

Old Bears defense picks off 34-18 win over Cowboys

Written by Stephen Hawkins

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ARLINGTON, Texas — Charles Tillman had the ball thrown right into his hands. All the Chicago Bears cornerback had to do was grab it and run 25 yards untouched down the sideline for a touchdown.

Lance Briggs had to go three times farther and sidestep a few Dallas Cowboys on his way to the end zone.

The interception returns by Tillman and Briggs, who are among the five 30-something starters on Chicago's defense, came in a 34-18 win over the Cowboys on Monday night when Tony Romo matched his career high with five picks.

"I think Lance's was better. He juked a couple of people. His was longer, so by far I think he had the play of the game," Tillman said. "Mine was simple and boring. His was exciting."

Briggs' interception came in a wild two-play exchange of turnovers midway through the third quarter, and put the Bears up 24-7.

The first fumble of the season for Chicago (3-1) came when Jay Cutler was sacked by DeMarcus Ware to set Dallas up at the Bears 27. It was the third forced fumble already for Ware, the Pro Bowl linebacker who turned 30 during training camp.

On the very next play, Romo was trying to escape pressure when he was hit from behind by Henry Melton. The ball popped forward into the air to Briggs.

"Just outstanding play by our defense," Bears coach Lovie Smith said. "It seemed like everybody had a say in it. How about Lance Briggs? You guys didn't know he could run that fast."

Despite his fumble, Cutler was nearly flawless after halftime, completing 11 of 12 passes for 219 yards and two touchdowns. He was 18 of 24 overall for 275 yards. A 34-yard TD pass to Devin Hester started the half and there was later a 31-yarder to Brandon Marshall, who had seven catches for 138 yards.

The Cowboys (2-2) are a .500 team again, alternating wins and losses this season. Since the start of the 1997 season, Dallas is 122-122 in regular-season games with one playoff victory.

"This has to be a wakeup call for us. I don't say that nonchalantly. It has to be," said Jason Witten, the Cowboys' 10th-year tight end. "You can't bounce back and forth like this and try to compete come December-time. You can't do it. We have been in that situation before. You cannot do it. And we know that, and we'll get better."

Making things worse for the Cowboys, they now head into their bye week. And their next game is Oct. 14 at Baltimore, starting a stretch of playing four of five on the road.

"These next two weeks are going to be very long," running back DeMarco Murray said. "They're going to seem like forever."

Dallas owner Jerry Jones, however, called it a "timely bye" and a chance to reassess things for his team that opened the season by winning at the New York Giants. The defending Super Bowl champions are the next team to visit Cowboys Stadium, on Oct. 28.

"I know it's the same makeup of the team. Same personnel," Jones said. "We've seen this team play well and we can play a lot better. ... We have a lot of work to do."

Chicago scored first on Robbie Gould's 43-yard field goal with just over 4 minutes left in the first half. Three plays later, Romo threw a ball right at Tillman when intended receiver Dez Bryant kept running down the field instead of cutting toward the sideline.

"We were just seeing how the corner played," Cowboys coach Jason Garrett said. "'Tony saw it one way. Dez saw it another way.'"

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Romo finished 31 of 43 for 307 yards, including a 10-yard touchdown to Miles Austin just before halftime.

Chicago opened the second half with a 73-yard drive capped with the TD by Hester, who sprinted by rookie cornerback Morris Claiborne and had to make a lunging catch at the goal line — a play upheld after a replay review.

That was one of three plays reviewed by referee Walt Anderson and his crew. The regular refs were back to work a week after that disputed Monday night ending in which Seattle won at home against Green Bay.

Romo was picked off again when his short pass deflected off receiver Kevin Ogletree and was caught by Major Wright. The Bears ran only two plays before the teams traded turnovers on consecutive snaps with Briggs' first interception return for a score since 2005.

"We have a ton of athletes, a great mixture of old and young, a great core," Briggs said. "All of the talk coming into training camp about the offense. The defense, we've got a lot of pride. We want to be consistent. We want to get turnovers. We want to get after the passer. We want to shut down the run."

The Bears did all of that against the Cowboys, who had only 41 yards rushing.

Murray had 131 yards rushing in the Cowboys' season-opening victory at the Giants. He has only 106 in the last three games, including 24 on 11 carries Monday night with an 11-yard run.

NOTES: Chicago is 8-2 in Monday night games under Smith. ... When the Cowboys got the ball in the final 3 minutes, Kyle Orton got his first action since he signed a free-agent deal during the offseason to be Romo's backup. The veteran quarterback was 9 of 10 passing for 89 yards with a 5-yard TD to Witten in the final minute. ... Wright had two picks after returning interception for a TD in Chicago's previous game. ... D.J. Moore has nine career interceptions, three against Romo. ... Witten, the seven-time Pro Bowler with some uncharacteristic drops in the first three games, had 13 catches for 112 yards. It was his 15th career 100-yard game. ... Bryant had eight catches for 105 yards. __PUBLIC__