

Titans fire Whisenhunt, name Mularkey

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Mike Mularkey showed up for work in Nashville early Tuesday morning planning to shape a plan for the running game against New Orleans. Not long after he began his workday, Mularkey was a head coach for the third time and plans changes for the Tennessee Titans.

"As I told (president Steve Underwood), I kind of had to take a step back," Mularkey said.

He will serve as interim coach after head coach Ken Whisenhunt was fired without warning. Whisenhunt reported to the team facility as per usual to learn he



Whisenhunt

had been fired in a meeting with Underwood and general manager Ruston Webster. That decision was made by controlling owner Amy Adams Strunk.

Whisenhunt was 3-20 as head coach in Tennessee, including 1-6 this season. Only one coach in NFL history had worse in his first 23 games with a team (John McKay, 0-23 from 1976-78).

"I'm grateful for the opportunity and appreciate the hard work the staff put in and the support I got from our players and our fans," Whisenhunt said. "I wish the organization much success going forward."

"We'll cast a wide loop looking for a successor (at) head coach," Underwood said. "This is a chance for him to audition for a permanent role."

Mularkey, 16-32 as a head coach

with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Buffalo Bills, said he never thought a third opportunity would come. Adams Strunk will hire the next coach but Underwood said Webster would be involved in "genuine collaboration" to hire Whisenhunt's replacement. She and Mularkey spoke by phone on Tuesday morning.

The primary offensive focus for the Titans' organization is quarterback Marcus Mariota. Mularkey said consistency will breed confidence in Mariota. He compared the No. 2 overall pick in the 2015 draft to past pupils — a cross between former Steelers quarterback Kordell Stewart and Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan.

"He has similarities to both of those guys. That's dangerous for defenses," Mularkey said of Mariota.

Mularkey is the third head coach for the Titans since 2011.

"I'm better now than I was a couple hours ago," Mularkey said Tuesday at a mid-morning news conference at the team facility. "She felt like there needed to be a change. That was the brunt of it. I'll leave it at that."

Jason Michael will call plays for Mularkey.

"We have two former NFL coaches on our staff," team president Steve Underwood said. "Our defense is playing very well. It's not something we wanted to distract coach LeBeau about. ... I don't think there was a single straw that broke the camel's back, as you put it. Amy has been considering for several weeks. ... It was a process, not an event."

Underwood said he was not

asked many football questions by ownership because that is not his expertise. But he was asked about morale, and the effect on business under a dogpile of losses.

"You have some attrition in your season ticket sales, it affects your suite business. Our fans have been really loyal," Underwood said. "All of those things have an effect on your television ratings, and you have to pay attention to that stuff."

Underwood said Webster has ownership's full support though he was not given a seat at the podium Tuesday next to the team's president and Mularkey.

"Improvement in our business is measured in wins," Underwood said of what ownership would consider ample improvement to retain Mularkey on a fulltime basis.

Panthers' kicker stays focused in OT

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina — Graham Gano knew to focus on what might be coming up rather than dwell on the past.

The Carolina kicker was clutch in overtime, making a 42-yard field goal and then a game-winning 52-yarder as the Panthers stayed unbeaten by defeating the Indianapolis Colts 29-26 on a rainy Monday night at Bank of America Stadium.

"I feel blessed to have that opportunity at the end," Gano said.

Gano atoned for a missed extra point, and the Panthers (7-0) continued their best start in franchise history after blowing a 17-point, fourth-quarter lead.

"We have had games when you have weather like this and sometimes those things happen," he said of the missed kick. "We prepare for that the best we can."

After the teams traded overtime field goals, Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly's interception of quarterback Andrew Luck off a deflection from safety Roman Harper gave the Panthers the ball at the Colts' 39-yard line in the sudden-death portion of the extra session.

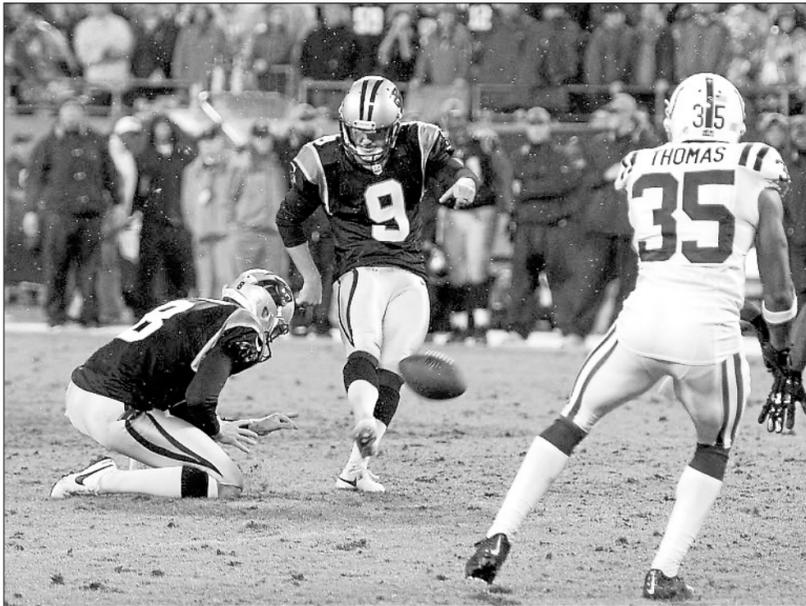
"The ball went right to me. All I had to do is catch it," Kuechly said. "Roman Harper was the key guy on that. He got his hand in there."

Carolina has won a franchise-record 11 consecutive regular-season games dating to last season. The Panthers matched last year's regular-season victory total, when they went 7-8-1, which was good enough to win the NFC South.

"We're one of the lucky few to be able to say we're 7-0," Panthers quarterback Cam Newton said.

The Colts (3-5) wiped out a 17-point deficit in the last 7:04 of regulation as Luck suddenly got untracked, throwing two touchdown passes.

He was miffed that it wasn't



JEFF Siner | CHARLOTTE OBSERVER | TNS

Carolina Panthers kicker Graham Gano kicks the game-winning field goal to defeat the Indianapolis Colts 29-26 on Monday night at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte, North Carolina.

enough because it took so long to fall into a rhythm.

"We've got to fix those things in practice and fix them in games," said Luck, who finished with three interceptions. "We did some decent things to give ourselves a chance but messed up at the end by throwing an interception."

Adam Vinatieri's 50-yard field goal on the opening possession of overtime put the Colts in good position. The Panthers matched it when Gano connected from 42 yards.

The Carolina possession included a dropped pass by wide receiver Ted Ginn Jr. that would have, at the very least, taken the ball inside the 10-yard line.

Newton clicked on a couple of second-half drives and it put Carolina up 23-6. He threw two touchdown passes in a 4 1/2-minute span.

Still trailing 23-20, the Colts regained possession at their own 40 with 2:02 remaining and out of timeouts. Luck's

next three passes were incomplete before a fourth-down conversion, and after that, the Colts moved methodically to the Carolina 6-yard line.

Vinatieri's 24-yard field goal tied the game on the last play of regulation, completing a 16-play possession.

"We didn't get enough pressure that we needed in the fourth quarter," Carolina coach Ron Rivera said, "and (Luck) makes some nice throws."

Newton finished 16 of 35 for 248 yards and two touchdowns. He was picked off once.

Luck completed 23 of 47 passes for 232 yards for the Colts, who lost their third game in a row. Through three quarters, he had only 40 passing yards and was intercepted twice.

"(Our defense) kept us in it and gave us a chance to win it," Luck said. "The Panthers made the plays when they needed them."

Luck's 18-yard touchdown

pass to wide receiver Andre Johnson pulled the Colts to within 23-13 with 7:04 left. It was an eight-play, 86-yard march.

Luck then connected with tight end Coby Fleener in the middle of the end zone with 2:27 to go, making it 23-20 after the extra-point kick.

Of Luck's first 16 passes, only five were complete while two were intercepted.

The Panthers were on the verge of scoring late in the third quarter, reaching the Indianapolis 1-yard line. A fumbled snap gave the ball back to the Colts, leaving the score at 10-6.

After the Colts punted from their own end zone, Ginn's 18-yard return helped set up Newton's 27-yard touchdown strike to tight end Greg Olsen.

The next time the Panthers had possession, the drive ended with Newton's 8-yard strike to diving wide receiver Corey Brown in the end zone with 10:44 remaining in the fourth quarter.

Colby-Sawyer tips MMA soccer team in NAC semifinal

NEW LONDON, New Hampshire — Colby-Sawyer sophomore Emily Martin made a game-saving play early in the second half and won the game with a goal late in the first over-

WOMEN'S SOCCER

time to lift the Chargers to a 1-0 victory over Maine Maritime in a North Atlantic Conference women's soccer semifinal Tuesday.

With the win, the second seed Chargers improve to 12-3-2 and will host intrastate rival New England College for the NAC championship on Saturday by virtue of the fourth seed Pilgrims upsetting top seed Castleton 3-1 in Tuesday's other semifinal.

No. 3 MMA of Castine finishes at 10-8-1.

In an evenly played match throughout, each side saw a fair share of scoring opportunities but could not break through thanks to great

goaltending and timely defense.

The Mariners had the best chance of the contest eight minutes into the second half when NAC Rookie of the Year Makayla Lewis got behind Colby-Sawyer goalie Karley Hamilton and took a shot to a seemingly open net. That's when Martin stepped in to block the ball and save the day for the Chargers.

The game-winning play by Martin came in the first overtime at 97:41. As each team tried to gain possession, Martin gathered the ball and ripped a shot from 25 yards out that hit off a player a few yards in front of her, which kept the ball on an upward trajectory ending up in the top left corner of the net. The goal was Martin's third of the season and second game-winner.

Hamilton made six saves and earned her eighth shutout while MMA's Maggie McConkey finished with eight saves.

UMaine club to host rugby championships

ORONO — The University of Maine men's rugby club will host the New England Rugby Football Union College Men's Division Conference Championships this weekend.

UMaine (5-1), the No. 1 team in the northern division of the conference, hosts Tufts (4-1), the No. 2 team in the southern division, at noon Saturday at Lengyel Field. Phasathon Ithipalakorn of Augusta captains the 40-member UMaine squad, which has outscored opponents 202-52 this season.

"The team being able to host and compete in the playoffs this year shows all the hard work and dedication the players have put in during this season and the

off-season," coach Dale Rustell said in a news release.

The University of Maine at Farmington (5-1), the No. 2 team in the northern division of the conference, plays Eastern Connecticut State University (6-0), the No. 1 team in the southern division, at 2 p.m. Saturday.

The winners of Saturday's matches will square off at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 8.

The conference champion will advance to the National Small College Rugby Organization Regional Tournament at Eastern Connecticut State University on Nov. 21-22. The runner-up will take on the Upstate New York Rugby Conference runner-up on Nov. 14 in Saratoga Springs, New York.

Soccer

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strategy," said Michaud. "And there are World Cup plexiglass dugouts for the teams."

"It is exciting to have people visiting us for a change," said White. "We are very proud of our facility and we're looking forward to showing it off for people who will be coming up."

Dick Durost, executive director of the Maine Principals' Association, credited MPA assistant executive director Mike Burnham and the MPA's soccer committee for making the decision five years ago to develop a five-year rotation for state championship soccer sites that included Aroostook County. It is a decision he firmly agrees with.

"Aroostook County teams had done all of the traveling," said Durost.

He pointed out that in 2010, the Caribou High School girls team not only had to travel 297 miles to

Falmouth to play in the state Class B championship game, they also wound up playing Falmouth on its home field because that was the pre-determined site.

That contributed to the decision to rotate the sites.

Durost said there was "no doubt in my mind" that Presque Isle will embrace the opportunity to showcase The County.

"It's going to be a great day on Saturday," said Durost, who will be in attendance.

Aroostook County teams in Classes C and D have certain-

ly earned the right to play near home.

Between 2007 and 2013, six of the seven Eastern (now the North Division) champions in Class C boys soccer have hailed from Aroostook County. The last nine Eastern titlists in girls Class D have been from Aroostook County, including this year's.

Prior to this season, Fort Kent had won three of the previous five Class C east titles, and in Class D boys, Aroostook County teams won six of eight regional crowns between 2001 and 2008.

County

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and Ashland — and would have trips of 11, 59 and 23 miles, respectively.

The South regional final teams of Monmouth Academy, Waynflete of Portland, Rich-

mond, Buckfield and Rangeley face an average trip of 265 miles. Monmouth, Waynflete and Richmond each have two teams in the finals.

Yes, those distances are long, but remember again that The County teams have always done so, and those looking for a reminder only need to check in with the Fort Kent girls soccer team,

which traveled 314 miles to Portland for last year's state final and 320 miles to Scarborough in 2012.

Admittedly, I'm a bit objectively challenged when it comes to feeling a bit of sympathy for the long journeys teams will take to play games in Aroostook County because I have strong family connections to The County

and was always amazed by friends who seemed to think the trip from Bangor to Presque Isle was longer than the trip from Presque Isle to Bangor.

The distances, of course, are the same. It just seems like it's a bit more uphill to The County, especially for rookies making their first trips.

Dusty Baker named new manager of Washington Nationals

REUTERS

The Washington Nationals have named veteran Dusty Baker as their new manager, the Major League Baseball team announced on Tuesday.

A three-time National League Manager of the Year, Baker takes over from Matt Williams, who was fired in

October after the regular season.

Baker, 66, will inherit a team that was widely favored to win the National League East and seen as a World Series contender but barely managed a winning record going 83-79 to finish seven games behind the New York Mets.

The Nationals reportedly first offered the manager's job to Bud Black, the 2010 NL manager of the year, but financial terms could not be agreed.

"During our broad search process we met with many qualified candidates, and ultimately it was clear that Dusty's

deep experience was the best fit for our ball club," team owner Ted Lerner said in a statement.

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