

Seattle Bests Carolina

Written by Max Henson
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Despite all the offensive struggles -- highlighted by 190 total yards and 2-for-11 on third down conversions -- the Carolina Panthers were in position to take the lead against the Seattle

Seahawks with just under four minutes remaining in the game. A 10-play, 79-yard drive set up fourth-and goal from the 1-yard line, and the Panthers called for play-action. Quarterback Cam Newton rolled right and looked for Greg Olsen, but the tight end was surrounded by three Seahawks.

Newton then spotted tight end Ben Hartsock in the middle of the end zone, but his pass fell short. The Seahawks maintained their 16-10 lead with 3:47 left, and they would emerge with a 16-12 victory at Bank of America Stadium.

"We had (Hartsock) wide-open," head coach Ron Rivera said. "The run-pass option worked in our favor, and we had a guy wide-open. Unfortunately, we just didn't get it done."

Following the turnover on downs, Seattle quarterback Russell Wilson sneaked for no gain and running back Marshawn Lynch picked up three yards before Carolina called its second time out at the 2:58 mark. On third down, Lynch rumbled up the middle for 11 yards.

"We had the opportunity to force them to punt a little bit sooner and especially backed up," Rivera said. "We had a chance. We had guys miss tackles."

The two-minute warning and Carolina's third timeout stopped the clock after a pair of runs from Lynch, and Wilson's third-down scramble came up seven yards short. Seattle punter Jon Ryan then took six seconds off the clock by intentionally running through the back of the end zone for a safety. Captain Munnerlyn returned the ensuing kick to the Carolina 31-yard line with 53 seconds left.

After an incomplete pass on first down, Seattle defensive end Bruce Irvin stripped the ball from Newton and the Seahawks recovered.

"We were pretty bad offensively," left tackle Jordan Gross said. "We were lucky that our defense did such a good job that we had an opportunity to win in the fourth."

It was the defense in fact, who accounted for Carolina's only touchdown. The Seahawks held a 6-3 advantage at halftime, and after the Panther's offense failed to capitalize on Leon Washington's fumbled kick return to start the second half, Munnerlyn gave the Panthers' their first lead.

Munnerlyn stepped in front of a pass intended for tight end Anthony McCoy and returned the interception 33 yards down the left sideline for a touchdown.

"Early in the game, the tight end, he actually ran a go route on me. This time I was like, 'He's not going to do the same thing,'" Munnerlyn said. "He ended up running an out (route), and I undercut it and had a pick-6."

The Panthers had the momentum and a 10-6 lead, but the offense never found its rhythm. And late in the third quarter, a turnover led directly to Seattle points. On first down from the Carolina 30-yard line, Newton pitched the ball to running back DeAngelo Williams, who was stood up and stripped by cornerback Brandon Browner.

Browner recovered the fumble and Seattle took full advantage of the short field. Five plays later, Wilson connected with wideout Golden Tate over the middle for a 13-yard touchdown.

"We practice those situations," linebacker Thomas Davis said. "Whenever we take the field as a

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defense, we feel like we're capable of holding. If it's a short field, holding them to a field goal to trying to get the ball back to not even allowing them to score at all. But we weren't able to hold them, and they were able to go ahead and score."

Steven Hauschka added a 44-yard field goal early in the fourth quarter to extend the Seattle lead to 16-10. The Carolina offense responded with its best drive of the game but failed to convert on fourth-and-goal. In the end, for the third time this season, the Panthers lost a game by six points or less.

"This by no stretch is done," Rivera said. "This is 1-4. We are not going to quit. We are going to show up and we will be back on the job tomorrow. We will find answers and we are going to win. We will. It's going to happen. It's just a matter of us putting it all together."

Added Olsen: "We're too young in the season, we have too many good players, too many good guys. We have a bye so we've got to do a little soul searching here and get ourselves fixed."

Photo Courtesy: Cam Newton, Carolina Panthers