Tripplett. "But as far as working hard and giving everything you have and having a passion for the game, the guys are doing that. We've just got to limit the mistakes and win games."

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Strong play evokes old cliché for Squirt Minor 'AAA'

The Amherst Knights Squirt Minor "AAA" hockey team played strong for all but two minutes in a tough 6-4 loss to the Depew Saints last Wednesday evening at the Amherst Pepsi Center.

The Knights acquainted themselves with an old sports cliché that says a hockey team must play a full 60 minutes to defeat a high quality opponent. The Knights had a decidedly clear advantage in play with the exception of a volcanic two-minute span in the second period where the Saints erupted for four goals.

The Knights' transition game was sharp early on as the defensive pairing of Ellis Smith and Bradley Truel used some smart crisp passing to turn up ice quickly. A final deft pass found the stick of Mitchell Spring, who broke down the middle of the ice a

step ahead of a back-checking Saint.

Spring used his left leg to ward off the opposing player's stick and unleashed a Mitchell missile that sailed over the Saints' goaltender's right shoulder to give the Knights the early lead.

Getting up ice quickly was a trend that carried on throughout the game.

Defensemen Luke Eberhard's smooth skating and strong pivot ability frustrated many of the Saints faster forwards. On one play, Eberhard had to pivot front to back twice in open ice to stay with one of the best skating forwards the Saints had to offer. Eberhard kept the opposition's speed to the outside, ending their scoring opportunity in the corner boards. This allowed a back-checking winger to pick up the puck and execute a quick transition pass.

Late in the first period, the Owen Green-Danny Tyczynski-Dante Todaro line took advantage of getting up ice quickly.

On a three on two break, Todaro made a great outside move that allowed him to get the puck to the net and generate a number of scoring opportunities. Finally, Owen Green's quick shot and rebound ended with Danny Tyczynski jamming the puck into the corner of the net. At the end of the first period, the Knights led 2-0.

Early in the second period, the Knights let their guard down and the Saints pounced on the opportunity. For a two-minute span, the Saints stormed the Knights' net. Jimmy Szefer, Garrett Meegan, Elliott Crimmen and Ryan Wheeler all scored to put the Saints up 4-2.

After a late second period goal by the Saints' Zachary Burdzy, the Knights finally woke up and started to play their game. The Mitchell Spring-Matt Stephan-Alex Dimitroff line came back in the third period to score two more goals. Spring notched his second of the game with

a twisting low wrister.

After a quick goal by the Saints, Spring found Dimitroff to the left of the Saints net. Dimitroff let a wrist shot go as soon as the pass hit his stick.

A sneaky Matt Steffan, in perfect position on the open right side, drilled the rebound home to give the Saints a 6-4 lead.

Throughout the third period, a number of Knights players made their presence felt in a ferocious team effort to get back in the game. Defensemen Danny Brodzik picked up the puck inside his blue line and took it the length of the ice, challenging the opposition's defense and creating a great scoring chance.

Chris Winiacki worked hard forcing the play inside the opposition's blue line, keeping pressure on their defense and wingers. Winiacki made good decisions and forced the play up ice with some smart short rushes and forward passes.

Dylan Lock's speed kept the Saints defense honest and on one right side rush had the Saints' defense backing in and smothering their goaltender.

Matt Ruggiero used his strength to gather in the puck and made a strong inside move at the left faceoff circle that created havoc in front of the Saints' net.

In one fury of scoring chances, MJ Bronsky picked up a loose puck and almost scored on a wrap-around by powering his way around the net.

In frustration, the Saints took a number of penalties. The Knights have been practicing their puck movement and it was evident when they had the man advantage.

From the right boards, Green took command of the power play using crisp passes with his point men to get good shots on goal. The pressure on the Saints' goalie was intense but he held firm as the Knights tried desperately to even the game.

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