

'We're a young team and we've got a very bright future'

49ers' great turnaround season pulls up short in Super Bowl

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. Feb. 4, (AP) — The San Francisco 49ers' remarkable turnaround ended up just a few minutes shy of a Super Bowl title.

After becoming only the third team to go to the Super Bowl a year after winning four or fewer games, the 49ers stumbled at the end and lost 31-20 to the Kansas City Chiefs on Sunday night.

"It was a great season," linebacker Fred Warner said. "I can't take anything away from what we've done. To go 4-12 and then go to the Super Bowl and have a chance to win in it, it's one of those things that will hurt for a while. I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure we're better." The Niners (15-4) were poised to join the 1999 St. Louis Rams as the only teams to win a Super Bowl a year after going 4-12. Instead, they join the 1988 Bengals as a four-win team that came so close to a championship a year later but faltered at the end.

In this same stadium 21 years ago, Joe Montana and San Francisco drove past Cincinnati for the winning score in a 20-16 victory. The collapse for this version of the Niners was on both sides of the ball. The offense fell apart in the fourth quarter and the defense got burned for big plays by Patrick Mahomes that turned a 20-10 lead into a 31-20 loss in the blink of an eye in a crushing loss.

"You could see it in the guys eyes in there. It means something to guys," quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo said. "That means you've got

FOOTBALL

guys that care about what they're doing, guys who care about each other. We're a young team and we've got a very bright future. We've got to take this in stride and remember this feeling and let it fuel us in the offseason." Garoppolo's first full season as a starter had ups and downs. He led the team to 13 wins in the regular season with four fourth-quarter comebacks and three games with at least four TD passes. But he also showed a propensity for baffling mistakes. His 18 turnovers in the regular season were the most of any player in the postseason, and then he threw two interceptions in the Super Bowl.

A big reason for optimism for the Niners was the play of their top two picks in the 2019 draft. No. 2 overall pick Nick Bosa became a dominant defensive end, making nine sacks in the regular season and four more in the playoffs on the way to winning AP Defensive Rookie of the Year.

Second-round receiver Deebo Samuel showed he has the ability to be a star, excelling as a runner, receiver and blocker. He set a Super Bowl record for receivers with 53 yards rushing against the Chiefs and also had five catches for 39 yards. His physical play sets the tone for the Niners.

One of the feel-good stories of the season was the play of running back Raheem Mostert, the former special teams standout who proved he can be a No. 1 back after being cut by

US finish atop their group



Costa Rica defender Maria Coto (3) and United States forward Christen Press (20) both go for a header during the second half of a Concacaf women's Olympic qualifying soccer match Monday, Feb. 3, in Houston. (AP)

six teams. He led the team with 772 yards rushing in the regular season and then had 220 yards and four TDs in the NFC title game against Green Bay.

He ran for 58 yards and a TD in the Super Bowl and should get a chance for more work next season.

The Niners will have some difficult decisions when it comes to free agency this offseason with several key players set to hit the open market next month. The three biggest potential unrestricted free agents are defensive lineman Arik Armstead, who had a breakthrough season with 10 sacks; safety Jimmie Ward, who was a key part of the league's stingiest pass defense; and receiver Emmanu-

el Sanders, who sparked the passing game after his midseason addition.

San Francisco also can give extensions to key players like tight end George Kittle and defensive tackle DeForest Buckner, which might not leave much money left for other free agents.

The Niners won't have to improve much to contend again next season. Many of the key pieces are in place from a team that won 13 games in the regular season and made it to the Super Bowl.

San Francisco could use help at cornerback across from Richard Sherman and will need another top receiver if Sanders leaves in free agency.

Haiti rout Panama 6-0 in final qualifying match

HOUSTON, Feb. 4, (AP) — Christen Press and Samantha Mewis each scored a pair of goals and the United States beat Costa Rica 6-0 on Monday night to finish atop their group in the CONCACAF Women's Olympic Qualifying tournament.

The World Cup-winning US team extended their unbeaten streak to 26 games. The Americans wrapped up the group stage with three shutouts and 18 goals.

Both teams had already earned a spot in the semifinals of the tournament later this week in Carson, California. Eight teams are playing in the tournament, which will determine the region's two berths to the Tokyo Olympics this summer.

Press extended her scoring streak to four straight games with a goal in the fourth minute. Lindsey Horan, who had a hat trick in the US team's



Panama midfielder Gloria Saenz (16) and Haiti defender Johane Laforte (15) push off each other as they chase the ball during the first half of a CONCACAF women's Olympic qualifying soccer match on Feb. 3, in Houston. (AP)

Mazzarri steps down at Torino

Napoli survive scare to win

GENOA, Italy, Feb. 4, (AP) — Napoli let slip a two-goal lead but bounced back to win at Sampdoria 4-2 in Serie A.

It was Napoli's third league win since Gennaro Gattuso took over on Dec. 11 and moved the club up to 10th.

Sampdoria remained 16th, four points above the relegation zone.

Napoli came into the match with momentum after a week which saw them beat Serie A leaders Juventus in the league and reach the Italian Cup semifinals.

And they were 2-0 up within 16 minutes following goals from Arkadiusz Milik and Eljif Elmas. The 20-year-old Elmas burst into tears after scoring his first goal for the club.

However, former Napoli forward Fabio Quagliarella reduced the deficit in the 26th minute with a spectacular volley. Both sides had goals ruled out before

another former Napoli player, Manolo Gabbiadini, leveled with a penalty in the 73rd after visiting defender Kostas Manolas fouled Quagliarella.

New signing Diego Demme restored Napoli's lead seven minutes from time and fellow substitute Dries Mertens sealed the result in stoppage time.

Walter Mazzarri stepped down as Torino coach after his club conceded 11 goals over its last two matches, and Moreno Longo was hired as his replacement.

After an embarrassing 7-0 rout at home by Atalanta, Torino lost 4-0 at relegation-threatened Lecce on Sunday to stretch its losing streak to three games.

Longo is a former Torino player and youth squad coach who also coached Pro Vercelli and Frosinone.



Napoli's Dries Mertens (center), celebrates scoring against Sampdoria during a Serie A soccer match on Feb. 3, in Genova, Italy. (AP)



San Francisco 49ers' Kyle Juszczyk (44) falls into the end zone for a touchdown the Kansas City Chiefs during the first half of the NFL Super Bowl 54 football game on Feb. 2, in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP)

Willie Wood Hall of Fame DB, dies at 83

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 4, (AP) — Willie Wood, the Hall of Fame defensive back who won five NFL championships with the Green Bay Packers under coach Vince Lombardi and made the first interception in Super Bowl history, died Monday. He was 83.

Wood died of natural causes in Washington, according to Robert Schmidt, his longtime friend and former teammate at Southern California. Wood had suffered from advanced dementia for several years.

After being undrafted out of Southern California, Wood sent postcards to several NFL teams seeking a tryout. He signed as a free agent with the Packers and played safety for them from 1960-71.

Wood had a key interception in the first Super Bowl, returning it 50 yards to set up a third quarter touchdown that sealed the Packers' 35-10 victory over the Kansas City Chiefs in 1967.

Wood had a 31-yard punt return in the second Super Bowl that stood as a record for 16 years. The Packers beat the Oakland Raiders 33-14 in the 1968 title game.

"The Green Bay Packers family lost a legend," Packers President and CEO Mark Murphy said. "Willie's success story, rising from an undrafted rookie free agent to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, is an inspiration to generations of football fans. While his health challenges kept him from returning to Lambeau Field in recent years, his alumni weekend visits were cherished by both Willie and our fans."

Wood was a nine-time All-NFL first or second team honoree, an Associated Press All-Pro from 1964-68, and played in

eight Pro Bowls. He won five of the six NFL championship games he played in. In his career, he had 48 interceptions and had 1,391 yards on 187 punt returns. His 154 career starts was an NFL record for a safety.

He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1989 and the Packers Hall of Fame in 1977. He was named to the NFL 1960s All-Decade team and was one of two safeties chosen on the Super Bowl Silver Anniversary Team in 1990.

"The game has lost a true legend with the passing of Willie Wood," Hall of Fame President and CEO David Baker said. "He had an unbelievable football career which helped transform Green Bay, Wisconsin, into Tittletown USA. Willie was a rare player who always fought to be a great teammate and achieve success." The flag at the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, will be flown at half-staff in Wood's memory.

At USC, Wood played quarterback and defensive back from 1957-59. He was the first black quarterback in what is now the Pac-12 Conference. He was a team captain as a senior when the Trojans were 8-2. He came to USC after playing the 1956 season at Coalinga (California) Junior College, where he was a JC All-American.

Wood went into coaching after his playing days. He became the first black head coach in the sport's modern era with the World Football League's Philadelphia Bell in 1975. He also was the first black head coach in the Canadian Football League with the Toronto Argonauts in 1980 and '81. He also had stints as an assistant coach with the San Diego Chargers and Argonauts.

SOCCER

8-0 victory over Panama on Friday, scored some six minutes later.

Press, who plays for the Chicago Red Stars of the National Women's Soccer League, added her second goal in the 36th minute.

Mewis scored on a free kick by Press in the 63rd minute and Jessica McDonald added a goal in the 77th before Mewis' second goal, which appeared to just barely hit the line after deflecting down off the crossbar.

The crowd at Houston's BBVA Compass Stadium was announced at 7,082.

Costa Rica rested top players Shirley Cruz and Raquel Rodriguez in anticipation of the semifinals on Friday.

The US have qualified for every Olympics since women's soccer was introduced in 1996, and have won the gold medal four times. The team have five consecutive titles in the qualifying tournament.

Six teams have already made the field for Tokyo: Japan, Brazil, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Sweden and New Zealand.

Nerilia Mondesir and Mikerline Saint-Felix each scored twice and Haiti beat Panama 6-0.

It was the final match of the tournament for both teams.

Mondesir scored on a penalty kick in the fifth minute, and Saint-Felix added goals in the 11th and 29th to give Haiti a 3-0 first-half lead. Melchie Daelle Dumonay and Batcheba Louis scored in the second half before Mondesir capped scoring with a goal in the 84th minute.

Panama goalkeeper and captain Yenith Bailey did not play after she was injured in the team's 8-0 loss to the United States on Friday. Sasha Fabregas replaced her in goal for the final match.