Sports

L.A. RAMS 38, MINNESOTA 31

Goff has record night, Rams hold off Vikings with offensive onslaught

By Greg Beacham
AP Sports Writer

(Wally Skalij/Los Angeles Times/TNS

Los Angeles Rams wide receiver Robert Woods (17) is felled by Minnesota Vikings cornerback Trae Waynes (26) after a reception in the second quarter at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Thursday. The Rams won, 38-31.

LOS ANGELES — Any lingering questions about Jared Goff's ability to be the next standout quarterback in a horned helmet are withering while he destroys defenses this season.

The Vikings were his latest victims Thursday night when Goff threw for 465 yards and five touchdowns of increasing brilliance. Yet Minnesota still had a chance until the Los Angeles Rams' defense kept them unbeaten.

Goff set career highs while winning a scintillating duel with Minnesota's Kirk Cousins and leading the Rams to a 38-31 victory.

Goff and Cousins got together at midfield afterward, exchanging compliments about their eye-catching performances and their bright futures ahead.

"We're really clicking right now," Goff said. "I feel good about where we're at, and we have a lot of season ahead of us."

Goff was perfect, at least according to his passer rating of 158.3 in his third consecutive 300-yard game. He went 26 of 33 in the Rams' most prolific passing performance since 1982.

Yet the raw numbers don't describe the series of high-difficulty, high-reward throws that he completed in a brilliant four-touchdown first half.

He threw a 70-yard beauty of a TD pass to Cooper Kupp, who then caught a perfectly thrown 19-yard scoring pass later in the second quarter on his way to a monster 162-yard receiving game. Todd Gurley, Brandin Cooks and Robert Woods also hauled in scoring throws designed by Sean McVay and executed flawlessly by his quarterback.

The Rams (4-0) are off to their best start since 2001, when Kurt Warner, Marshall Faulk and their fleet-footed receivers made the franchise's last appearance in the Super Bowl.

"It can't get much better than how we're playing right now," Gurley said. "I mean, it can. But it can't."

For all of the Rams' offensive brilliance, Cousins and the Vikings (1-2-1) were within a touchdown with the ball at midfield and 2 minutes to play. Cousins passed for 422 yards and three touchdowns, but Minnesota lost when Rams rookie defensive lineman John Franklin-Myers strip-sacked Cousins near midfield with 1:18 to play.

"If you don't bounce back, if you don't have an answer, you won't be in the league very long," said Cousins, who went 36 for 50. "This league will chew you up and spit you out if you don't show up every week. We felt like there was a huge sense of urgency, and we played that way."

Cousins also got a moment to chat with McVay, his former offensive coordinator in Washington. Cousins credits McVay for a major role in his development into an $84 million quarterback, and Goff has spent untold hours watching film of Cousins' progress with McVay.

"It's fun for us, personally," Goff said of his duel with Cousins, who hit Aldrick Robinson for two scores.

"I don't know if it's fun for the whole team, but it's cool," Goff said. "Got a lot of respect for him and the way he plays, and I just think he's such a great quarterback. To get a chance to go against him like that and kind of duke it out, I told him after the game how much I appreciated the battle with him."

A healthy throng of purple-clad fans turned out for the Vikings' first game in Los Angeles since 1993 — but one week after giving up 27 points in the first half and getting blown out as 16 1/2-point favorites in Buffalo, the Vikings gave up 28 before halftime against LA.

"We did not play well defensively," Vikings coach Mike Zimmer said. "Offensively we moved the ball well, but we had too many missed tackles, and too many people were left wide open. I've not ever had a team that's been this poor in pass coverage. We are going to have to look at everything."

The Vikings trimmed LA's lead to 31-28 late in the third quarter with Adam Thielen's 45-yard TD catch and a 2-point conversion.

Goff promptly surpassed his previous career highs for yards passing during a swift drive ending in Robert Woods' 31-yard TD catch, and the Rams' defense hung on while the offense went scoreless in the fourth quarter, partly thanks to a missed 28-yard field goal by Sam Ficken.

Goff found Kupp with two beautiful TD throws in the first half, the first hitting Kupp in stride on that 70-yard sprint , and the second eluding two Vikings and dropping into Kupp's hands deep in the end zone.

"Jared put it in about a 6-inch box that only he could fit it into," McVay said.

PAC-12 FOOTBALL

Night games are here to stay for Pac-12 football

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

Pac-12 After Dark brings drama, even in the daylight.

Those late West Coast games are here to stay, however, despite criticism that they are a challenge for the league, its teams and the fans.

"We've got eight of what we call special date games, Thursday or Friday night games, every year. Those have been very successful for ESPN or Fox just from a purely ratings perspective. And also you don't have the clutter, or the fragmentation of a lot of multiple games going on," Pac-12 Commissioner Larry Scott said. "So they work well."

Some have long argued the late starts in the Pac-12 mean that East Coast viewers don't necessarily see key games, putting the league's teams and star players at a disadvantage when it comes to poll voting or postseason award consideration.

Coaches have voiced concern about the late starts because they can wreak havoc with travel schedules and take a toll on athletes. For example, road teams that have a 7 p.m. Saturday kickoff might not be back home until early Sunday morning. If the team has to turn around to play another road game the next week, it's at a disadvantage.

But the reality is that the league has a 12-year, $3 billion contract with ESPN and Fox. Good West Coast teams are going to get those late national time slots because there is no other competition for them.

Scott, who spoke to reporters from this weekend's evening game between Stanford and Oregon (5 p.m. start Pacific), said the league limits teams to playing just one of those games per season. Usually it's no more than two in every three years, he said.

"They've been big showcases. Our broadcast partners like them because they get good ratings. We've got plenty of challenges in this conference with time zone, and being willing to be a little bit flexible and willing to play those has been good for our league," he said.

Saturday's game in Eugene, which was the "Saturday Night Football" game on ABC, was the most watched ESPN/ABC Pac-12 Conference game in nearly four years with a total live audience of 4.26 million viewers, according to ESPN. The audience peaked at nearly 6 million viewers for Stanford's 38-31 overtime victory.

Some ticketholders aren't fans of late start times, especially when there's travel involved to stadiums. Take Eugene: It's about a two-hour drive from Portland and possibly more on game day, then there's TV timeouts that stretch the actual game before the lengthy late-night drive home.

Alumni on the opposite coast sometimes have to stay up until the wee hours to watch their teams.

Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre noted that his team is coming off a bye before hosting UCLA tonight. He said the league continues to address coaches' scheduling concerns over late starts.

"We also understand that we are going to have to play some night games at prime time, which honestly if you're winning games and playing at night, you're kind of pumped about it. Would you rather play at 2 o'clock in the afternoon? Of course," he said.

Last season, 24 games started at 7 p.m. local time or later. This year's number hasn't been determined because TV slots are often only determined a couple of weeks before games, not the start of the season.

Rangers shut out Mariners

By Todd Milles
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Interim manager Don Wakamatsu is getting a long September look at some of the future pitching pieces of the Texas Rangers.

Rookie right-hander Ariel Jurado is stating his case to be included in the Rangers' 2019 rotation. And hard-throwing Jose Leclerc just keeps putting up zeroes at the back end of the bullpen.

Jurado gave up two hits in six innings, first baseman Ronald Guzman broke a tie with an RBI single in the seventh and the Rangers snapped a three-game losing streak with a 2-0 victory over the Seattle Mariners on Thursday night.

Guzman hammered reliever Zach Duke's sinking fastball into the right-center gap, scoring Ryan Rua, who reached base on a one-out double.

Guzman scored after right-hander Shawn Armstrong plunked Isiah Kiner-Falefa in the helmet with the bases loaded later in the inning.

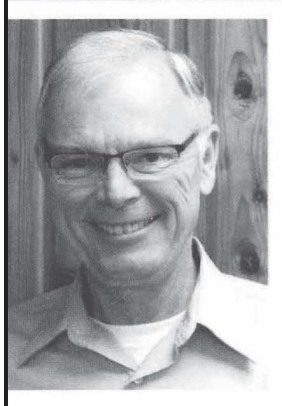
Jurado (5-5) beat the Mariners for the second time in six days. This time, he induced nine ground-ball outs and struck out three.

"That sinker, and his ability to get guys to swing early in the count, is critical," Wakamatsu said. "I thought he pitched a heck of a ballgame."

The only hits Jurado gave up Thursday were Daniel Vogelbach's opposite-field single to left field in the second inning, and Ben Gamel's single to right field in the sixth. At one point, he retired 10 batters in a row.

"We didn't do much at all," said Mariners manager Scott Servais, whose club was shut out for the seventh time this season.

Minding the County's Business



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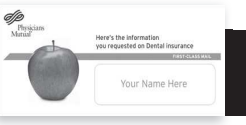

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