





Article by: Larry Mayer - Bears Senior Writer

Bears hang tough but fall to Saints in New Orleans

The Bears outgained the Saints 368-301 and outplayed them for much of Sunday's game. But losing the turnover battle 5-0 was the key factor in a 24-17 defeat to New Orleans.

The score was tied at 7, 14 and 17 before the Saints produced the go-ahead touchdown on Taysom Hill's 3-yard pass to tight end

Juwan Johnson in the back of the end zone with 11:05 to play in the game. "Really the story of the day was the takeaways," said coach Matt Eberflus. "The league's pretty even in most spots, and it's hard to win when you have minus-five. That's a whole team thing: It's us protecting it, it's us protecting the quarterback, us getting it on defense and us doing a better job of taking the ball away.

After the Saints took a 24-17 lead, the Bears had several opportunities to answer. But an offense that was crisp and productive in the first half mustered just 14 yards on 13 plays and one first down on its final four possessions that ended with three turnovers and a punt.

"The defense played lights out," said receiver DJ Moore. "They did give up some points, but when it counted they came down in the clutch and did what they had to do and we've just got to capitalize on it.

Making his third straight start in place of the injured Justin Fields, Tyson Bagent completed 18 of 30 passes for 220 yards and two touchdowns and also rushed for 70 yards on eight carries. But the undrafted rookie from Shepherd University also threw three interceptions and lost a fumble.

The defense impressively kept the Bears (2-7) within seven points late by not allowing the Saints (5-4) to score on three straight fourth-quarter possessions that started at the Chicago 38, 46 and 36.

First, T.J. Edwards and Andrew Billings teamed up to stop Derek Carr on a fourth-and-1 quarterback sneak at the 17. The defense then forced a punt with a three-and-out and later allowed one yard on three plays before kicker Blake Grupe missed a 47-yard field goal attempt that hit the left upright.

But the Bears offense failed to capitalize, as Bagent threw two interceptions and lost a fumble in the game's final 11 minutes. "It really just all comes down to myself in that last quarter being able to do a better job of taking care of the ball," Bagent said. "Coach talks about it every single day, how important it is to take care of the ball, and I didn't do a good job of that. "It was good on their part, bad on my part. Tight coverage and they made a couple really good plays. Hats off to them, but once

again, I've got to probably just go somewhere else with the ball. That's on me." Bagent excelled in the first half, completing 10 of 13 passes for 148 yards with two TDs, one interception and a 121.2 passer rating while also rushing for 60 yards on six carries.

The Bears opened the game with an impressive nine-play, 75-yard drive, taking a 7-0 lead on Bagent's 18-yard touchdown pass to Cole Kmet. Bagent faked a hand-off, rolled to his left and threw back across the field to the right corner of the end zone to Kmet, who beat tight coverage by safety Tyrann Mathieu.

On the Bears' second drive, Bagent's pass intended for Kmet was intercepted by cornerback Paulson Adebo, who returned it five yards to the Chicago 45.

New Orleans capitalized on the takeaway, tying the score 7-7 on Carr's 8-yard touchdown pass to Chris Olave on third-and-6 with :44 left in the first quarter. In the game, Carr completed 25 of 34 passes for 211 yards with two TDs and a 108.8 passer rating and was not sacked.

Bagent and Kmet then connected for a second TD pass, this time a 9-yarder in the left corner of the end zone after a play-action fake to give the Bears a 14-7 lead early in the second quarter. On the first play of the drive, Darnell Mooney caught a short pass and turned it into a 38-yard gain with a nifty cutback move.

The Saints answered immediately, as Carr threw a 2-yard TD pass to Hill to tie the score 14-14 with 6:05 left in the second quarter.

The Bears moved into scoring position, but Cairo Santos missed his first field goal attempt of the season, a 40-yarder that hit the right upright with :28 remaining in the half.

After forcing the Saints to punt on the opening possession of the third quarter, Moore caught a Bagent pass over the middle but was stripped by Adebo, who recovered the fumble at the Chicago 39.

The Bears held the Saints without a first down, but New Orleans took a 17-14 lead on Grupe's booming 55-yard field goal. The Bears responded, tying the score 17-17 on Santos' 31-yard field goal with 3:27 left in the third quarter. The drive was sustained by Bagent completions of 12 yards to Mooney on third-and-6 and 11 yards to Robert Tonyan on third-and-five. D'Onta

Foreman also had runs of 21 and 13 yards, finishing the game with 83 yards on 20 attempts. But the Saints followed by taking a 24-17 lead and then blanking the Bears the rest of the way. Bagent was intercepted by safety Marcus Maye on a pass intended for Mooney over the middle and picked off again by Adebo on a throw to Tyler Scott. After a three-and-out on their next possession, the Bears turned the ball over again on a strip sack of Bagent at his own 19 with 2:05 to play.



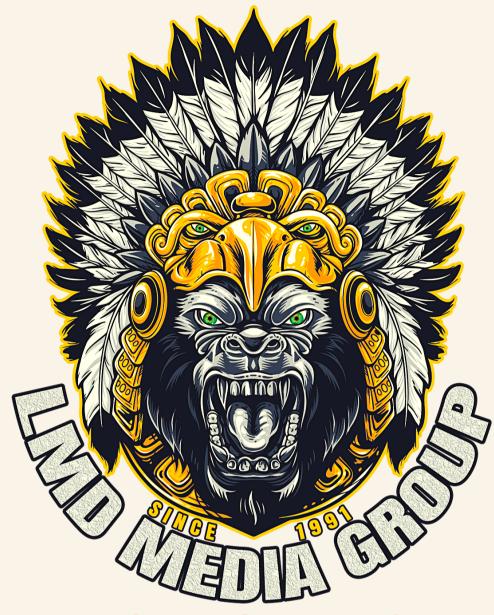




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