

CONVINCING WIN



Cutler needed to state case as go-to guy, and rally did just that

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Jay Cutler was flat on his back, unable to see much of anything. The Bears quarterback could do nothing but wait. And hope.

So much hung in the bleak Cleveland air early in the fourth quarter Sunday. The mood of a city. The need of backing within the locker room. Cutler's future.

Most important, a deep ball to Alshon Jeffery.

Maybe this moment, this pass, was a microcosm of Cutler's five seasons in Chicago. It was fluttering, so far from perfect, dangerously close to a maddening mistake yet somehow giving the Bears a chance at something big.

Cutler had so much impact on the play but so little control of how it finished. Which was with Jeffery making a remarkable 45-yard touchdown catch between two Browns defenders, tying the score at 24 and propelling the Bears to a 38-31 victory.

Not just any victory, either. This win lifted the Bears to the top of the NFC North, energized and relieved Cutler and pushed aside a pair of anonymously sourced national reports suggesting significant dis-

Jay Cutler and the Bears defeated the Browns on Sunday with the backdrop of reports of dissension on the team.

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INSIDE 61-yard FG stuns Lions

Bears alone atop NFC North after Ravens rally in final minute for 18-16 victory. [Page 3](#)

Cutler: Coach feeling it in 2nd half. [Page 3](#)

Brad Biggs' film session. [Back Page](#)

TALKING SMACK



Steve Rosenbloom That Bears receiver making all those highlight catches apparently has a difficult name to pronounce correctly. Maybe he should go by M. Jeff. [More Smack, Page 2](#)

A relief for Cutler

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cord within the locker room.

Everyone knew the drastically negative turn things could have taken with a Cutler face plant and a Bears loss.

Instead, at a fork in the road, a rousing fourth-quarter comeback sent the narrative skipping down a cheerier path.

"Every game from here on out is going to be like that," Cutler said. "Last week was like that. This week was like that. You've got all this stuff happening around the building. And inside, we're thinking: 'We're in a playoff race right now. We're trying to win ballgames.' So you have to lock all that stuff out."

Heated debate had stirred all last week regarding coach Marc Trestman's unwavering backing of Cutler as his go-to quarterback over Josh McCown.

The Bears felt the growing buzz encircling Halas Hall.

"We knew the media reports. We knew things that were going on," left tackle Jermon Bushrod said Monday. "We understood that, but we didn't focus on it. When you're in the locker room and you have the type of guys that we have, if you're focusing on things (outside) the team and what everybody else is saying, it takes away from what you're trying to get done in-house."

Cutler was so concerned about his in-house approval that he sought out several teammates midweek — including receiver Brandon Marshall, running back Matt Forte and center Roberto Garza — to make certain his return wasn't creating an unwanted commotion.

"I get it. I understand that," Bushrod said. "Josh was playing great. He got our offense rolling."

But, Bushrod added, there's also sincere appreciation for Cutler's heart and competitive fire. So he was welcomed back, Bushrod said, "with open arms" and a

teamwide pact to filter the outside noise.

Trestman was asked Monday, even with his decision set in stone so long ago, whether he ever felt obligated to take the temperature of the locker room to ensure harmony remained.

"I didn't take any temperature," he responded. "I stayed resolute in that I felt it was in the best interest of the team from the beginning to make sure that everybody knew the direction we were going to go."

Still, deeper undertones will linger regarding the potential friction at Halas Hall.

Cutler acknowledged as much Monday, carefully addressing the ESPN and Fox reports that implied he remains a polarizing figure, even within the team. He said he felt well supported — by offensive teammates anyway. But he couldn't say with confidence how much the defense had his back.

"No one approached me and said, 'Hey, out of respect to you and Tress, we're not going to say anything. But we don't think you should play,'" Cutler said on his weekly radio show on WMVP-AM 1000. "You never know. Locker rooms are funny places."

General manager Phil Emery chimed in on WSCR-AM 670, never denying disagreement within the organization but insisting Sunday's win and its celebratory aftermath were far more important.

"I saw a group that trusts, understands and loves one another," Emery said. "And that's how they came up with the victory. There was certainly a time during that game, when it was 24-17, where the air could have gone out of the bubble and it could have been over for the Bears. But that didn't happen."

So here the Bears stand, with two regular-season games remaining, a playoff push in progress and no other choice but to rally behind Cutler as their top gun — the way Trestman has all season.

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