

Lions end skid, take top spot in NY Life Protection Index

NORTHBROOK, Ill. (STATS) - In the midst of a historical road losing streak and armed with a third-string quarterback who was downright dreadful the week before, the Detroit Lions didn't have much reason to be confident when they visited Tampa Bay last weekend.

After four-plus quarters of impressive offensive line play, however, history was turned on its head and even the lowly Lions were walking around with a contender's swagger. Detroit graded out with a Week 15-best 96.3 in the New York Life Protection Index in its 23-20 overtime win Sunday over the Buccaneers, a victory which saw the team snap its 26-game skid away from home.

The New York Life Protection Index is a proprietary formula created by STATS LLC which measures pass protection by using metrics such as length of passes, penalties by offensive lineman, sacks allowed and quarterback hurries and knockdowns.

Drew Stanton, appearing in his third straight game after being forced into the starting role following injuries to Matthew Stafford and Shaun Hill, wasn't sacked and was hurried just once. He passed for a career-best 252 yards and a touchdown to lead the Lions to their first road victory since Oct. 28, 2007, when they won 16-7 at Chicago. Stanton, however, wasn't about to take the credit for the win.

"We put the onus on the offensive line," he said. "Going into the final drive in the fourth quarter I said, 'We're going to win this football game because of you.'"

Although Stanton had faith in his front five, they hadn't helped him much in his last two starts, grading out at a season-low 34.4 in a defeat to the Bears in Week 13 and 58.6 in a loss to Green Bay last week.

Sunday's rating was the best by Detroit's line since recording a 101.9 in a 31-21 loss to Indianapolis on Dec. 14, 2008.

While the Lions were a surprise to finish first in the NYLPI, the Colts have been regulars near the top. They finished second in Week 15 at 93.7 in their 34-24 victory over Jacksonville.

NEW YORK LIFE PROTECTION INDEX		
Team	Wk15	Season
Detroit	96.3	70.0
Indianapolis	93.7	90.7
New Orleans	84.8	81.7
Pittsburgh	83.9	48.6
Miami	81.9	66.3
NY Jets	81.1	66.8
NY Giants	80.1	79.9
Cincinnati	78.2	68.3
Dallas	75.8	71.4
San Diego	75.1	68.3

In a game Indianapolis needed to win to stay in control of its playoff destiny, Peyton Manning was sacked just once and threw for 229 yards and two touchdowns.

The Colts, who rank first overall on the season at 90.7, have finished first or second in the NYLPI four of the last five weeks. Manning has been sacked only three times over that span, and Indianapolis is tied with the New York Giants for an NFL-low 15 sacks allowed on the season.

While both Manning brothers play behind solid pass protection - Eli's Giants rank third overall at 79.9 - and do a good job of throwing the ball away to avoid sacks, a couple of quarterbacks who made their season debut this past weekend weren't quite as savvy in the pocket.

Washington's Rex Grossman was sacked five times in a 33-30 loss at Dallas, and Green Bay's Matt Flynn was also dropped five times in Sunday night's 31-27 loss at New England. The Redskins' line graded out at 52.4, while the Packers' finished at 41.2.

But neither of those teams had the most porous protection for the week. San Francisco allowed Alex Smith to be sacked six times and knocked down on eight other occasions in last Thursday's 34-7 loss to San Diego.

"I thought under the situation, under the circumstances, I thought Alex handled himself about as well as he could," 49ers coach Mike Singletary said.

San Francisco's line graded out with an 18.2, just ahead of Baltimore, which finished with a Week 15-worst 17.4. The Ravens beat New Orleans 30-24 on Sunday, but the front five put the team in difficult positions on numerous occasions as they allowed three sacks and were guilty of three false starts. In addition, only 48 of Joe Flacco's 172 passing yards were in the air, with the rest coming after the catch.

Flacco completed 10 of 20 passes, just three of which went to his wide receivers.

Baltimore has finished with a NYLPI of less than 46 in each of the past four weeks after grading out at 63 or better in nine of the first 10.

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