

Cowboys' Cundiff sees stock rise after game winner vs. STL

IRVING, Texas (AP) — When Billy Cundiff's game-winning 22-yard field goal attempt bounced off the upright on the final play of a preseason game, the rookie thought his career with the Dallas Cowboys might already be over.

"I knew at that moment that it was truly a day-to-day existence, and I had prepared to go home," Cundiff said. "I felt that there was any time to get cut, that was a good time."

But the Cowboys liked the strong-legged 22-year-old kid from Division I-AA Drake too much to let him go because of one mistake. He got another chance after that 21-19 preseason loss to Atlanta on Aug. 24, and a week later was on the final roster instead of incumbent kicker Tim Seder.

And now Cundiff is the Cowboys' latest hero because of a longer game-winner that counted so much more.

On the final play of Sunday's game at the St. Louis Rams, Cundiff's 48-yarder — his longest so far — gave the Cowboys a 13-10 win. Dallas improved to 2-2 to end the first month of the season, which began with dismal predictions after an opening loss at the expansion Houston Texans.

going to react, but it may be big in a sense that it kind of solidifies my position a little bit more," Cundiff said.

"It is one of those things that can be a springboard to making me more successful, or it could be something that if I draw on too much, it could kind of drag me down," he said. "It is the culmination of hard work. I want to carry it on and keep going."

— Billy Cundiff
Cowboys kicker

Cundiff has made all six of his extra points and 5-of-6 field goals, all from at least 30 yards. His only miss was a 42-yarder in the season opener against the Texans.

The Cowboys liked the long range that Cundiff could provide. During his college career, he made eight field goals of at least 50 yards, including a 62-yarder.

Seder's longest kick in two seasons with Dallas was 48 yards, and he was just 12-of-21 on kicks of at least 40 yards, and missed five attempts shorter than that. Before missing the second half of last season with a foot injury suffered while chasing down a botched field-goal snap, Seder made 36-of-50 field goals.

Cundiff moved to the Dallas area in May and began working out under the guidance of Cowboys kicking coach Steve Hoffman.

"Kicking became my life," Cundiff said.

The Cowboys let Cundiff and Seder battle for the job during a training-camp long "kickoff" — both in games and practices. Even though he won the job, Cundiff continues to work.

"I'm trying to become more machine-like in my kicking, trying to make every kick exactly the same," he said. "And I'm just learning to relax and work on things technique-wise."

Cundiff is still driven by the feeling he had after that Atlanta game, when he had prepared himself mentally to be cut.

"I think it made a difference. I refocused, and feel like I've really grown as a player," Cundiff said. "But I make sure I always approach every day like it is my last."

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SPORTS IN BRIEF

Oakland takes game two over Minnesota, series tied 1-1

Giants pound the Braves in game one, lead series 1-0

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Behind Mark Mulder's steady pitching and a whole lot of timely hitting, everything was back to normal for the Athletics.

David Justice's bases-loaded triple highlighted Oakland's 14-hit barrage, and Mulder pitched six strong innings as the A's beat the Minnesota Twins 9-1 Wednesday to even their AL division series at one game apiece.

Eric Chavez had a three-run homer, and rookie Mark Ellis got three hits as Oakland replied to Game 1 with a tremendous offensive game against Joe Mays (0-1) and the Twins' bullpen.

Each of the first seven hitters in Oakland's lineup got an extra-base hit as the A's jumped to an 8-0 lead after four innings. Justice, the most prolific run-producer in playoff history, added three more RBIs to his record total during Oakland's five-run fourth.

Miguel Tejada had an RBI double. Five players drove in a run, and Ray Durham scored three times. Justice's triple broke the game open, with three runners scampering home.

Mulder (1-0) wasn't overpowering, but he mostly stayed out of trouble while allowing five hits and striking out three. He didn't allow a runner to reach third base in the first five innings.

The Twins struggled against Mulder — though Cristian Guzman broke up Mulder's shutout bid with a solo homer in the sixth.

ATLANTA (AP) — Barry Bonds didn't have to come up big for the San Francisco Giants to get a jump on the Atlanta Braves.

The rest of the San Francisco lineup knocked around Atlanta's heralded pitching staff while Russ Ortiz threw seven strong innings, carrying the Giants to an 8-5 victory in Game 1 of the NL division playoffs.

Down 8-2, Gary Sheffield and Javy Lopez homered in the eighth to get the Braves close. Atlanta had its chance in the ninth, but Robb Nen got Sheffield to ground into a game-ending double play with two runners on for a save.

Bonds was denied a homer in the eighth when Andruw Jones leaped above the center-field wall to make a catch.

Bonds went 1-for-4 with an intentional walk and a throwing error. His teammates did plenty of damage against Tom Glavine.

The Giants scored three runs in the second inning and three more in the fourth.

Benito Santiago, J.T. Snow and Rich Aurilia each had two RBIs.

Santiago redeemed himself somewhat by leaning into a photographer's box to grab Marcus Giles' pop-up with a runner on to end the inning.

Santiago hit a two-run double off Chris Hammond in the sixth to put the game out of reach.

Big 12

Continued from page 1B

around," Stoops said. "They have a good number of designed runs for him also, so you have to be aware of that."

No. 13 Kansas State at Colorado, 2:30 p.m.

The Colorado Buffaloes begin their defense of their 2001 Big 12 North title when

they open Big 12 play by hosting the Wildcats at Folsom Field. The Buffs are coming off a 31-17 upset victory over the No. 20 UCLA last week.

"Colorado has certainly sent a very strong message with their ballgame against UCLA," said Kansas State football coach Bill Snyder. "We have no doubt about having our hands completely full."

The Wildcats come into Boulder after defeating No. 11

USC 27-20 last week. Kansas State suffered a 16-6 loss to the Buffaloes in 2001. K-State junior linebacker Terry Pierce was the co-defensive player of the week for his 12 tackles against USC last week.

Texas A&M will host Texas Tech at Kyle Field. Nebraska, who has lost its last two games, will host McNeese State in Lincoln. It will be the first meeting between the two teams. Iowa State has the week off.

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