

Pro Football

Seahawks, Cowboys face simple playoff scenario: win or else

By SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Dak Prescott knows about the stack of scenarios required to get the Dallas Cowboys in the playoffs.

There's no point in looking past the first one, especially since it applies to both teams when Seattle visits Sunday in the return of star Dallas running back Ezekiel Elliott from a six-game suspension over domestic violence allegations.

The winning team is still in the NFC wild-card race. The loser isn't.

"None of those scenarios mean anything if we don't win," Prescott said. "So we can talk about them all we want, but the most important thing for us to do is win this game and then we'll worry about it. Cross our fingers and hope on those scenarios, but all we can do is control this game against Seattle."

The Cowboys (8-6) lost their first three games without Elliott, forcing them into what they figured was must-win mode with five games remaining.

They were right, and now Dallas has matched the three-game winning streak from before Elliott finally started serving his suspension after weeks of legal battles.

Seattle (8-6) is coming off the most lopsided loss in eight seasons under Pete Carroll, a 42-7 defeat to the Rams that put Los Angeles on the brink



In this Dec. 10, 2017, file photo, Seattle Seahawks wide receiver Doug Baldwin (89) catches a pass in the end zone for a touchdown in front of Jacksonville Jaguars

of the NFC West title. The Seahawks, who have dropped two straight, haven't lost three in a row in December since 2010, when they made the playoffs at 7-9.

That won't work this time for Seattle and its injury-depleted defense, most notably stars Kam Chancellor and Richard Sherman. The Seahawks have made the

playoffs five straight years. "We have never really had to face adversity in the season like this," receiver Doug Baldwin said. "We've endured some pretty devas-

Week 16




Seattle Seahawks (8-6)
Dallas Cowboys (8-6)

- Sun., 1:05 p.m. (TV: FOX)
- at AT&T Stadium

tating losses before, but I think just the time frame in which we are in, the situation which we are in, the state of our roster, age-wise, so many different factors play into it. I think it's a different place for us."

Things to consider with the Cowboys seeking consecutive winning seasons for the first time since 2008-09:

ELLIOTT'S RETURN: Last year's NFL rushing leader was terse in his first media session, abruptly ending it after a series of questions about his time in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, during the suspension after saying he didn't want to talk about the saga any longer. The Cowboys say he's still the same fun-loving locker room presence from before the hiatus, and a motivated one at that.

"The fact that he probably never let his team down, never been in this position or situation, so to experience that, I know what it lit inside of him and, yeah, you'll see it," said Prescott, who was the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year with his backfield mate a year ago when the Cowboys had an NFC-best 13 wins.

RUN OVER: At one time this season, Seattle had one of the best run defenses in the NFL. Not so much the past two weeks. Led by rookie Leonard Fournette (101 yards), Jacksonville had 156 yards rushing.

The Rams had 244, the second-most under Carroll. "It's a situation where we've been down this road before and all it takes is focus and everybody doing their job to get back on the right track," linebacker Bobby Wagner said.

COWBOYS INJURIES: LT Tyron Smith injured his right knee against the Raiders and missed the first two practices of the week. Just selected to his fifth straight Pro Bowl, Smith missed two games earlier this season with back and groin issues. Byron Bell replaced an ineffective Chaz Green in the first of those two games and will start if Smith can't play. DL David Irving is likely to miss his third straight game with a concussion.

PROTECT RUSSELL: Seahawks QB Russell Wilson was sacked seven times last week by the Rams. He was forced into a number of mistakes, including a costly fumble trying to spin away from one sack and a backward pass that lost 23 yards trying to avoid another. It was one of Wilson's uglier performances on a stage where he's excelled during his career. Wilson was 23-4 coming into last week following a Seattle loss.



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