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Undrafted Palko a winner in team's meaningless loss

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Saints win, 132-19.

Anyway, that's what it said on the stat sheet, under total yardage, just before the home team kicked a field goal to take a 3-0 lead on the first play of the second quarter.

This time, the Saints front-liners had much the best of it against the Buffalo Bills, a reversal of what happened a week ago against the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Drew Brees was 12-of-14 passing.

Reggie Bush and Devery Henderson were catching 78 yards of passes. Sean Payton's defense was limiting J.P. Losman to 0 yards passing and 19 yards rushing, 12 on a scramble.

The bad news?

Well, a Saints field-goal attempt was blocked after Brees moved the regulars to the Buffalo 19. Later, before the field goal that counted, Brees was a tad high going for Henderson in the end zone.

The story of the game the Saints lost 13-10 was the three-quarter audition by **Tyler Palko**, the undrafted rookie out of the University of Pittsburgh.

Despite throwing two interceptions, the 24-year-old lefty did an admirable job running the backups.

His first mistake was untimely all right, coming after he had moved his team from his 3-yard-line to the Bills' 11, where he made an errant throw on a slant that was picked off in the end zone.

On the march, however, Palko exhibited a measure of poise.

First he got his team out of a deep hole with an 18-yard strike to Lance Moore, a soft lob under pressure that found its target.

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Then he bought time when he had to, he was patient, he wasn't rushing things, he tossed one away rather than risk a pick, and he found Terrance Cooper on a third-and-8 that showed plenty of smarts in going to the right man.

His interception into the end zone was behind the receiver, a poor throw, but it was a call the head coach said was more his fault than the quarterback's.

"I thought Tyler did a decent job," said Payton. "He showed a comfort level out there and some poise, but he has to do a better job protecting the football. There's a lot he can learn from watching this tape."

Palko's touchdown drive was more impressive, a 16-play march that ate up seven and a half minutes, that covered 78 yards, that ended with a 2-yard third-down touch pass on a fade route to Robert Meachem that did both men proud.

The biggest play of the drive came on fourth-and-1 when Tyler caught the Bills napping, turning left end for 19 yards on a bootleg that turned out to be the longest run of the evening.

"I thought Tyler did a fine job," said Brees. "Every young quarterback is going to make mistakes. What I liked is the way Tyler responded. He keeps on improving, and he's going to get better."

Palko finished 15-of-27 for 172 yards and was sacked twice. Still, he had mobility and escape instincts to finish with 47 yards, turning losses into positive yardage.

The kid who threw for 66 touchdowns at Pitt, second only to NFL Hall of Famer Dan Marino, suggests he's a work in progress. But with Brees and Payton in his corner, he appears to have a better than decent shot to hang around and do some good if opportunity calls.

In the NFL, you never know when that opportunity might arrive. Obviously, the number one prayer offered by all Saints fans is directed toward the continued health, and well being, of No. 9.

In the case of **Tyler Palko**, living in a climate of a savvy coach and quarterback, the rookie could not be in a better position.

And he knows it.

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Tyler Palko, competing for the job as the Saints' third quarterback, played most of Thursday's game against Buffalo. [3457108]

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