



PRINTER FRIENDLY ARTICLE

Friday, December 18, 2009

## ONCE AGAIN, A VICTORY

By John Oehser - Special to Colts.com

### Colts Set Franchise Record with 14th Consecutive Victory to Start the Season

The Colts' 14th game ended in the fashion of so many of the first 13.

The circumstances on the banks of the St. Johns River Thursday night were dramatic. The Colts, again on history's cusp, trailed late, the score remained tight, and a big play or two decided the outcome.

Once again, the Colts made those plays. Once again, they won.

And once again, they came from behind to do it.

Peyton Manning, who played a perfect first half for a second time in as many visits to Jacksonville, followed that half with yet another fourth-quarter rally, leading the Colts to their 14th consecutive victory to start the season – 35-31 over the Jacksonville Jaguars in front of 63,753 at Jacksonville Municipal Stadium in Jacksonville, Fla., Thursday night.

"The guys have a great, great fighting spirit," Colts Head Coach Jim Caldwell told Colts Radio after a game that featured 10 lead changes and in which neither team led by more than four points.

The Colts rallied five times from three-point deficits, the last time when Manning threw his fourth touchdown pass – this one a 65-yarder to three-time Pro Bowl wide receiver Reggie Wayne on 3rd-and-5 from the Colts 35 with 5:23 remaining.

An interception by rookie cornerback Jacob Lacey secured the victory with :56 remaining.

"We never gave up," Lacey told Colts Radio. "We never lost focus. When we had our back against the wall and we needed to step up, we were able to do that.

"It's a great feeling, not only to keep the undefeated record going, but to get a win."

The Colts, who extended their regular-season winning streak to an NFL-record 23 games, became the third team in NFL history to start the season 14-0. The 1972 Miami Dolphins went unbeaten in a 14-game regular season, and the New England Patriots finished 16-0 in 2007.

The Colts, who set a franchise record for the best start, rallied to win in the fourth quarter for a seventh time this season.

That's an NFL record, too.

"As long as you finish on top, it's a good way to win," Colts tight end Dallas Clark told Colts Radio after catching seven passes for 95 yards and two touchdown passes. "It was what we expected. We knew we'd have to earn everything we got. They took us down to the wire."

The Colts, who remained one of two unbeaten teams in the NFL along with New Orleans, a week ago clinched the AFC's No. 1 seed. Because they have secured home-field advantage throughout the postseason, the question of how much starters would or wouldn't play was a major topic of discussion around the Colts throughout the week.

The Colts, as Caldwell said throughout the week, played all healthy starters on Thursday, with defensive ends Robert Mathis (quad) and Dwight Freeney (abdomen) and offensive tackle Charlie Johnson (foot) – all of whom missed practice this week – playing.

Mathis and Freeney each played mainly on third downs early, but played extensively late.

Asked afterward how the Colts will approach next Sunday's game against the New York Jets, Caldwell told Colts Radio he hadn't yet decided.

"We just kind of look at this thing one week at a time," Caldwell said. "We get a chance to think about it and evaluate the health of our team. That's probably going to be the biggest issue. At the end of the regular season, another season starts, and that's the big one."

Said Manning to the NFL Network, "We're not going to lobby, because that's not what our football team's about. Certainly, players have their hopes and wishes. Caldwell makes the call. We follow.

"We'll see what happens. Obviously, personally, I hope we still play."

As he was last December in Jacksonville, Manning – 23 of 30, 308 yards, four touchdowns, one interception – was perfect in the first half, a half in which the each offense moved efficiently.

With Manning completing 12 of 12 first-half passes, the Colts scored three first-half touchdowns – two on touchdown passes by Manning – en route to a 21-17 first-half lead, with the first score coming on a 50-yard field goal by Jaguars kicker Josh Scobee.

The Colts then moved 80 yards in 14 plays, with Manning throwing a 6-yard touchdown pass to Clark early in the second quarter. Jaguars quarterback David Garrard then moved the Jaguars 61 yards on 11 plays, finishing the drive with a 9-yard touchdown pass to running back Maurice Jones-Drew.

That made it 10-7, Jaguars, but running back Chad Simpson returned the ensuing kickoff 93 yards for a touchdown that gave Indianapolis the lead again.

Jones-Drew's three-yard touchdown run ended the Jaguars' next drive, but Manning threw his second touchdown just before the end of the half for a 21-17 Colts lead.

The back-and-forth continued in the third quarter.

After a pass from Manning went off the hands of Clark and was intercepted by Jaguars linebacker Daryl Smith, Garrard threw 16 yards to wide receiver Mike Sims-Walker. Clark caught a 27-yard touchdown pass from Manning on the ensuing series, bouncing off a tackle by Jacksonville safety Reggie Nelson and running the final 15 yards into the end zone.

The Jaguars took the lead again on the ensuing possession, with wide receiver Mike Thomas catching a 13-yard touchdown pass in the middle of the end zone from Garrard after a nine-play, 46-yard drive.

The Colts punted on their ensuing two possessions, but forced a Jaguars punt with 6:05 remaining, setting up Manning's touchdown pass to Wayne.

The Colts' defense, which allowed 345 yards and 25 first downs for the game but held Jacksonville scoreless in the fourth quarter, stopped the ensuing drive when defensive tackle Eric Foster recorded his second sack of the game to force a punt.

After the Jaguars forced a three-and-out, Garrard drove to the Jaguars to the Colts 33, but on 3rd-and-10 from there, he threw high to Thomas. Lacey caught the ball and after a short return and fell on the ground, securing the victory.

"We just want to try our best to keep this streak going," Bethea said. "It feels good. Hopefully, we can keep it going in our next game against New York (next week).

"Fourteen-and-oh feels good. Hopefully, we'll get to 15."



[Print this Article](#)