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# Eagles ride luck to win over Panthers

Philadelphia extends its winning streak to seven games with a win over Carolina on Sunday

By Bob Brookover  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Lady Luck and the Eagles first made eye contact six weeks ago at Giants Stadium. Now they are a happily married couple on a seven-week honeymoon that just might last through the first day of February in Houston.

Sure, the first-place Eagles are good. They proved that again Sunday with a 25-16 victory over the Carolina Panthers at Ericsson Stadium. They improved to 9-3 and extended their winning streak to seven games — the longest for an Eagles squad since 1980, when coach Dick Vermeil's team won eight in a row on its way to the franchise's one and only trip to the Super Bowl.

As they prepare for another huge game against the Dallas Cowboys on Sunday at Lincoln Financial Field, the Eagles are tied with the St. Louis Rams for the best record in the NFC. If they beat the 8-4 Cowboys, the Birds will have a two-game lead in the NFC East and be in the driver's seat for a third straight division title.

The Eagles did a lot of things right against the Panthers, who had won five of their previous six home games. They continued to come up with big plays at crucial times — the most recognizable trademark of coach Andy Reid's resilient team.

That said, it should also be noted that the Eagles had another delightful encounter with Lady Luck, who has been by their side ever since Brian Westbrook's miracle punt return on Oct. 19 at the Meadowlands.

This time, she made her presence felt by messing with the left foot of Carolina's John Kasay, who went into Sunday's game as the second-most-accurate kicker in the NFC. He left the stadium as the game's most obvious goat after missing field-goal attempts of 32, 38 and 49 yards as well as an extra point.

"It's a little bit of luck," Eagles defensive end Brandon Whiting said. "The field out there was a little bad. But we put them in those fourth-down situations."

Birds linebacker Carlos Emmons did not want to hear about luck.

"I don't think it's luck," he said. "I think his skills weren't there today."

The Eagles' David Akers, on the other hand, had no problems putting the ball between the uprights. The second-most-accurate kicker in NFL history connected on attempts from 35, 48, 38 and 29 yards out. He also saved

a touchdown by pushing Steve Smith out of bounds on a first-quarter kick-off return.

There were other obvious contributions and turning points for the Eagles.

For instance, the Birds found themselves in an immediate crisis when Donovan McNabb's string of 127 passes without an interception came to an end on the first offensive play of the game.

Defensive end Mike Rucker intercepted a short pass intended for full-back Jon Ritchie, giving Carolina the ball at the Eagles' 36-yard line. Quarterback Jake Delhomme and running back Stephen Davis moved the ball to the 2, but the Panthers had to settle for Kasay's only successful field-goal attempt.

McNabb and the Eagles' offense immediately atoned for their first turnover in five games by driving 68 yards on 10 plays for a touchdown. Two runs by the incredibly talented Westbrook accounted for 28 yards on the drive, and McNabb dodged a heavy rush and connected with Ritchie for a first down on a third-and-2 play. Duce Staley finished the drive with a 2-yard touchdown run.

"I think what you saw from the Eagles today was a team that sustained drives and put points on the board," McNabb said.

Just as important was their ability to

keep Carolina from putting points on the board.

The Panthers got inside the red zone four times in the first half and walked off the field at halftime with just three points.

On a third-and-3 play from the Eagles' 16 late in the first quarter, defensive tackle Corey Simon stood up Rod Smart, who was then tackled by N.D. Kalu a yard shy of a first down.

After Westbrook fumbled a punt return, with former Eagle Mike Caldwell recovering, early in the second quarter, the Panthers proceeded to pick up just 2 yards before Kasay missed again.

The Eagles then drove 55 yards to set up a 35-yard field goal by Akers. McNabb kept the drive going twice, first by hitting Todd Pinkston on a third-and-7 play and then connecting with Freddie Mitchell on a third-and-14 play.

The ultimate red-zone frustration followed for the Panthers when they reached the Eagles' 8-yard line and decided to go for a first down on fourth and 1 only to come up an inch short when Whiting turned Davis sideways.

"You could see just a little light between the ball and the chain," Whiting said. "It was supposed to be an outside slant, but I saw a guard pulling, and I followed him inside."

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## ROETMAN

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over the roof of our house in what equated to the bottom of the ninth, leading to a bitter outburst filled with spitting, swearing and bat tossing.

Emotions run even higher during traditional sporting events. My friend Brandon and I have made a habit of playing racquetball at the Student Recreation Center this year. We've just started learning the game, but we

consider ourselves decent at the sport. Now, Brandon may be one of the few people who hates losing more than I do. And since I've lost only once to my combative counterpart, I have been on the viewing end of quite a few heated eruptions.

The most entertaining tantrum occurred when he lost a racquetball bet for a case of beer. Along with spewing out four-letter words loud enough for all of Eugene to hear, he used his racquet to smash the plastic container

that holds the balls. He proceeded to put the balls back into the container and fire it into a trash can with an "if you talk to me I'll punch you in the face" look smeared all over his face.

Plenty of people say my family, friends and I are too competitive. If I received a nickel for every time someone told me, "it's just a game," my tuition would be paid for. I say being a competitive person is a good way to release stress. Whether you're barking at a teammate during a sand-

lot baseball game or yelling at the TV when your favorite NFL team is in the playoffs, releasing your emotions is healthy.

Contrary to how I must sound, I am innocent of being psychotic. I am, however, guilty of being a sports nut and a competitive freak.

That's not so bad, is it?

Contact the sports reporter at jonroetman@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



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## CLASSIC

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54-51, at McArthur Court.

"Our defense is what won us the game because our offense wasn't clicking," Brandi Davis said of the win against the Jayhawks. "We know if we play good defense, we're going to win. We'll take this and learn from it."

As a team, Oregon made 29 percent of its shots from the field and was 62 percent from the free throw line.

Kraayeveld had her 20th double-double of her career with 10 points and 10 rebounds, while Davis and center Andrea Bills led the Ducks with 14 points each.

"There really is no excuse for why we played so poor," Smith said. "But we did hang in there defensively and played really tough."

The Ducks outrebounded the Jayhawks, 39-37, with 24 of their rebounds coming defensively.

Oregon took the lead for the final

time Friday on a layup by Davis with 1:42 remaining.

"I just saw an opening and thought it was the wisest move," Davis said. "I was actually looking for a foul, but I was happy I could help the team."

In the final 34 seconds, point guard Corrie Mizusawa hit four free throws in six attempts to ensure the three-point win.

Bills led Oregon with 31 points in the two games, while Kraayeveld had 28 points and Davis added 23. Kraayeveld and Bills were named to the All-Tournament team, and Kraayeveld also won tournament MVP honors.

"We're excited about this win, to be 5-0, and it's really going to help us coming in to these next two games," Kraayeveld said.

Oregon makes a mini-road trip to Portland for a game against Portland on Thursday.

Contact the senior sports reporter at mindirice@dailyemerald.com.

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