

NFL WEEK 5 WINNERS AND LOSERS

Chargers bolting up, Jaguars spiraling

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USA TODAY

Week 5 in the NFL was a wild one. Three of the early-window games – not counting the Falcons topping the Jets in the really early window in London – came down to electric finishes. And the Packers, Patriots and Vikings won their games on field goals at or near the end of regulation or in overtime, on a day in which placekickers struggled at historic levels.

We also saw an upstart team with a rookie coach, the Chargers, outlast another powerful AFC opponent in the Browns in what could end up being a potential playoff preview. The same went for a rematch of last year's AFC championship game, though this time it was the Bills who prevailed over the Chiefs in convincing fashion.

Elsewhere, a rough week got tougher for embattled Jaguars coach Urban Meyer, who saw his team drop to 0-5.

The Week 5 winners and losers:

WINNERS

The (AFC West favorite?) Chargers

In the track meet that was a 47-42 victory, the Chargers outslugged a worthy contender in the AFC, the Browns. Questions about defensive lapses abound for both teams, but that the Chargers had to battle back from a 14-point, third-quarter deficit shows how far Los Angeles (4-1) has come in Brandon Staley's first season as head coach.

First, let's highlight what the Chargers *did* do well on defense. One of the main reasons Los Angeles was able to keep the deficit manageable was because in three of Cleveland's first five trips inside the red zone, it clamped down and forced the Browns to settle for two short field goals and forced one turnover on downs. But quarterback Justin Herbert is quickly becoming one of the young star passers in the entire NFL. Herbert is on a historic pace in his young career, bolstered by his 26 of 43 performance against the Browns for 398 yards with four touchdowns. He also added a rushing score. He could be on a track to insert himself in the MVP conversation. More important, with the Chiefs looking vulnerable – especially on defense – the Chargers could even threaten for the division crown.

Not only offense in Arizona

A team coached by Kliff Kingsbury always was going to have dynamic playmakers on offense. But the Cardinals have remained the lone undefeated team in the NFL also because of a really talented and efficient defense. Going up against a dynamic athlete and passer in 49ers rookie Trey Lance, who was making his first career start, the Cardinals prevailed 17-10.

Arizona was excellent in high-leverage situations. The Cardinals limited the 49ers to 3 of 11 conversions on third downs, kept the Niners out of the end zone in their only goal-to-go scenario of the game and stopped San Francisco on fourth downs on four out of five tries. According to Elias Sports Bureau, it was the only time in at least the last 40 seasons that a team recorded four fourth-



First-year NFL head coach Urban Meyer's Jaguars fell to 0-5 on Sunday and Jacksonville has lost 20 consecutive games. BOB SELF/THE FLORIDA TIMES-UNION

down stops in a game. The Cardinals will start to have a target on their backs, but having a now-improved defense makes this team that much more dangerous because it won't be incumbent on quarterback Kyler Murray and the Arizona offense to carry the team.

The losing Lions

Yes, they fell in heartbreak, again. And players and coaches in the NFL almost never want to hear about silver linings. But what rookie coach Dan Campbell is doing in Detroit, getting his team to punch above its weight and nearly pull off two improbable upsets in two weeks, should be admired. The Lions lost to the Vikings 19-17 on a crushing game-winning field goal after Detroit had battled back from a 10-point deficit with a little more than five minutes left to play. This came one week after the Lions lost (also 19-17) when Ravens kicker Justin Tucker set an NFL record with a 66-yard, game-winning field goal.

In both cases, the Lions gave up big passing plays to put their opponents near field goal range. Those are issues the team needs to clean up. This Lions roster is still young and has a lot of holes. Jared Goff is not a long-term answer at quarterback. But Detroit ranks second in third-down defense (27.78%) and has become a high-effort team. That has kept it in these games. If Campbell can keep developing the talent the Lions have and if the Lions improve their roster over the next couple of seasons, Detroit could be a team to watch in the near future.

LOSERS

Kickers

The NFL, when it changed its rule in 2015 to push back the extra point, wanted the play to have more drama. In Week 5, the league got its wish. There were 12 missed extra points before Monday's game. Extra points weren't the only kicking struggle. There have also been 12 missed field goals. This shouldn't necessarily be chalked up to any big-picture issues or problematic trend; every now and then, a week comes by

where this just seems to happen. This one, however, was the worst kicking performance since the rule change.

What makes this case interesting, though, is that weather typically plays a factor in poor kicking. This week, games were not affected by inclement weather. In particular, the Packers' 25-22 overtime victory against the Bengals offered a study of kicking comedy. At one point, Mason Crosby of the Packers and Evan McPherson of the Bengals combined for five consecutive missed field goal kicks in a stretch of fewer than eight minutes of game time – and it happened in the fourth quarter and overtime. And, if there were a missed extra point in Monday's game between the Colts and Ravens, it will set a record for the most combined missed extra points across the entire league in a week.

Urban Meyer

With each passing day, Urban Meyer is showing that the head coaching job of the Jaguars is too big for him. It wasn't so much that the Jaguars lost to the AFC South rival Titans 37-19. It was the effort they showed. Early in the third quarter, with Tennessee holding an 11-point lead, the Jaguars defense did not look interested in tackling Titans running back Derrick Henry on a 9-yard TD rush.

It's no surprise that effort was an issue. This entire week was shrouded in controversy over Meyer's decision to stay in Ohio after a loss to the Bengals, missing the team flight. He was later filmed at a bar, where a woman who was not his wife danced on him. It would be natural for players to question his commitment.

After the incident in Ohio, owner Shad Khan issued a strong statement and said Meyer "must regain our trust and respect." Yet Meyer has repeatedly failed to hold himself accountable and routinely blames others for mistakes, even his players. After Sunday's loss, reporters asked him about a 4th-and-1 call and why Trevor Lawrence didn't keep it on a quarterback sneak. Meyer said Lawrence was "not quite comfortable with that yet" and added "I don't micro-manage who is in the game." Minutes later, Lawrence disagreed and said that while it wasn't something they had done

in a game yet, that he was "comfortable." This team has had bouts of mental mistakes and communications issues, careless penalties, carelessness with the ball. And it all falls on Meyer.

Brian Flores and Chris Grier

Memories of Miami's surprise 10-win season in coach Brian Flores' second season with the Dolphins feel so long ago. And after the defending Super Bowl champion Buccaneers throttled the Dolphins 45-17, both Flores and general manager Chris Grier have some significant questions to answer. The Tampa Bay roster is better than Miami's. It might be the best in the entire league. But Flores, a coach with a specialty on defense, spent 15 seasons on the Patriots coaching staff, each of those when Tom Brady played in New England. He should have at least a decent idea of how to fluster Brady.

Instead, Brady completed 30 of 41 passes for 411 yards with four TDs. The Bucs failed to convert only three of their 11 third-down attempts. And Tampa Bay gained 558 yards of total offense in what was simply a defensive collapse for Miami (1-4). While Grier has hit on some of his recent draft picks, his inability to fix holes at running back, linebacker, offensive line and quarterback are concerning. Though second-year passer Tua Tagovailoa has been sidelined with broken ribs, Grier will always have to face questions of how Miami passed on Justin Herbert, who has been a revelation for the Chargers and was taken one pick after Tagovailoa was. It's too early for a total cleaning house, but if more performances like this follow, that time may be quickly nearing.

The Panthers as NFC disruptors

They had a hot start to the season, but after consecutive losses Carolina has regressed to the mean. Granted, last week's defeat came against a powerful Cowboys team and both have been with star running back Christian McCaffrey sidelined. But Carolina (3-2) blew a 12-point lead it held in the second quarter and squandered several chances to extend their lead in a disappointing 21-18 loss against the Eagles.

Carolina's defense held its end of the bargain early in the game. Other than the three first downs the unit gave up on Philadelphia's end-of-half drive in the second quarter, the Panthers had allowed the Eagles to move the chains just twice in their other 10 possessions to start the game. The Panthers defense constantly put the offense in great field position, but Carolina stalled when it got into plus territory. Quarterback Sam Darnold has now thrown five interceptions in the last two weeks after tossing three against the Eagles. Though there were other shortcomings, his inability to move the ball when Philly brought pressure doomed the Panthers. The special teams unit allowing the Eagles to block a punt with four minutes left in the game set up the game-winning touchdown. But don't lose sight of the throw Darnold missed to receiver Robby Anderson on third down. These are the games Carolina needs to win to be a contender in the conference. This loss shows the Panthers still have some work to do to get there.

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