

Bengals QB Dalton getting it done without fanfare

Written by Associated Press
Wednesday, October 16, 2013 12:28 AM -

By JOE KAY

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Andy Dalton doesn't throw the prettiest passes. He's not the swiftest when he has to scramble. He's not piling up statistics that stand out, except for one.

His team wins.

The third-year Bengals quarterback is ranked in the middle of the pack of NFL passers this week. His team leads the AFC North all by itself with a 4-2 mark, the first time it's been alone at the top since the end of the 2009 season.

For now, it has quieted fans who wonder if he's capable of taking Cincinnati to the next step.

"Andy has done a great job all season," running back Giovani Bernard said. "He's going through a lot of scrutiny but he's been able to block all that out and been able to play (well)."

Dalton has been the focal point since another poor showing in the playoffs. The Bengals are 23-15 in the regular season under Dalton but 0-2 in the playoffs. He played two of his worst games in playoff losses at Houston each of the last two seasons

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The ultimate test will be whether he gets Cincinnati back to the playoffs for a third straight season and wins this time.

Dalton ranks 16th in the NFL this week with a passer rating of 87.2. He has completed 65 percent of his passes with eight touchdowns and six interceptions. His fourth-quarter passer rating of 76.9 ranks 21st in the NFL.

One of the things he's done best: avoid mistakes that decide close games.

"I don't know that his predecessor has won these kinds of games week-in and week-out, you know?" coach Marvin Lewis asked.

Lewis was referring to Carson Palmer, who set numerous club passing records while leading the Bengals to AFC North titles in 2005 and 2009. Palmer had a vastly different team around him — the defense finished in the bottom half of the league rankings during four of his seven seasons as a starter, putting pressure on the offense to score a lot of points.

Cincinnati's defense has ranked in the top 10 in each of his first three seasons, taking a lot of pressure off Dalton and the offense. The Bengals don't need Dalton to put up huge passing numbers in order to win with their West Coast offense.

Lewis likes to point out that Dalton was thrown into the starting job right away as a rookie. By contrast, some of the NFL's top quarterbacks had time to learn on the bench, allowing them to excel right away when they got the job.

"We're very supportive of him," Lewis added. "As I told him, it's his football team. He just has to keep doing it his way. There's going to be a play that makes you go, 'Ah, shoot,' but they all have that."

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“We’re asking for special. We’re looking for special each and every day. That’s what the expectations are. He’s got to keep shouldering that and keep moving forward.”

One main area for improvement is how Dalton responds when the pocket breaks down. He’s shown a tendency to hold the ball too long or force a throw.

The overall results are pleasing. Dalton has a chance to become only the fifth quarterback in NFL history to lead his team to the playoffs each of his first three seasons, along with Pat Haden, Dan Marino, Bernie Kosar and Joe Flacco.

NOTES: The Bengals filled an open spot on their practice squad Tuesday by signing DE Kendrick Adams, who opened the season with Cleveland and played in three preseason games before being waived. Last season, he spent time on the practice squads at Tampa Bay, Detroit and Cleveland. ... The Bengals play at Detroit (4-2) on Sunday, their only indoor game this season. The Bengals won their only previous game at Ford Field and have beaten the Lions four straight overall.