

NFL Notes

Miami looks to end losing ways in the Meadowlands

By **BARRY WILNER**
AP Football Writer

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J.— Here's a switch: The guys from Florida, needing to regain their health, are heading north.

Nobody makes an NFL team feel better than the New York Jets. So Sunday's visit for the Miami Dolphins might be looked at as a little R&R in the Meadowlands.

Sparked by a staunch defense, the Dolphins jumped to a 3-0 record. They struggled defending the pass in Game 4, but still won 26-23 against Cincinnati. Ever since, the defense has been out to

lunch and the Dolphins have slipped to 4-2.

"I think we need to stop reading the press clippings and start playing football," middle linebacker Bryan Cox said. "We're overanalyzing things, getting to almost a panic and not getting things done. Everybody is trying to find reasons why instead of going on the football field and catching the ball and hitting people."

Cox can complain all he wants — and there are grounds for worrying, given the Dolphins' weak performance the last six periods. But Miami's woes didn't come close to the Jets' dire situation. While

Miami is a contender for the AFC East title and perhaps a Super Bowl trip, the Jets are the leader in the first-pick sweepstakes for next spring's draft. And they're pulling away.

So what could be more timely than a trip to New Jersey?

"What happened to us last week, going to New Orleans to play an 0-5 team, nowhere in this league can you go in and say, 'No way are we going to lose this game.'" Cox said.

"We should not have any problem with being overconfident. We have our own problems right now, we're not getting it done.

"It is a concern because of the

nature of the way we started to unravel the last two weeks. We definitely feel we can get ourselves going again. We need our team to come here with the right frame of mind. We certainly were disappointed we lost two games, but we learned our lessons."

The Dolphins will try to teach the Jets a lesson even without Dan Marino and Eric Green. Marino isn't expected to play as he continues mending hip and knee injuries. Tight end Green, one of Miami's premier free-agent signings, is out after undergoing arthroscopic knee surgery.

The Jets also are banged up.

Quarterback Boomer Esiason still is feeling the effects of a concussion suffered two weeks ago. His replacement, Bubby Brister, has a sore thumb. Two starters on defense also are out.

"The only thing we can do is play for pride and win a few games," center Cal Dixon said. "The guys are getting fed up. As football players, nothing is worse than this."

It figures to get a lot worse if the Jets don't make an immediate U-turn. Four of the next six games are against teams with winning records.

The first of those opponents is Miami, which will use Bernie

Kosar in Marino's place. That doesn't comfort the Jets.

"Bernie is an outstanding quarterback who does a lot of things that fit into their system," coach Rich Kotite said.

Kosar threw for 368 yards and four touchdowns at New Orleans, but the Dolphins had five turnovers. And the defense once again was shoddy against the pass.

"We had three strong performances in a row, then the last three we have struggled," coach Don Shula said.

And that is why the Dolphins need rehabilitation, making this weekend's trip north most timely.

Struggling QBs meet in divisional showdown

By **ARNIE STAPLETON**
AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis.— Minnesota's Warren Moon is flustered because he's completing lots of passes, but not enough drives. The Green Bay Packers are frustrated because quarterback Brett Favre is having to do too much.

Both teams promise changes Sunday when they meet at Lambeau Field.

Moon said he wants to throw deep more often to help snap the Vikings (3-3) out of their season-long scoring slump, a suggestion that hasn't sat well with Vikings coach Dennis Green, who contends it's the running game that needs to improve.

"Throwing for 300 yards doesn't mean an awful lot if you can't get down and score," Green said. "That's why we have to be more opportunistic in the red zone this week. Bottom line is we have to be able to run the ball better."

Robert Smith averaged 5.7 yards a carry in the first four games, but only 2.9 yards in the last two.

Moon threw for 332 yards against Tampa Bay, but the Vikings scored just one touchdown and turned the ball over three times inside the Buccaneers' 25-yard line in a 20-17 overtime loss.

That's been the story of Minnesota's season.

Despite an offense that ranks right behind Dallas and San Francisco, the Vikings are again struggling to score inside opponents' 20-yard line. Minnesota was the second-worst team in the NFL in that category last season and is 17th this year.

Moon said he would start taking more chances. Because he's been bothered by a sore throwing shoulder and because Green has emphasized the run, Minnesota mostly has used a short to medium-range passing game.

"I've got to be more aggressive ... and we need to make more big plays," Moon said. "We can't afford to nickel-and-dime it down the field all the time."

Moon, 38, scoffs at those who think his skills have deteriorated.

"I feel great," Moon said. "I just need to do a better job when we get in the red zone and get more balls in the end zone, and I think that will shut everyone up."

While Moon wants to do more, the Packers would like to see Favre do less.

Favre's burden is heavy. He lost his top receiver, Sterling Sharpe, to spinal surgery, the defense has struggled to generate turnovers and the running game hasn't gotten untracked. Their running backs are averaging just 3.2 yards per carry.

As if he wasn't doing enough with his arm, Favre's also got the team's longest run from scrimmage of 40 yards and he leads Green Bay with two rushing touchdowns.

Still, the Packers (4-2) are off to their best start since 1978 and rank 10th in the NFL in offense.


The telling statistic is Favre's 7.3 yards per pass attempt, which shows that Favre is being allowed to throw downfield more — like Moon wants to do.

It also means the receivers, led by Robert Brooks and Mark Ingram, are getting yards after the catch.

"I think we have pretty good speed at our wide receiver positions now," Packers coach Mike Holmgren said. "Brett is certainly making real solid decisions. His decision-making has really improved over the years."

Favre spread the ball around in a 30-21 victory over Detroit last week, when five receivers caught at least four passes.

The 30 points, 436 total yards and nearly 38 minutes of possession time were all highs for Green Bay in the eight games since Sharpe's career ended with a spinal injury late last December.



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