

Sports

Rams stifle Seahawks

■ Russell Wilson, Seattle offense struggle in season-ending playoff loss

By Tim Booth
AP Sports Writer

SEATTLE — Quietly, Aaron Donald, Jared Goff and the rest of the Los Angeles Rams seethed.

They watched less than two weeks ago as the Seattle Seahawks loudly celebrated a division title the Rams felt they gave away. Los Angeles desperately wanted another shot.

Behind a lot of Cam Akers churning yards on the ground and mostly a great defense, the Rams are moving on in the NFC playoffs at the expense of the Seahawks.

“We come up here, and all week we were told how good they are and how we snuck into the playoffs,” Goff said. “Two weeks ago you saw them smoking cigars and getting all excited about beating us, and winning the division, and we were able to come up here and beat them.”

Akers rushed for 131 yards and a touchdown, Darius Williams returned Russell Wilson’s interception 42 yards for a score, and the Rams beat the Seahawks 30-20 in the NFC wild-card playoff game Saturday.

“A lot of guys stepped up and answered the bell in a big way,” Rams coach Sean McVay said. “Darius Williams showing up, I thought that was a huge momentum shift for us.”

The best defense in the league during the regular season carried its dominance into the playoffs — even while missing unanimous All-Pro tackle Aaron Donald for much of the second half. No team was better at limiting yards or points than



Mike Siegel/Seattle Times-TNS

Los Angeles Rams defensive back Darius Williams (31) scores after intercepting a pass from Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson on Saturday, Jan. 9, at Lumen Field in Seattle. The Rams advanced with a 30-20 win.

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— Seattle head coach Pete Carroll

the Rams (11-6) and they continued to torment Wilson and the Seahawks (12-5).

Seattle’s quarterback was under siege from the defensive front and a secondary that minus one play never let DK Metcalf or Tyler Lockett break loose. Donald, before leaving with a rib injury, and Jalen Ramsey were superb. But so were other role players such as Troy Reeder, Jordan Fuller and Leonard Floyd.

Floyd had two of the Rams’ five sacks. Two of the others belonged to Donald. The Rams allowed just 278 total yards and 11 first downs.

The victory sent the Rams into next week’s divisional playoff round, likely at top-

seeded Green Bay unless Chicago upsets New Orleans.

“We’re excited about competing to go see who we play next and see if we can keep this thing rolling,” McVay said. “But we’ll enjoy this.”

Williams’ third interception against Wilson after picking him off twice in Los Angeles came as he jumped a wide receiver screen intended for Metcalf and returned it untouched for a 13-3 lead midway through the second quarter.

Akers added a 5-yard TD run just before halftime for a 20-10 lead. It proved enough against a Seattle offense disjointed and confused nearly from the start.

Wilson had one of his worst playoff performances. He was 11 of 27 for 174 yards. Wilson connected with Metcalf on a pair of TDs: 51 yards in the first half off a broken play, and a 12-yard TD with 2:28 left to make the score more respectable.

Seattle never played with the lead and was 2 of 14 on third downs. It’s first home playoff game in four years was a dud without its raucous home crowd, and the Sea-hawks saw their 10-game home playoff win streak snapped.

Their last home playoff loss came in January 2005 to the St. Louis Rams.

“I told these guys I have no place in my brain for this outcome,” Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. “We were planning on winning and moving on.”

McCollum has 37 as Blazers race past Kings

By Joe Stiglich
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — CJ McCollum scored 37 points, making six 3-pointers, and the Portland Trail Blazers coasted to a 125-99 victory over the Sacramento Kings on Saturday night.

The Trail Blazers led by as many as 31 and faced little resistance from a Kings team that gave up 144 points to Toronto just a night earlier.

Sacramento (4-6) didn’t fare much better defensively Saturday and lost for the fifth time in six games.

McCollum scored 16 points in the first half as the Blazers took a 66-49 lead into the break. Then he scored 16 in a roughly seven-minute span to begin the third as Portland rattled off a 22-8 run that ended any hopes of a Sacramento comeback.

“He’s just playing. He’s finding his rhythm,” Portland forward Carmelo Anthony said. “He’s in his groove right now, and he’s leading us at this moment. We all know he can score the basketball, but it’s how he’s doing it. ... His feel for the game is getting better each year.”

Damian Lillard scored 17 points for Portland and Anthony added 13.

Marvin Bagley III had 15 points for the Kings, who shot just 40.7 % (33 for 81) from the floor. They went 8 for 30 from beyond the arc and committed 15 turnovers that Portland converted into 30 points. But defense is the biggest issue for the Kings right now.

“We just have to understand at this level, against a team like Portland and whoever we’re playing, we have to bring it every single night, and that’s what we’re looking for,” Kings coach Luke Walton said. “It was a tough one for us tonight.”

The Blazers made eight of their first 13 shots on the way to a 38-point first quarter. The Kings shot 42.5% from the floor in the first half without a single scorer in double digits.

TIP-INS

- Trail Blazers: With a 3-pointer midway through the third quarter, McCollum passed Rasheed Wallace (9,119 points) for 10th place on Portland’s career scoring list. Next up is Mychal Thompson at 9,215. ... Enes Kanter finished with 11 points and 15 rebounds.
- Kings: Center Richaun Holmes (sore left ankle) was scratched about 30 minutes before opening tip. Walton switched to a three-guard lineup and rookie Tyrese Haliburton made his first NBA start. Haliburton finished with 12 points and eight assists.

UP NEXT

- Trail Blazers: Host Toronto on Monday, having split the season series with the Raptors each of the past two seasons.
- Kings: Host Indiana on Monday, the fourth game of a seven-game homestand.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Bills hold off Colts for first playoff win since 1995

By John Wawrow
AP Sports Writer

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Quarterback Josh Allen and safety Micah Hyde teamed up to make the Buffalo Bills’ losing past history.

Now do you Bill-ieve?

In a season in which the Bills busted numerous slumps, Allen became Buffalo’s first starter in a quarter century to win a playoff game.

And Hyde ensured the Bills wouldn’t endure another second-half collapse as happened last year in a wild-card loss to Houston, or last-second touchdown.

With Buffalo the AFC East champions for the first time since 1995 and hosting their first playoff game since ’96, Allen threw two touchdown passes and scored another rushing in leading the Bills to

a 27-24 win over the Indianapolis Colts in a wild-card game Saturday.

Hyde batted down Philip Rivers’ desperation pass as time ran out in helping Buffalo snap an 0-6 postseason skid by winning its first playoff game since a 37-22 win over Miami on Dec. 30, 1995.

The past was very much present in Allen’s mind when reflecting on how

Buffalo squandered a 16-0 third-quarter lead in a 22-19 overtime loss to Houston in his first career playoff appearance.

“Obviously we started off a little slow and we were able to get into a rhythm late. Made enough plays to win,” Allen said. “It’s new territory for myself, but it just gives us a chance to play next week.”

The end of the game was so

stunning, in which the Bills nearly squandered a 24-10 fourth-quarter lead, safety Jordan Poyer was still having difficulty trying to put the result in perspective.

“I haven’t had time to celebrate and take it in, but this is awesome for the Bills organization, the city, to be able to play a home game and get a victory,” said Poyer, in his fourth season in Buf-

falo. “Since 2017, we’ve been working at this, but a day like today, to come out on top, we worked so hard.”

Hyde’s pass defense eased memories of the Bills giving up DeAndre Hopkins’ leaping 43-yard touchdown catch in the final seconds of a 32-30 loss at Arizona on Nov. 15. Buffalo has won seven straight since for its longest winning streak since 1990.

OREGON MEN’S BASKETBALL

Ducks rally from 10-point halftime deficit, top Utah

By John Coon
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Trailing by 10 points at halftime, No. 17 Oregon picked up its intensity in the second half and rallied to avoid an upset bid by Utah.

Chris Duarte scored 25 points and Eric Williams Jr. added 19 to lift the Ducks to a 79-73 victory over the Utes on Saturday night.

LJ Figueroa scored 15 points for Oregon (9-2, 4-1 Pac-12) before exiting late in the second half with a left ankle injury. Amauri Hardy added 13. Oregon beat Utah for the 18th time in the last 20 games between the two schools.

The latest win for the Ducks in the series boiled down to hard-nosed

defense. Oregon forced 18 turnovers and scored 25 points off those turnovers. The Ducks tallied 10 steals.

“We just stayed active,” Duarte said.

Timmy Allen scored 23 points and Mikael Jantunen added a career-high 20 points to lead the Utes (4-4, 1-3). Pelle Larsson had 15 points, five rebounds, and five assists before fouling out in the final minute.

Utah shot 57% from the field but sputtered down the stretch after struggling to hold onto the ball.

The Utes’ last chance to pull an upset came when Riley Battin buried a 3-pointer to cut Oregon’s lead to 70-68 with 1:40 left. Chandler Lawson answered with a layup on the other end and the Ducks made

seven free throws in the final minute to close out a hard-fought win.

“The ball was moving, we were clicking,” Allen said. “They picked up the pressure in the second half and took us out of our rhythm a little bit.”

Utah executed flawlessly on offense for large stretches of the first half. The Utes used a combination of great ball movement, precision passing, and accurate shooting to keep Oregon on its heels.

The Utes made 10 consecutive shots over the final 6 1/2 minutes before halftime to carve out a 10-point lead on the Ducks. As a team, Utah shot 67% from the floor during the first half and recorded 13 assists on 18 baskets.

“That first half defensive effort was unacceptable,” Oregon coach Dana Altman said. “I can’t put it any other way.”

Allen supplied the biggest spark, totaling 17 points on 8-of-10 shooting in the first half. After Oregon went up 25-22 on a 3-pointer from Duarte, the Utes did not miss another field goal attempt before halftime. Allen scored three straight layups to light a fire under the rest of his team. He totaled five baskets during a 21-8 run over the final 5:20 of the first half that helped Utah take a 43-33 lead.

“He’s the head of our snake,” Utah coach Larry Krystkowiak said. “It’s a shame we couldn’t celebrate his birthday with a win.”

Oregon opened the second half by scoring baskets off three consecutive Utah turnovers. It helped the Ducks quickly erase the double-digit halftime deficit. Oregon finally climbed back ahead following a 3-point play from Hardy for a 50-48 lead.

“We needed a good start to the half after finishing the first half so poorly,” Altman said. “We needed something good to get our heads up and get guys on the same page.”

What changed after halftime for the Ducks, Duarte said, is they focused on defending much more aggressively on each possession.

“We were not playing hard,” Duarte said. “That’s it. We were not playing hard.”

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