

Jets drop season opener to Ravens

By Barry Wilner
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The Baltimore Ravens gave the New York Jets some hard knocks — real ones.

The Jets intruged audiences in the pre-season with their no-holds-barred, behind-the-scenes TV show, but it was the Ravens who grabbed the spotlight Monday night. They held New York to 176 yards, six first downs, allowed Mark Sanchez just 74 yards passing and kept Rex Ryan's crew out of the end zone.

NFL

10
Baltimore

9
New York

For those urging the Jets to put up or shut up, well, it was Baltimore that produced most of the highlights in a sloppy opener of New York's new home.

The \$1.6 billion New Meadowlands Stadium rocked with J-E-T-S chants, then the Ravens rocked Ryan's defense with enough big plays to silence the crowd of 78,127 — if not the talkative coach and his players.

Billy Cundiff's 25-yard field goal in the third quarter provided the winning points, with Anquan Boldin, Baltimore's main offseason acquisition, gaining 65 yards on two passes against first-round draft pick Kyle Wilson.

Boldin made the kind of impact the Ravens sought with seven receptions overall for 110 yards, at times toying with the Jets' vaunted secondary.

So did tight end Todd Heap, who caught six passes from a cool Joe Flacco for 72 yards.

The beginning was fiery, as expected, with Ray Rice and Shaun Ellis woofing at each other before kickoff.

But it turned into a slopfest, as many of the openers were this weekend, with the Jets looking particularly undisciplined by drawing 14 penalties for 125 yards. They also were 1 for 11 on third downs.

New York's six first downs tied a franchise-low set in 1976.

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New York's usually fierce defense sacked Flacco on Baltimore's first offensive play, forcing a fumble recovered by Sione Pouha. The Ravens' equally intense D held firm, and Nick Folk kicked a 23-yard field goal.

Pouha grabbed another fumble later in the quarter, by Willis McGahee, and Flacco was picked off by Antonio Cromartie on a sideline pass at the New York 3.

The cornerback, acquired in a trade with San Diego to further bolster a secondary that features All-Pro CB Darrelle Revis, got a terrific block from his partner on a 66-yard runback to the Baltimore 31.

Two plays later, Shonn Greene lost the ball — he touched it only one more time the rest of the night and dropped a pass — and Baltimore embarked on an

impressive 11-play, 76-yard drive for a 7-6 halftime lead. Of course, it was aided by Jets mistakes, the worst of which were Braylon Edwards — a wide receiver, of all things — running into Cundiff on a field goal attempt, giving the Ravens a first down to prolong the possession, and rookie Kyle Wilson's pass interference on T.J. Houshmandzadeh in the end zone.

McGahee scored from the 1 with 6 seconds left, but New York wasn't done committing penalties. The Jets were offside on the extra point and had 10 penalties for 100 yards in the opening half.

They weren't any more efficient in the second half. But they did get Folk's 48-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter to make it 10-9. Even then, however, they wasted a 22-yard punt return by Jim Leonhard to the Baltimore 35.

Devils fined \$3 million by NHL, lose 2 draft picks

By Tom Canavan
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEWARK, N.J. — The cost of signing Ilya Kovalchuk got even more expensive for the New Jersey Devils.

The NHL fined the Devils \$3 million and took away two high draft picks over the next four years for signing Kovalchuk to a 17-year, \$102 million contract in July that circumvented the league's salary cap.

In handing down what might be his harshest penalty for a team salary-cap violation, Commissioner Gary Bettman forced New Jersey to forfeit a first-round pick sometime over the next four years and a third-round pick next year.

Devils president and chief executive Lou Lamoriello insisted the team didn't break the rules.

“We were today advised of the ruling by the commissioner with respect to the Kovalchuk matter,” Lamoriello said in a statement.

“We disagree with the decision. We acted in good faith and did nothing wrong. We will have no further comment.”

It was not immediately clear if the Devils can appeal the ruling.

The NHL had the right to discipline the Devils after arbitrator Richard Bloch ruled on Aug. 9 that Kovalchuk's free-agent contract constituted a circumvention of the NHL/NHLPA collective bargaining agreement.

The league's biggest problem with the deal was that the 27-year-old Russian star was to be paid only \$550,000 in each of the final six years.

The \$3 million fine will not count

against the Devils' salary cap, a decision the league and the NHL Players' Association reached earlier this month in working out an amendment on long-term contracts.

That amendment paved the way for the league to approve a 15-year, \$100 million contract that the Devils and Kovalchuk reworked after Bloch's arbitration ruling.

The NHL said it now considered the matter closed and will have no further comment, including anything on its disciplinary action.

The Devils have the right to choose what year they will forfeit their first-round pick, but they must tell the league by the day after the Stanley Cup finals in that year.

The Devils originally signed the high-scoring left winger to what would have been a landmark deal in July. It would have kept

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Lou Lamoriello

Devils president and chief executive

Kovalchuk under contract until he was 44.

The league immediately rejected the deal, noting that paying the Russian All Star such a low salary in each of the final five years violated the league's salary cap because it drove down New Jersey's annual salary cap hit.

The players' association filed a grievance against the league, but Bloch sided with the league after hearing from both sides. The Devils and Kovalchuk reworked the contract and settled on the revised 15-year deal earlier this month.

The NHL approved it after agreeing with the players' association on the amendment covering long-term contracts.

With 338 goals and 304 assists in 642 career NHL games, Kovalchuk was the biggest prize on the free agent market this season. He had 41 goals and 44 assists in 2009-10, a season he split between Atlanta and the Devils, who acquired him in a multiplayer deal in February.

The new deal will put a \$6.67 million annual hit on the Devils' salary cap and put the team roughly \$3 million over the league limit (\$59.4 million).

Roster

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came away impressed, specifically pointing out the defensemen as a strength.

Four freshmen made the team, including forward Michael McDonough, center Andrew Duvall, defenseman Ryan Seibolt and goalie Matt Madrazzo.

O'Brien said they will be expected to step up and play right away as key players from last season are starting the season injured.

Junior forward Nick Seravalli and sophomore forwards Dominic Morrone and George Saad will all start the season

recovering from injuries.

Another new face is junior defenseman Kevin Miller, who transferred from Robert Morris (Pa.). He came away particularly impressed with Seibolt.

“Seabiscuit” is a big body that throws his weight around,” Miller said. “Once he gets his feet under him, I think he's going to be a physical presence back on the blue line.”

While the Icers roster may be set, team leadership is still in question. Balboni said he plans to get feedback from the team before choosing captains and assistant captains next week.

One skater, junior forward Paul Daley, feels he is ready to assume a leadership role.

“I came into the season thinking I would want a part of leading the team, but now I definitely want to be the main leader on this team,” Daley said. “I want the ‘C’ this year. I just feel that I'm ready, I can and I have the respect of my peers.”

The Icers will now practice as they head towards the Sept. 24 Blue and White game.

“I think guys will be competing for spots every day in practice and that's always a good thing,” Daley said. “It's just going to make everyone better and work that much harder. It can only mean good things as we move along this season.”

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Reaction

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Michigan State, Minnesota, Ohio State and Wisconsin as the sixth member of the Big Ten conference — the minimum number of teams needed in a conference to receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament at the end of March 2011.

The Big Ten has long coveted hockey because of its successful television network, and adding Penn State would only likely help the cause.

Happy Valley is not the only place that is excited to hear about the potential jump in collegiate ice hockey.

It seems Spartan hockey fans in East Lansing, Mich. have heard about the blueprint and are ready to see what soon comes of it.

“I know that if Penn State moves to Division I, it would mean a lot for hockey,” Michigan State student Dan Rudnik (junior-statistics) said.

“Right now all the Division I teams are either in the Northeast or Midwest and if Penn State makes the jump, I think a lot of other schools would potentially follow.”

“I saw the Spartans win a national championship in 2007 and it was pretty big.”

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Tackling

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they all seemed so repetitive. A frustrated Bradley reshaped “poor tackling” in almost every response he gave.

“You gotta hustle, you gotta tackle, you gotta get off blocks,” he said.

“If you don't do those things it doesn't matter what you're doing.”

Bradley attributed the inability to bring runners down to defenders “catching” and not “hitting through” their opponent.

It was something he said the defense will work on this week in practice.

The Penn State linebackers struggled Saturday, consistently allowing Richardson yards after contact, which put Alabama in short yardage situations on second and third down.

“We did too much arm tackling,” Bradley said looking back. “We didn't hit them in the mouth. We gotta get involved. If you're not gonna wrap, then that's one of the things he does. He gets a lot of yards after he gets hit.”

Linebacking units often lead the team in tackles, but Saturday's top linebacker, Chris Colasanti, finished fourth.

Only Colasanti and Michael Mauti finished with more than

four tackles at linebacker, as Bani Gbadyu and Nate Stupar didn't make much noise defensively, and Gerald Hodges was injured on the game's opening play.

The tackling was poor from start to finish against Alabama, Colasanti said, and it wasn't sound against Youngstown State, either, when poor pursuit angles allowed for an 80-yard screen pass touchdown in the first quarter.

Colasanti, a senior in his first

year as a starter, said one of the defense's main problems is fighting off blocks and swarming to the ball.

“No matter who the running back is, we have to tackle and we have to fly around the ball, and we have to gang tackle,” Colasanti said.

“We have to be better on defense as a whole.”

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Smith

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game high and freshman quarterback Rob Bolden looked toward the sophomore several other times.

The speedster provides a threat to opposing defenses, switching back and forth between receiver and running back, which he show-

cased against Alabama. He ran to the right and recorded a seven-yard run on one play, and during the same drive, caught a 10-yard pass near the left side of the field.

Add his speed to the mix, and the Lions believe he's a valuable asset to an offense that has gotten off to a sluggish start.

“Just the same thing,” Smith said when asked about how the Lions aim to use him in the com-

ing weeks. “Just open space opportunities to get me in open space to make a move on a defender.”

Evidence of Smith's big play ability came when he slipped through the Tide secondary and caught a 17-yard pass from Bolden. With his 5-foot-7, 157-pound build, the sophomore doesn't believe he has trouble releasing off the line as he felt he held his

own against a physical Alabama defense, but the grind of a full season could wear on him.

However, the Lions have other quick players on the roster such as Shawney Kersey and Chaz Powell who provide matchup trouble against the opposition and can provide a different element to the offense.

While Smith plans on using his versatility in various ways this

season, as he also returns punts, as a wide receiver he understands that unless he catches the passes Bolden is firing, his speed won't make a difference.

“Some of the balls he threw we didn't catch,” Smith said. “You have to catch every ball he throws and it's not gonna be perfect, but we have to catch it.”

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