SPORTS

Steelers clinch first-round bye with blowout win over Texans

By KRISTIE RIEKEN Associated Press

HOUSTON - Ben Roethlisberger told his teammates they didn't need to make up for Antonio Brown's absence. He just wanted everyone to do what they could to help out, figuring that would be enough.

It certainly was.

"I know everyone was thinking about A.B. not being out there and trying to fill those shoes, but you can't fill those shoes," Roethlisberger said. "I just tried to tell them: 'Don't try to fill them, just try to be the best you can be."

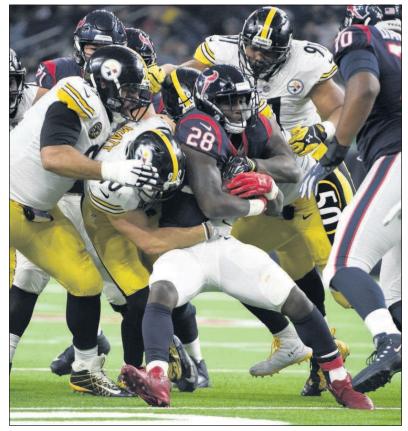
Roethlisberger threw for 226 yards and two touchdowns in the first game since Brown injured his calf, and the Steelers clinched a first-round playoff bye with a 34-6 win over the Texans. Roethlisberger threw passes to six players as Pittsburgh (12-3) romped over the lowly Texans (4-11) despite missing the NFL's leading receiver.

"It just kind of shows how many weapons we actually have in our offense ... everybody played well," Le'Veon Bell said. "Ben made the plays when he needed to. I made some plays on third down when I needed to. It was literally a total team effort.'

The Steelers led 20-0 at halftime after taking advantage of two turnovers by the Texans. Bell added a 10-yard TD run late in the third quarter and rookie JuJu Smith-Schuster made it 34-6 with an 18-yard touchdown grab in the fourth.

Bell finished with 14 carries for 69 yards and Smith-Schuster had six receptions for 75 yards.

"Significant day for us," Pitts-



AP Photo/Eric Christian Smith Houston Texans running back Alfred Blue (28) is wrapped up by Pittsburgh Steelers' T.J. Watt (90), Cameron Heyward (97), Bud Dupree (48) and Stephon Tuitt (91) during the second half of Mondays game in Houston.

burgh coach Mike Tomlin said. "Our last regular-season road game, finishing 7-1, getting our 12th win, securing a ticket to the second round. All very positive things, but it's kind of the culmination of being singularly focused on the next opportunity.'

T.J. Yates was 7 of 16 for 83 yards and a touchdown for the Texans, who lost their fifth straight game and for the eighth time in nine

games

"It's brutal," coach Bill O'Brien said of Houston's skid. "It's been a tough year."

Yates made his second straight start since Tom Savage sustained a concussion. Yates left the game briefly on Monday to be evaluated for a concussion, and his replacement, Taylor Heinicke, sustained a concussion on his only full possession



Roethlisberger was replaced by backup Landry Jones with about six minutes remaining and the game well in hand.

The Steelers hurried and harassed Yates all day with Mike Hilton leading the way with three sacks and three quarterback hits, Cameron Heyward adding two and forcing a fumble. Hilton became the first cornerback with three sacks in a game since sacks became an official statistic in 1982.

The Texans couldn't do much right on a day their home stadium was overtaken by vocal Steelers fans waving their Terrible Towels. One of the few highlights came on an acrobatic 3-yard touchdown reception by DeAndre Hopkins in the fourth quarter. Hopkins deflected the ball with his right hand, reeled it in with his left and got both feet down before falling out of bounds for his NFL-best and franchise-record 13th touchdown reception.

Hopkins may have been the only one who wasn't impressed with the grab.

"I'm mad I didn't catch it the first time," he said. "Like me, who I am, I was supposed to catch that one the first time with my right hand.'

The Steelers took a 10-0 lead when Roethlisberger connected with Justin Hunter on a 5-yard touchdown pass in the first quarter. Alfred Blue had a 48-yard run on

the first play of the second quarter to get the Texans to the Pittsburgh 18-yard line. The Texans got to the 1 on second down later in that drive, but couldn't do anything on the next two plays before Yates was intercepted in the end zone.

Pittsburgh added a touchdown on a 1-yard run by Roosevelt Nix on the ensuing possession. Heyward sacked Yates three plays later and caused a fumble recovered by Bud Dupree to give the Steelers the ball right back.

Pittsburgh added a 36-yard field goal on the next drive to push the lead to 20-0.

Yates was sacked again on Houston's next possession and injured on the play. He left the game to be evaluated for a concussion, forcing the Texans to play Heinicke.

Heinicke finished that possession and remained in the game for the first drive of the third quarter while Yates was being evaluated. But Heinicke took a hard hit on a sack on the last play of that drive and had to be evaluated for a concussion, too.

FAMILÝ TIME

J.J. Watt didn't get to play on Monday as he recovers from a broken leg, but spent some time pregame with his brother, Pittsburgh rookie linebacker T.J. Watt. Houston's defensive end threw the ball around with T.J. and the brothers also posed for some pictures with their parents before the game.

T.J. was disappointed that his brother didn't get to play on Monday, but is looking forward to seeing him return next season.

"I wish he was out there just to be a dominant force for them," T.J. said. "But I know he'll come back bigger, faster and stronger."

Parity catching up to powerhouse Canada at world juniors hockey

By JOHN WAWROW Associated Press

Hockey

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Canada has more than one score to settle. The United States has a title to defend. And don't discount Sweden.

The 10-nation World Junior hockey championship tournament opens in Buffalo on Tuesday with numerous subplots. The most notable involves the question of whether parity is finally catching up to the Canadians.

Bring it on, says Canada manager and two-time world junior gold medalist Joel Bouchard.

"I played in '93 and '94, and it was not even close to what it is right now," Bouchard said.

By contrast, the U.S. has won three times, including a 5-4 shootout win over Canada — and in Canada no less — in the championship game in January. Finland has won twice and the Swedes and Russians once each.

No one is discounting chances Canada's of winning its 17th gold medal this time, especially with a roster stocked with eight first-round NHL draft picks. And yet, as Russian defenseman and New Jersey Devils prospect Yegor Zaitsev said through an interpreter: "Canada is not more favored than Russia."

It's a trend even Toronto



on/The Canadian Press via AP, File Paul Chias In this Jan. 5, 2017, file photo, United States players celebrate their victory over Canada in the final of the world junior championship in Montreal. The 10-nation tomorrow."

The Americans' 23-player roster features seven returnees, and nine

first-round picks. The U.S. is in the same pool as Canada, and the two will meet in international hockey's first outdoor game, which will be played at the NFL Buffalo Bills' New Era Field on Friday.

Sweden might finally be in line to medal after finishing fourth in each of the past three years.

The Swedes' roster is particularly strong in the back end with three goalies already drafted by NHL teams. The defense features Rasmus Dahlin, a potential No. 1 pick in next year's draft "He's good, but he's going to have a tough tournament," coach Tomas Monten said. "Everyone's going to be on him. But I think that's going to create more space for others." Sweden got a boost last week when the Buffalo Sabres assigned prospect Alexander Nylander to represent his country for a third consecutive tournament. Nylander finished tied for the world junior lead last year with 12 points (five goals, seven assists) in seven games.

considered somewhat of an unknown, despite having won medals for seven straight years. That included the 2011 title when the tournament was also held in Buffalo. Russia rallied from a 3-0 third-period deficit to beat Canada 5-3 in the final.

"The comeback was crazy. And I just felt so proud," said Russian defenseman Nikolai Knyzhov, who watched the victory on TV. "And now we're back here trying to do the same thing.

The loss marked the third time Canada has settled for silver since 2010, with its other two title-game defeats against the U.S.

"Every country is pushing it. And it's our job to keep bringing the bar higher and higher," he added. "We know everybody is looking at us. And that's good. That's what you want."

The landscape has dramatically shifted since 2009, when the Canadians set a world junior record by winning their fifth straight title.

In the eight years since, Canada has won just one gold medal — in 2015 with a team featuring Edmonton Oilers captain Connor McDavid.

Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock, who coached Canada to win the 1997 world junior title, couldn't help but acknowledge.

"On population base alone, the U.S. should take over one day eventually,' Babcock told The Associated Press. "But I'm going to get my passport and flag out and I'll be cheering for Canada to get back on track."

drawback One 1S Canada's inability to draw upon the nation's entire pool of players 20 and younger because the top talent is already competing in the NHL. McDavid, for example, could have represented Canada for two

tournament is being played at Buffalo, N.Y., and opens on Tuesday, Dec. 26. It will feature Canada and the U.S. playing an outdoor game at the NFL Buffalo Bills' New Era Field on Friday, Dec. 29.

more years, but was instead busy producing at more than a point-a-game pace while winning last season's NHL MVP honor during his first two years in Edmonton.

USA Hockey is enjoying a golden era by doubling its medal count from five to 10 (four gold, one silver and five bronze) since 2010. The surge reflects a rise of registration, nationwide and attributed to the NHL's expansion into nontradifional markets such as Arizona, where 2016 No. 1

draft pick Auston Matthews grew up rooting for the Covotes.

The test for the Americans is becoming the first U.S. team to win consecutive titles, and first nation since Canada's five-year run to repeat as champions.

"Honestly, I would never say pressure," U.S. coach Bob Motzko said. "I would be foolish to waste energy having those feelings. I love the process. I'm more nervous about what we're going to do at practice

Russians The are

This past year's shootout loss to the Americans still stings for Canada's returning players.

"There's no point in trying to avoid it. It's obviously there," defenseman Jake Bean said. "It kind of fills you every day to be on the ice, just make sure you do everything just that much more intensely, that much more focused and just try not to leave it down to a question or a chance."

AP Hockey Writer Larry Lage, in Detroit, and AP Sports Writer Mitch Stacey, in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report.

Local slate

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL

- Thursday Ione vs. Echo (at Helix), 1:30 p.m. Heppner vs. Liberty Christian (WA) (at Irrigon), 4:30 p.m.
- Trout Lake (WA) at Helix, 4:30 p.m. Riverside at Stevenson (WA), 5 p.m. Pendleton at Mountain View, 6 p.m. Silverton at Hermiston, 7 p.m. Mac-Hi vs. Pilot Rock (at Irrigon), 7 p.m. Waitsburg (WA) at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m. South Wasco vs. Nixyaawii (at Helix),
- 7:30 p.m. Umatilla vs. TBD (At Salem Acadmey) TBD

Friday

- Pendleton vs. Grants Pass (at Summit
- Heppner vs. Waitsburg (WA) (at Irrigon), 1:30 p.m. Condon/Wheeler vs. Tri-City Prep (WA) (at Pendleton Convention), 1:30 p.m. Echo vs. Trout Lake (WA) (at Helix), 1:30 p.m. Mae Hive, Liborty, Christian (WA) (at
- Mac-Hi vs. Liberty Christian (WA) (at
- Mac-Hi vs. Liberty Christian (VVA) (at Irrigon), 3 p.m. Burns vs. Weston-McEwen (at Pendleton Convention), 4:30 p.m. Ione vs. Nixyaavui (at Helix), 4:30 p.m. South Wasco at Helix, 7:30 p.m. Pilot Rock at Irrigon, 7:30 p.m. Hermiston at Crescent Valley, 7:30 p.m. Umatilla at Salem Academy Tournament, TBD
- t TBD

PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

Wednesday Hermiston vs. Oregon City (at Lake Oswego), 7 p.m.

- Thursday Mac-Hi vs. Pilot Rock (at Irrigon), Noon Ione vs. Echo (at Helix), Noon Heppner vs. Liberty Christian (WA) (at Irrigon), 3 p.m
- Trout Lake (WA) at Helix, 3 p.m. Riverside at Stevenson (WA), 3:30 p.m. Waitsburg (WA) at Irrigon, 6 p.m. Nixyaawii vs. South Wasco (at Helix),
- 6 p.m. Pendleton at Mountain View, 7:45 p.m.
- Umatilla vs. Western Mennonite (at Salem Academy), 8 p.m. Hermiston at Lake Oswego Nike Shootout, TBD
- Friday Heppner vs. Waitsburg (WA), Noon Trout Lake (WA) vs. Echo (at Helix), Noon Condon/Wheeler vs. Tri-City Prep (WA) (at Pendleton Convention), Noon Mac-Hi vs. Liberty Christian (WA) (at
- Irrigon), 3 p.m
- Burns vs. Weston-McEwen (at Pendleton

Convention), 3 p.m. Ione vs. Nixyaawii (at Helix), 3 p.m. Pendleton vs. Lake Washington (WA) (at Bend), 4 p.m. Pilot Rock at Irrigon, 6 p.m. South Wasco at Helix, 6 p.m Hermiston at Lake Oswego Nike Shootout, TBD Umatilla at Salem Academy Tournament, TBD

PREP WRESTLING

Saturdav Pendleton, Mac-Hi, Riverside, Irrigon Echo, Heppner at Schimmel Memorial Tournament (Pendleton HS), 9 a.m.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

BMCC vs. Everett (at North Idaho), 2 p.m. Friday EOU at Walla Walla, 1:30 p.m. Saturday EOU at Walla Walla, 8 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Saturday BMCC at Pacific University JV, 4 p.m. Friday EOU at Walla Walla, 11:30 a.m. Saturday EOU at Walla Walla, 6 p.m.

Basketball

NBA EASTERN CONFERENCE					
Atlantic Division	י w	L Pct GB			
Boston	27	10.730			
Toronto	23	8.742 —			
New York	17	16.515 7			
Philadelphia	15	18.455 9			
Brooklyn	12	20 .375 111/2			
Southeast Divis	ion				
	W	L Pct GB			
Washington	19	15.559 —			
Miami	17	16.515 11/2			
Charlotte	12	21.364 61/2			
Orlando	11	23.324 8			
Atlanta	8	25 .242 101⁄2			
Central Division					
	W	L Pct GB			
Cleveland	24	10.706 —			
Indiana	19	14 .576 41⁄2			
Detroit	18	14 .563 5			
Milwaukee	17	14 .548 51⁄2			
Chicago	10	22 .313 13			
WESTERN CONFERENCE					
Southwest Divis					
	W	L Pct GB			
Houston	25 23	7.781 —			
San Antonio					

1 [New Orleans Memphis Dallas	17 10 9	23	.515 .303 .265		
1	Northwest Divisi			_		
([Vinnesota Oklahoma City Denver Portland Utah	W 20 19 18 17 15	13 15 15 16	Pct .606 .559 .545 .515 .441	GB 1½ 2 3 5½	
	Pacific Division	w		Det	CP	
l	Golden State A. Clippers A. Lakers Sacramento Phoenix	27 13 11 11 12	7 19 20 21	Pct .794 .406 .355 .344 .343	13 14½ 15	
)) 	Philadelphia 105, 1 Golden State 99, 1 Nashington 111, E Uklahoma City 111 Minnesota at L.A. fuesday's Game ndiana at Detroit, foronto at Dallas, Zrlando at Miami, Chicago at Milwai Brooklyn at San A Memphis at Phoe Jtah at Denver, 6 Sacramento at L.4	Cleve Bosto 2, Ho Lake 4 p.r 4 p.r 4:30 ukee nton nix, 0 p.m.	eland on 10 oustc ers, l m. n.) p.m , 5 p. io, 5: 5 p.n	1 92 3 on 107 ate fin n. 30 p. n.	nish m.	
1 1 1 1 1 3::	Men's Basketball fop 25 Schedule Monday's Game No. 15 Miami 84, Mednesday's Ga Fursday's Gam Vo. 25 Creighton 30 p.m. (FS1)	Mida mes IePau rque es at No	dle Te il, 4:3 ite, 5 p. 23	0 p.m :30 p. Seto	n. (CBS m. (FS n Hall,	SN) 1)
Pacific at No. 20 Gonzaga, 6 p.m. (ESPN2 Women's Basketball Top 25 Schedule Monday-Wednesday						

No games schedule Thursday's Games

Nursuay S demes No. 19 Green Bay at Wright State, 1:30 p.m. Illinois at No. 15 Maryland, 3 p.m. Penn State at No. 21 Michigan, 3 p.m. Syracuse at No. 2 Notre Dame, 4 p.m. No. 3 Louisville at Georgia Tech, 4 p.m. Jacksonville at No. 13 Florida State, 4 p.m. No. 9 Work Virginia at TCU 4/20 p.m. No. 9 West Virginia at TCU, 4:30 p.m. No. 24 Oklahoma St. at Texas Tech, 4:30 p.m. Miss. Valley St. at No. 5 Mississippi St., 5 p.m. No. 6 Baylor at Kansas State, 5 p.m.

No. 8 Texas at Oklahoma, 5 p.m. No. 12 Ohio State at Nebraska, 5 p.m. No. 18 Villanova at Creighton, 5 p.m. SMU at No. 22 Texas A&M, 5 p.m. No. 23 Iowa at Wisconsin, 5 p.m.

Hockey

SCOREBOARD

NHL EASTERN CONFERENCE				
Atlantic Divi	sion			
Tampa Bay Toronto Boston Montreal Florida Detroit Ottawa Buffalo	GP W 35 26 37 22 34 19 36 16 36 15 35 13 34 11 36 9	L 7 14 10 16 15 15 20	2 54	98 114 103 119 96 113
Metropolita	n Divisi 3P W	on L	OT Pts	GF GA
New Jersey Columbus Washington N.Y. Rangers N.Y. Islanders Carolina Pittsburgh Philadelphia	35 21 37 22 37 22 36 19 36 19 35 16 37 18 36 15	9 13 13 13 13 12 16 13	5 47 2 46 2 46 4 42 4 42 7 39 3 39 8 38	113 103 105 99 114 107 117 104 130 127 99 109 104 118
WESTERN C Central Divis		ENC	E.	
St. Louis Nashville Winnipeg Dallas Chicago Minnesota	GP W 38 23 35 21 37 20 37 20 35 17 36 18 35 17	L 13 9 11 14 13 15 15	OT Pts 2 48 5 47 6 46 3 43 5 39 3 39 3 37	113 94 116 99 121 105 110 106 103 94
Vegas Los Angeles San Jose Anaheim Calgary Edmonton Vancouver	GP W 34 23	L 9 11 13 15 17 17 25	4 42 8 40 3 39 2 36	119 100 109 85 95 84 101 108 101 106 108 113 98 121
Monday-Tuesday No games scheduled Wednesday's Games Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders, 4 p.m. Montreal at Carolina, 4 p.m. Ottawa at Boston, 4 p.m. Columbus at Pittsburgh, 4 p.m. Detroit at New Jersey, 4 p.m. Nashville at St. Louis, 5 p.m. Washington at N.Y. Bangers, 5 p.m.				

Washington at N.Y. Rangers, 5 p.m. Dallas at Minnesota, 5 p.m.

Edmonton at Winnipeg, 5 p.m. Arizona at Colorado, 6 p.m. Vegas at Anaheim, 7 p.m.

NICI

Football

NFL				
AMERICAN CO East W y-New England1 Buffalo 8 Miami 6 N.Y. Jets 5 South	L	ENCE F PA 0.800432290 0.533280343 0.400265371 0.333292356		
W y-Jacksonville10 Tennessee 8 Houston 4 Indianapolis 3 North	L 5 7 11 12	T Pct PF PA 0.667407253 0.533319346 0.267325414 0.200241391		
y-Pittsburgh 12 Baltimore 9 Cincinnati 6 Cleveland 0 West		T Pct PF PA 0.800 378 284 0.600 368 272 0.400 259 322 0.000 210 382		
W y-Kansas City 9 L.A. Chargers 8 Oakland 6 Denver 5 NATIONAL COT East W y-Philadelphia12 Dallas 8 Washington 7 N.Y. Giants 2 South	L 6 7 8 10 NFERI 2 7 8 13	T Pct PF PA 0.600388 315 0.533325 262 0.429281 324 0.333265 355 ENCE T Pct PF PA 0.857438 279 0.533348 332 0.467332 370 0.433228 378		
W x-New Orleans 11 x-Carolina 11 Atlanta 9 Tampa Bay 4 North	L 1 4 4 6 11	T Pct PF PA 0.733424 295 .733353 305 0.600331 305 .600331 358 0.267304 358		
W y-Minnesota 12 Detroit 8 Green Bay 7 Chicago 5 West	L 3 7 8 10	T Pct PF PA 0.800359242 0.533375365 0.467309349 0.333254297		
y-L.A. Rams 11 Seattle 9 Arizona 7 San Francisco 5 x-clinched playof y-clinched divisio		T Pct PF PA 0.733465295 0.600342306 0.467269337 0.333297370		
Week 16 Results Baltimore 23, Indianapolis 16 Minnesota 16, Green Bay 0				

Minnesota 16, Green Bay 0 Chicago 20, Cleveland 3

New England 37, Buffalo 16 L.A. Chargers 14, N.Y. Jets 7 Washington 27, Denver 11 Carolina 22, Tampa Bay 19 Carolina 122, Tarlipa Bay 19 Cincinnat 26, Detroit 17 Kansas City 29, Miami 13 L.A. Rams 27, Tennessee 23 New Orleans 23, Atlanta 13 Seattle 21, Dallas 12 Arizona 23, N.Y. Giants 0 San Francisco 44, Jacksonville 33 Pittsburgh 34, Houston 6 Oakland at Philadelphia, late finish Week 17 Sunday's Games N.Y. Jets at New England, 10 a.m. Washington at N.Y. Giants, 10 a.m. Chicago at Minnesota, 10 a.m. Dallas at Philadelphia, 10 a.m. Green Bay at Detroit, 10 a.m. Cleveland at Pittsburgh, 10 a.m Houston at Indianapolis, 10 a.m. Houston at Indianapolis, 10 a.m. Cincinnati at Baltimore, 1:25 p.m. New Orleans at Tampa Bay, 1:25 p.m. Kansas City at Denver, 1:25 p.m. Jacksonville at Tennessee, 1:25 p.m. Buffalo at Miami, 1:25 p.m. Arizona at Seattle, 1:25 p.m. San Francisco at L.A. Rams, 1:25 p.m. Oakland at L.A. Chargers, 1:25 p.m. Carolina at Atlanta, 1:25 p.m. NCAA Bowl Schedule TUESDAY

Heart of Dallas Bowl West Virginia (7-5) vs. Utah (6-6), 10:30 m (ESPN) a.m. (ESPN) Quick Lane Bowl Detroit Northern Illinois (8-4) vs. Duke (6-6), 2:15 p.m. (ESPN) Cactus Bowl Phoenix Kansas St. (7-5) vs. UCLA (6-6), 6 p.m. (ESPN) WEDNESDAY

MelpinesDat Independence Bowl Shreveport, La. Southern Mississippi (8-4) vs. Florida State (6-6), 10:30 a.m. (ESPN) Pinstripe Bowl Dence N V Bronx, N.Y. Boston College (7-5) vs. Iowa (7-5), 2:15 p.m. (ESPN) Foster Farms Bowl Santa Clara, Calif. Arizona (7-5) vs. Purdue (6-6), 5:30 p.m. (FOX) Texas Bowl Houstor Texas (6-6) vs. Missouri (7-5), 6 p.m. (ESPN