

From 2020's best play to its weirdest moment

By **BARRY WILNER**
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The Associated Press will hand out its individual NFL awards on the night before the Super Bowl in Tampa. Until then, here are some off-the-beaten track honors to consider.

BEST GAME: In Week 9, the first professional matchup of Tua Tagovailoa and Kyler Murray lived up to the hype. The two young quarterbacks traded pinpoint passes, timely scrambles and other big plays in a dazzling show of the league's future. Miami won 34-31. Tagovailoa led a 93-yard drive to tie it before Jason Sanders made a 50-yard field goal. Arizona's Zane Gonzalez missed a 49-yarder that would have tied it.

Runner-up: There's lots of support for Baltimore's last-second shootout win at Cleveland in Week 14. For drama, it's a good choice. For football, not so much. Was it the Big 12 we were watching? Or simply touch football with no defense? Exciting, yes. Classic, nope.

WORST GAME: Some day, the league will learn to keep the Lions off national TV. In Week 16, they got a Saturday afternoon matchup with Tampa Bay. Lowly Detroit lost to Tampa Bay 47-7 — the game wasn't that close. If the Buccaneers showed no mercy and left Tom Brady in after he threw four touchdowns in the first half, they might have broken the NFL record that Washington scored, 72 points against the Giants in 1966.

Runner-up: Pretty much anything involving the Jaguars.

BEST CELEBRATION: Get a look at the Colts' Nyheim Hines doing his best Simone Biles imitation, not only in the end zone but on his way to it, against Detroit.

Runner-up: Aaron Rodgers' simple "I LOVE GOLD" declaration after running for a touchdown against Carolina.

WORST CELEBRATION: New York Jets fans' reaction to their team breaking its winless string



Ross D. Franklin/AP Photo

Arizona Cardinals wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins catches the game-winning touchdown as Buffalo Bills cornerback Tre'Davious White (27), free safety Jordan Poyer (21) and strong safety Micah Hyde, left, defend during an NFL football game, Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020, in Glendale, Arizona. The Cardinals won 32-20.

by beating the Rams in Week 15 — removing any chance to draft Clemson QB Trevor Lawrence.

Runner-up: All of those preening for the sideline videoboard shows when a penalty erased the big play.

BEST PLAY OF THE YEAR: HAIL MURRAY, naturally. When it comes to desperation heaves, so much must go right. Some of it didn't on this one at the end of Arizona's "miracle" victory over Buffalo. Kyler Murray nearly got knocked down. He had to scramble left. And DeAndre Hopkins had to outjump three defenders — all in as good a position to grab the ball as he was. He did, and the highlight will be shown forever.

Runner-up: Not everything that happens in Vegas stays there. Ryan Fitzpatrick's 34-yard pass to Mack Hollins while being dragged down by his facemask set up a winning field goal in Week 16 with 1 second remaining, putting Miami on the verge of playoff qualification.

WORST PLAY OF THE YEAR: Of course this category includes the awful Jets. With New York on the verge of its first victory on Dec. 6 against Las Vegas, ahead 28-24 lead with 15 seconds left, defensive coordinator Gregg Williams inexplicably called an all-out blitz. Derek Carr read it,

lofted a pass for Henry Ruggs III, who zipped passed rookie cornerback Lamar Jackson — who had no safety help — for a 46-yard touchdown and the win. Williams was fired the next day.

Runners-up: Dallas' fake punt on fourth-and-10 at its 24 down four points early in the fourth quarter against Washington. It flopped, Washington scored on the next play to trigger a 21-point quarter on Thanksgiving.

And Giants QB Daniel Jones tripping over his own feet at the end of an 80-yard run.

WEIRDEST INCIDENT: The Broncos were forced to face the Saints without any of their four quarterbacks. Drew Lock, Brett Rypien and Blake Bortles were maskless around Jeff Driskel, who tested positive for the coronavirus on Thanksgiving. Practice squad receiver Kendall Hinton completed one pass to a teammate and two to the Saints — his wristband wound up in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He was the first non-QB to start at the position since 1965.

Runners-up: Ravens CB Marcus Peters spitting behind the back of Browns WR Jarvis Landry; QB Dwayne Haskins, a first-round selection in 2019, cut by Washington just after Christmas.

One college drops out of CCC baseball, softball seasons

Border closure means University of British Columbia won't compete

The Observer

CORVALLIS — The Cascade Collegiate Conference lost one member's baseball and softball teams for the 2021 season.

"COVID-19, provincial regulations and the continued closed border between Canada and the United States has forced the University of British Columbia to opt out of Cascade Collegiate Conference play in softball and baseball for the 2021 season," the conference announced last week.

"UBC made the very difficult deci-

sion, and really had no choice given the circumstances," stated CCC Commissioner Robert Cashell in the press release.

"We support the Thunderbirds and look forward to their return to full participation in 2022."

University of British Columbia's move reduces softball to 10 teams in the conference and baseball to five and changes the schedule.

The Eastern Oregon University softball team opens the revised season March 5-6 at home against Warner Pacific University.

And the EOU baseball team opens its season March 6-7 at Caldwell, Idaho, against the College of Idaho.

For a full schedule of Eastern's sports, visit eousports.com.

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