

# Sports

Eagles' loss to Cowboys cost them NFC East crown, bye week, B2

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## One step at a time for Martinek

Ex-Hopatcong running back star has breakout season for Rutgers

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Joe Martinek doesn't care. So what if the Rutgers starting running back finished this season a long run short of 1,000 yards? In his mind, getting the opportunity to come so close to the mark was satisfying enough. "It would have been awesome to have something I could tell my grandkids. 'You know, my first year starting I got 1,000 yards,'" Martinek said. "I was 30 or 40 yards from it. I'm happy with that."

A former Hopatcong star, Martinek notched team highs in rushing yards (967) and attempts (206) as the Scarlet Knights' featured back. He spent the previous two years mired in head coach Greg Schiano's deep backfield rotation searching for its identity after Ray Rice's departure to the NFL.

Martinek said he was grateful for the added workload.

"Every week it was a new experience," he said. "It was just so new to me. I was grateful that I was playing well and doing well in certain games and that I had great teammates around me that really helped and supported me."

Martinek entered the St. Petersburg Bowl needing 77 yards to eclipse 1,000. Two factors were working against him — the University of Central Florida's stingy rushing defense (ranked fourth in the nation at season's end) and Schiano's increased use of wide receiver Mohamed Sanu out of the wildcat formation.

Martinek said he feels comfortable in the wildcat, which he often used at Hopatcong while racking up a state record 7,589 yards and 80 TDs.

"I feel real comfortable," he said. "You're in control of the offense. It's in your hands and I feel comfortable in that situation."

At any rate, the 20-year-old gained just 44 yards on 11 carries as Rutgers routed the Golden Knights, 45-24. Martinek also collected 66 yards on three catches in Rutgers' fourth straight bowl victory. He mostly watched the team's last two bowl appearances from the sideline as a redshirt freshman in 2007 and a backup in 2008.

"This year, going into it, knowing that I was going to start and play the majority of the reps, it was a great feeling and a great experience," he said. "A couple of days leading up to it, I felt like I was there for a different reason. I was there to help the team win."

Which is what Martinek did all season. Rutgers went 5-0 in the games in which the 6-foot, 215-pounder ran for 90 yards or more. He collected four 100-yard games, including a 19-carry, 147-yard showing in a 34-13 win at Maryland.

Martinek wasn't sure it would work out like this.

He started training camp No. 3 on the depth chart, behind junior Jourdan Brooks and senior Kordell Young. Martinek's downhill, powerful running style won over Schiano and he was named Rutgers' starter going into the season opener against Cincinnati.

It wasn't all roses initially, as Martinek earned just 92 yards on 25 tries in his first two games. His breakout performance came against Florida International in Week 3 when he rolled for 121 yards on 23 carries in the win.

Martinek said the added attempts have taken a toll on his body.

"A couple of days after the game, you still feel it," he said. "You have to be in the training room... and you have to get your body just physically prepared and able to take it into next week."

Martinek expects to improve — and maybe even reach the 1,000-yard mark — next season.

"Right now I'm watching every game and seeing that our offense and I left a lot of yards, a lot of points on the field," he said. "So that's one thing I want to work on in the offseason and try to gain my full potential next year."



Submitted photo

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— Ex-Hopatcong star and Rutgers' running back Joe Martinek

## Jets win gets them in playoffs

EAST RUTHERFORD (AP) — Rex and The Sanchez are headed to the playoffs, lucky breaks and all.

Same Old J-E-T-S? Nope, not this time.

Rex Ryan's top-ranked defense shut down the Cincinnati Bengals and rookie Mark Sanchez efficiently led a clock-eating offense as the Jets clinched their first playoff berth in three seasons with a 37-0 victory Sunday night.

Needing a win to keep their season going, and playing in front of their frosted fans braving Arctic conditions, the Jets (9-7) set up a rematch against the Bengals (10-6) in the first round of the playoffs next Saturday at Cincinnati.

"I don't believe we backed into anything, so we're going to try to prove it," Ryan said.

It was the Jets' first shutout at home since beating Pittsburgh, 6-0, Dec. 14, 2003. Green and white confetti filled the sky after the game as fans waved white rally towels with the words "Win And We're In" in green letters.

The victory — marked by Ryan getting a Gatorade shower on the sideline — was likely the last game at Giants Stadium and capped a series of favorable twists and turns for the Jets.

New York appeared to be on the outside of the playoff hunt two weeks ago when it lost to Atlanta, and Ryan even mistakenly said his team's playoff chances were over.

Instead, the Jets defeated previously undefeated Indianapolis last Sunday when Peyton Manning and other Colts stars went to the bench in the second half. Several other teams in playoff contention lost, setting up the Jets' win-and-in game against the Bengals.

Wide receiver Braylon Edwards boldly told the fans earlier in the week the Jets wouldn't lose, and his teammates backed him up bigtime.

Sanchez was 8-for-16 for 63 yards with no turnovers before being replaced by Kellen Clemens late in the fourth quarter with the game in hand. Thomas Jones ran for 78 yards and two touchdowns and do-it-all wide receiver Brad Smith had 92 yards rushing, including a 32-yard TD run, as the Jets set a record for rushing yards in a season.

The Bengals opened with most of their starters — running back Cedric Benson was the only healthy starter to not play — but pulled Carson Palmer early in the third quarter. Palmer was ineffective when he was in, going 1-for-11 for no — yes, zero — yards before J.T. O'Sullivan replaced him.

The Jets got things started on their first possession when Smith took a direct snap in the TigerCat formation on third-and-7 from the Bengals 42. He took a few steps to his right and then scooted up the middle before being taken down by Leon Hall and Johnathan Joseph at the 1. Jones took the ball over the top and into the end zone to make it 7-0 4:14 into the game.

Jay Feely's 20-yard field goal 1:31 into the second quarter made it 10-0, capping a 21-play drive that lasted 11:11.

Smith's 32-yard touchdown run gave the Jets a 17-0 lead with 6:37 left in the half. Smith, lined up at quarterback, took the snap under center and took off, running over linebacker Rashad Jeanty, and zipping into the end zone.

The Jets continued to roll from there.

## Vikings punctuate Giants' slide from bright to bleak

Minnesota's 44-7 drubbing leaves New York 8-8 after it started the season 5-0

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Time will soon tell whether these were the real Minnesota Vikings. For now, they sure finished the regular season on a strong note.

Brett Favre and the rest of his teammates did everything right that went wrong in December; aggressively pursuing the swagger they had before the slump to move into the playoffs with a 44-7 victory against the barely-there New York Giants Sunday.

"I think it's proof of what we're capable of doing," said Favre, who completed 25 of 31 passes for 316 yards and four touchdowns in less than three quarters without a turnover. "Where it takes us from here, I have no idea. But it was definitely a momentum boost and confidence."

Controlling the game from the very first drive against a Giants team sitting five players who started at least four games this season, the Vikings (12-4) cruised into the locker room to start watching the Philadelphia-Dallas game, sounding unconcerned about the outcome.

When the Cowboys emerged with a 24-0 victory, the Vikings became the No. 2 seed behind sputtering New Orleans in the NFC field with a bye for the first round.

Favre surpassed 30 touchdowns for the ninth time in his career and 4,000 yards for the sixth time, finishing with a mere seven interceptions — the fewest of his 18-year run as a starter.

He made it through 16 games without much harm, either.

"Everyone wants to talk about me being 40. I'm fine," Favre said, weighing the pros and cons of the bye while declaring himself fit for the playoff run either way. "Would it help? I'm sure it would. But I'm fine."

The Vikings have questions about their offen-



AP Photo/Andy King

The New York Giants' Mathias Kiwanuka sits on the bench in the fourth quarter as the Minnesota Vikings defeated the Giants, 44-7, in an NFL game Sunday in Minneapolis.

sive line and secondary to answer, but they can forget about one worry already: They're guaranteed to play inside until the Super Bowl in sunny Miami. They'll have at least one game at the comfy Metrodome, where they went 8-0 for the first time since going 15-1 in 1998.

After ugly defeats in three nationally televised night games last month that ruined their chance to catch the Saints for pre-Super Bowl home-field advantage and exposed a few troubling flaws, the Vikings were determined to regain their edge.

They tried 35 passes and ran only 22 times during the first three quarters, even keeping

the offense on the field for fourth-and-goal at the 1 on Favre's final possession. He capped it with a touchdown pass to fullback Naufahu Tahi to make it 44-0.

Childress attempted to downplay the aggressiveness, but cornerback Cedric Griffin said the coaches emphasized "having a statement game" before the playoffs.

"Just wanted to stay on the gas," Childress said.

The Giants, who held out lead running back Brandon Jacobs and starting offensive lineman Rich Seubert and Kareem McKenzie, totaled 13 penalties for 95 yards.

"I do think we tried," coach Tom Coughlin said, adding: "I'm not going to say it was a great performance, but they all came to the stadium wanting to play."

Sidney Rice caught six passes for 112 yards and two touchdowns, and tight end Visanthe Shiancoe had seven receptions for 94 yards and a score, all in the first half. Adrian Peterson scored his 18th touchdown, only carrying the ball nine times for 54 yards. Childress chalked that up simply to "luck of the draw" on how the Vikings attacked the defense.

While the Giants (8-8) gained only 73 yards in the first three quarters, the Vikings sailed up and down the field and posted their highest score of the season.

"It felt good just to be back in rhythm offensively," Peterson said. "The defensive side looked good too. That's definitely the way you want to enter the playoffs."

After whipping Washington and putting themselves in solid position for a playoff spot, the Giants were blown out at home last week by Carolina and will miss the postseason for the first time in five years.

"Playing like that two weeks in a row is disrespectful to the logo that's on our helmet," center Shaun O'Hara said. "The Giants franchise, organization and fans deserve better than they received the last two weeks from the players."

Eli Manning threw an interception and lost a fumble. He missed his chance to set the franchise record for single-season yards passing, finishing 17 for 23 for 141 yards.

"I'm really confused. We were playing so well at Washington and had an opportunity, and I don't know what happened to get to this point," Manning said.

**NOTES:** The Giants gave up 427 points this season, their most since 1966. Only Detroit (2-14) and St. Louis (1-15) allowed more in the NFC. . . . Rookie Percy Harvin totaled 2,081 all-purpose yards this season, including kickoff returns, the most in Vikings' history.