By JOE KAY
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CINCINNATI — Third-and-1. Third-and-2. Might as well be third-and-50. The Bengals are at their worst on the most important down, and it's starting to catch up with them.

They were only 2 of 14 on third downs Sunday during a 17-13 loss to the Miami Dolphins. Given two chances to pull the game out in the closing minutes, the Bengals (3-2) couldn't keep moving the ball. They had to settle for a field goal attempt that Mike Nugent missed before Andy Dalton threw a game-ending interception.

In the last two games, the Bengals are only 4 of 25 on third down. They've come to rely on big plays for points. Forced to grind it out against the Dolphins, they couldn't do it.

Six times, they failed to convert on third-and-5 or shorter.

"We had too many third-and-very-long situations," coach Marvin Lewis on Monday. "There were a couple second-and-2s and third-and-2s that we've got to convert to first downs. That will keep us moving the football down the field a little better."

Dalton and the running backs repeatedly came up short, a major concern heading into a game Sunday in Cleveland (0-5). Dalton was only 2 of 11 for 17 yards on third down throws. Running back BenJarvus Green-Ellis carried nine times overall in the game for only 14 yards against the league's top run defense.

Cincinnati let Cedric Benson leave as a free agent and replaced him with Green-Ellis, hoping to get a more diversified running back. It hasn't worked out so far. Green-Ellis is averaging only 3.3 yards per carry and has seven catches for 48 yards.

Green-Ellis watched extra video on Monday trying to find reasons for the problems.

"When things don't go as well, or when things do go well, you don't take time and just take it easy," Green-Ellis said. "You work harder and you put in more time at the office. That's just what you do."

The Bengals were hoping that Bernard Scott — a quicker runner — could provide a complement to Green-Ellis when he returned from a hand injury that forced him to miss training camp and the first two games. He tore a ligament in his left knee on Sunday, ending his season.

The injury leaves the Bengals with three running backs: Green-Ellis, Brian Leonard and Cedric Peerman, who plays mostly on special teams.

"It's unfortunate for (Scott), but we'll have to move on," offensive coordinator Jay Gruden said. "I don't have any problem with any of those backs in the game. I can call anything that I want. It's not like I have a BenJarvus package, a Cedric Peerman package, a B-Scott package or whatever.

"I can just call the game the way it is and hopefully Cedric and Brian Leonard, with some more opportunities, will give us some different looks and BenJarvus the rest on the sideline when he needs it."

The Bengals filled Scott's roster spot by activating linebacker Dontay Moch, who was suspended the first four games for violating the NFL's policy on performance-enhancing substances. Moch, a third-round draft pick in 2011, didn't play last season because of a foot injury and an illness.

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