

Sports

Browns stun Steelers

■ Cleveland races to 28-0 lead after one quarter and gets first playoff win since 1995

By Will Graves
AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH — So much for the weight of his-tory. Or practicing. Or having your head coach on the side-line. Or an emotional leader on the field.

The Cleveland Browns overcame all of it. The bur-den of carrying the mantle of a franchise that’s long been a punchline. A sched-ule ravaged by a COVID-19 outbreak. A rival that for years has treated them like a harmless little brother.

All of that’s over. For now. And maybe for good.

The Browns dismantled the Pittsburgh Steelers 48-37 in the wild-card round Sunday night, picking up the franchise’s first postsea-son victory in more than a quarter-century and earning a trip to Kansas City next Sunday to face the defending Super Bowl champions.

“We believe in the people in the room no matter what’s going on,” quarterback Baker Mayfield said. “We knew that everybody was counting us out. There was no extra pressure or anything. No one



Jeff Lange/Akron Beacon Journal-TNS

Cleveland Browns wide receiver Jarvis Landry (80) dives into the end zone to score during the first half of an NFL playoff game against the Pittsburgh Steelers on Jan. 10.

believed in us besides us.”

Playing with first-year head coach Kevin Stefanski, Pro Bowl guard Joel Bitonio and top cornerback Denzel Ward back in Cleveland after all tested positive for COVID-19, Cleveland (12-5) raced to the biggest first half by a road team in NFL play-off history then held on.

Mayfield threw for 263 yards and three touchdowns, including a screen pass that Nick Chubb turned into a 40-yard score that halted Pittsburgh’s momentum af-ter the Steelers pulled within 12. Kareem Hunt added 48

yards and two TDs on the ground while Cleveland’s defense forced five turnovers to hand the Steelers (12-5) a staggering loss.

The victory was the Browns’ first postseason triumph of any kind since beat-ing New England on New Year’s Day 1995 — three months before Mayfield was born — and their first playoff win on the road since Dec. 28, 1969.

The significance wasn’t lost on special teams coordinator Mike Priefer, a Cleveland native who found himself filling in when

Stefanski tested positive for COVID-19.

“I grew up (a Browns fan), so I know what this means,” Priefer said.

Cleveland did it despite practicing just once over the last two weeks and having lost 17 straight at Heinz Field. The Browns did it with efficiency and swagger. And they did it with Priefer at the controls and offensive coor-dinator Alex Van Pelt taking over the play-calling duties as Stefanski watched in his basement back in Ohio.

“We have a resilient team,” Mayfield said.

Bears’ blunders costly in playoff loss to Saints

By Guerry Smith
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Early in their playoff game against the Saints, Bears wide receiver Javon Wims raced into the end zone behind defenders on a trick play.

It turned out the joke was on Chicago.

Wims let an accurate throw drop right through his arms and bounce of his jersey number. The blunder was the first of several that took away any chance the bumbling Bears had to beat the Saints in a 21-9 loss on Sunday.

Seventh-seeded Chicago (8-9), which needed to play a clean game after backing into the NFC playoffs with a .500 regular season, never had another opportunity as good as the first one in a contest that remained tight for a while.

“When you have an opportunity to make some big plays, you have to be able to make those against a really good team,” Chicago coach Matt Nagy said. “We have to be better.”

Trailing just 7-3 at halftime, the Bears saw their chances disappear during Saints touchdown drives that consumed more than 16 minutes combined in New Or-leans’ first two second-half possessions.

Wims’ drop came after running back David Montgom-ery took a shotgun snap from the wildcat formation on first down at the New Orleans 40 and flipped it to quarterback Mitchell Trubisky, who launched a perfect deep ball.

Nagy said the Bears had kept the trick play in their pocket for several weeks, setting it up by running almost all of the time out of that formation.

“It was a touchdown,” Trubisky said. “You don’t get many opportunities like that to get your guy wide open be-hind the safety. I was excited it got called, and it definitely would have helped getting on the board early.”

Chicago got nothing out of that drive, failing to cut into a 7-0 deficit after the Saints had taken the lead on Michael Thomas’ 13-yard touchdown catch in the first quarter. Trubisky was knocked out of bounds 2 yards short of the marker as he tried to avoid a hit on a fourth-and-4 scramble from the New Orleans 34.

Why former Duck Penei Sewell is a top draft pick

The 2021 NFL Draft is generating unprecedented anticipation. Littered throughout mock drafts, franchises have opportunities to secure a possible franchise quarterback, as up to four sig-nal callers are being slated to be taken in the first round. Some organizations desperately need Clemson’s Trevor Lawrence or Ohio State’s Justin Fields.

But a quarterback can only shine with the right amount of protection. To build an of-fensive line takes proper scouting and more importantly, time. This draft contains an im-mense amount of potential on the offensive line, and leading the way is former Oregon Ducks star Penei Sewell.

This 6-foot-6, 330-pounder played 21 games for the Ducks, can play guard or tackle, and has shown athletic prowess that can make him a key component to any team’s rushing offense. During his 2019 season with the Ducks, Sewell won the Outland Trophy, which recognizes the top offensive lineman in the country. He has the balance and ability to battle the league’s top pass rushers.

Where might Sewell go in the draft? Let’s break it down.

First off, at the second pick the New York Jets can grab Sewell. Jets quarterback Sam Darnold spends an alarming amount of time throwing outside of the pocket as protection breaks down. The Jets did draft Mekhi Bec-ton last year, but obviously one man can’t revitalize their offensive line.



COREY KIRK

If not New York, Sewell can be a great addition to teams including the Dolphins (fourth pick), Gi-ants (11th) or even for the Bengals at the fifth pick to protect their franchise

signal caller Joe Burrow, who tore up his ACL this season during his rookie year.

For most fans, there is more appeal drafting a prolific quarterback, a physical wide receiver and the dangerous linebacker who can play all parts of the field. Getting an offensive linemen high in the draft just isn’t satisfying enough to turn the fate of a franchise. But assembling a strong offensive line is a key to protecting a quarterback and opening up holes for running backs.

Tom Brady wouldn’t have looked as good during his years in New England if it wasn’t for the likes of linemen Matt Light and Nate Solder. Aaron Rodgers helped lead the Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl 45 with Bryan Bulaga and Chad Clifton protecting him. The proof is there — to be successful a team needs a quality offensive line. And Sewell’s versa-tility ensures he can immediately make an impact on any team.

When April 29 rolls around, the first day of the draft, Duck fans will get to see one of their own get ready to make his mark in the National Football League. Though it is tempting to go for any of these quarterbacks, wide receivers or defensive stars, the team that goes after Sewell will receive a high draft grade, and a player who is destined to have a lengthy career on the line.

Duck women overwhelm Cal

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) — Kylee Watson scored a career high 12 points on 6-for-8 shooting and 11th-ranked Oregon obliterated Cal 100-41 on Sunday.

Taylor Chavez, Te-Hina Paopao and Nyara Sabally each scored 13 points to lead the Ducks, who had a half-dozen play-ers score in double figures.

After the Ducks (9-2, 7-2 Pac-12 Conference) built a quick 10-2 lead, Cal responded by outscoring the Ducks 13-8. But Oregon responded with a vengeance and outscored the Bears (0-10, 0-7) 28-4 for the remainder of the half and led 50-19 at halftime. The Ducks had runs of 18-2 and 12-0 during that stretch.

SCOREBOARD

<

Tires

LES SCHWAB

Be prepared for winter driving

WINTER

CHECKLIST

✓ TRACTION TIRES

✓ SNOW WHEELS

✓ TIRE STUDS

✓ CHAINS

✓ BATTERY

✓ SANDBAGS

✓ SIPING

✓ WIPER BLADES

DOING THE *RIGHT* THING SINCE 1952.®

Low Brothers Tire Service

541-523-3679

210 Bridge St. Baker City, OR