

# Steelers overcome slow start, drop winless Dolphins 27-14

By WILL GRAVES  
Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers stopped beating themselves long enough to keep the Miami Dolphins winless.

James Conner ran for 145 yards and a touchdown, and Mason Rudolph overcame a shaky start to throw for 251 yards and two scores as the Steelers pulled away for a 27-14 victory on Monday night.

Pittsburgh (3-4) spotted the Dolphins (0-7) a 14-point first quarter lead before steadying itself to win consecutive games for the first time since ripping off six straight in the middle of last season. Steelers safety Minkah Fitzpatrick, acquired in a trade with Miami last month, picked off Dolphins quarterback Ryan Fitzpatrick twice, and Pittsburgh forced four turnovers in all to avoid an embarrassing loss that would have effectively ended the com-



Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster (19) climbs down from the stands after celebrating his touchdown with fans during the second half of Monday's game against the Miami Dolphins in Pittsburgh.

AP Photo/Don Wright

petitive portion of its season.

Rudolph completed 20 of 36 passes, including a 45-yard touchdown to rookie Diontae Johnson late in the second quarter and a 26-yard strike to JuJu Smith-Schuster in the third quarter that

put the Steelers in control. Smith-Schuster caught five passes for 103 yards, his first 100-yard game of the year.

Ryan Fitzpatrick passed for 190 yards with two touchdowns and two picks, a rare hot start couldn't pre-

vent Miami from staying winless through seven games for the first time since 2011. The Dolphins have dropped 10 straight dating back to last season.

Rudolph stressed he wasn't worried about the

long-term effects of a frightening concussion he suffered against Baltimore on Oct. 6, when he was knocked unconscious from a helmet-to-helmet hit by Ravens safety Earl Thomas. Still, playing for the first time in three weeks, he looked shaky at best and completely out of sorts at worst during an ugly opening quarter that saw the Dolphins grab their first two-touchdown lead over any opponent in more than a year.

Pittsburgh's first possession ended with Rudolph throwing a pick to Xavien Howard — back in the lineup after missing two games with a knee injury — and its second ended with an ugly fourth-down misfire by Rudolph.

The Dolphins, in the midst of a massive and ceaseless roster overhaul under first-year coach Brian Flores that included trading running back Kenyan Drake to Arizona on Monday for a conditional sixth-round pick in next year's draft, showed

their first extended signs of life in an already lost season.

Fitzpatrick found Albert Wilson for a 5-yard touchdown after Howard's interception, and Allen Hurns plowed through several tackles on his way to a 12-yard score that gave Miami — a 14-point underdog — a 14-point advantage for the first time since Oct. 7, 2018. The Dolphins couldn't hold on then, allowing the Bengals to rally for a victory. A year later, not much has changed.

The Steelers pulled within 14-10 at the break thanks to the first of Minkah Fitzpatrick's two interceptions and some curious defensive play-calling by the Dolphins.

Leading by 11 points and with Pittsburgh facing third-and-20 outside of field goal range, Miami opted to blitz and didn't bother to guard Johnson, who took a short pass from Rudolph and used a couple of downfield blocks by James Washington to weave his way 45 yards to the end zone.

# Bon Voyage: Road teams win first 5 Series games for third time

By RONALD BLUM  
AP Baseball Writer

HOUSTON — Justin Verlander, Joe Smith and Will Harris tossed the ball at Minute Maid Park as slanting light from the late-afternoon sun streaked through the large glass panels and across right field.

After arriving home at 4:30 a.m., they were back in familiar surroundings, yes, but home, sweet, home has been anything but in this contrarian World Series. For just the third time in Series history, the visiting team has won the first five games.

"I don't think there's really a rhyme or reason why maybe that's happened," Harris said.

In a tale of two cities, the Nationals outscored the Astros 17-7 in the first two

games at Minute Maid Park last week. After the travel day, Houston had a capital time in Washington, outscoring the Nats 19-3.

Road-field advantage? "I think I would have rather played the last three games on the road, with the outcome," Washington shortstop Trea Turner said with a chuckle after Houston swept three games at Nationals Park.

This is the first time the road team has won the first five games since 1996, when the Braves rocked the New York Yankees by a combined 16-1 in two games to spurt ahead on the road, lost the final three games played at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium, then were beaten in Game 6 in the Bronx.

Going back to the Windy City Series of 1906, when the



Houston Astros grounds crew members Jake Cooley, left, and Trey Felch repaint the World Series logo for Game 6 at Minute Maid Park on Monday. The Astros will play the Washington Nationals on Tuesday.

AP Photo/Eric Gay

home team alternated each day, the Chicago White Sox won Games 1, 3 and 5 at the West Side Grounds and the Cubs took Games 2 and 4 at South Side Park. The White Sox finally gave the home faithful something to cheer

in Game 6, bursting to a six-run lead and winning 8-3.

Houston was 60-21 at Minute Maid this season, the best home record in the major leagues since the 1998 New York Yankees, and Washington's 50 home wins

led to third-most in the NL. Eighteen of the 30 teams had winning records at home during the regular season, and overall clubs were 1,286-1,143 at home for a .529 winning percentage, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Home clubs then went 17-13 in the postseason through the League Championship Series.

But the World Series has been a bon voyage of late. Including Boston's victories at Dodger Stadium in Games 4 and 5 last year, visiting teams have won seven straight World Series games for the first time.

Washington first baseman Ryan Zimmerman doesn't think too much of the trend.

"I don't think home and road matters in baseball, other than the walk-off,

obviously," he said. "During the season when you're home for a 10-game homestand and you get to sleep in your bed and other teams are maybe on a long road trip, but during the playoffs you have off days."

Washington and Houston looked like two different teams after the change of ballparks. The Astros stranded 20 at home and were 3 for 17 with runners in scoring position, then went 7 for 21 with RISP in D.C.

"The confidence never left us," Astros reliever Joe Smith said. "It was just a matter of time. You could feel it coming. I could feel it coming. I think we all could feel it coming."

After going 7 for 21 with runners in scoring position on the road, the Nationals were 1 for 21 at home.

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