



RAMS SPORTS

Rams kicker Greg Zuerlein, the NFL's scoring leader, placed on injured reserve because of back issue

By GARY KLEIN

DEC 20, 2017 | 6:55 PM



Rams kicker Greg Zuerlein (4) kicks as quarterback Austin Davis holds during warmups before a game against the Seattle Seahawks on Sunday. (Elaine Thompson / Associated Press)

He was Mr. Automatic, a strong-legged kicker who provided the high-powered Rams offense an invaluable security blanket during their turnaround season.

Greg Zuerlein, as much as any player, helped the Rams vault into first place in the

NFC West and made them a part of the Super Bowl conversation.

On Wednesday, the Rams suffered a major blow when Zuerlein, the NFL's scoring leader, was placed on injured reserve because of a back issue, ending his season.

“It's huge,” coach Sean McVay said of the potential impact.

Zuerlein, who was voted to the Pro Bowl for the first time, is scheduled to have surgery Thursday. Dr. Robert Watkins will perform the procedure to repair a herniated disk, the Rams said.

Zuerlein, a sixth-year pro, made 38 of 40 field-goal attempts and scored 158 points for a Rams team that has a chance to clinch the division title with a victory Sunday against the Tennessee Titans in Nashville.

The Rams signed kicker Sam Ficken, who made 54 of 75 field-goal attempts for Penn State in 2011-2014.

Ficken has been to training camp with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Kansas City Chiefs.

But the Rams will travel to Tennessee — and possibly make a playoff run — with a kicker who has not attempted an NFL field goal during the regular season.

“Just like anything else,” McVay said, “all we can do is, hopefully, put him in good spots to deliver.”

Quarterback Jared Goff, who leads an offense that is ranked second in the NFL in scoring, acknowledged throughout the season that Zuerlein's capabilities made his job easier. Cross midfield, the thinking went, and the Rams were in scoring position.

Now?

“We've got to be better in the red zone,” McVay said.

Zuerlein — known by fans as “Greg the Leg” and “Leg-a-Tron” — signed a three-

year, \$6.75-million contract last March.



Rams Robert Quinn and Tavon Austin continue to help families transitioning from homelessness

DEC 19, 2017 | 9:45 PM

This season, he alleviated pressure on the offense with reliability from all distances. He kicked a team-record seven field goals in a Week 4 victory at Dallas, and kicked three or more field goals in six games.

“You prepare the same every week,” Zuerlein said earlier this season, adding, “Some games you don’t get many kicks, some you get a lot.”

Zuerlein finished within five points of the Rams’ season scoring record of 163 set by Jeff Wilkins in 2003. He was within 28 points of the NFL record of 186 set by Chargers running back LaDainian Tomlinson in 2006.

“You’re sick for him, because of what he’s meant for this team,” McVay said. “I know how badly it hurt him, and he’s done everything in his power to get to this

KNOW HOW BADLY IT HURT HIM, AND HE'S DONE EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO GET TO THIS point.”

Zuerlein, a sixth-round draft pick in 2012, and the Rams were aware of the back issue throughout the season, McVay said. Because Zuerlein was unencumbered by the condition, the plan was for it to be “taken care of” at season’s end, McVay said.

But Zuerlein woke up before last Sunday’s game at Seattle and could barely stand up.

“It’s been there, almost kind of dormant,” McVay said. “And then it kind of flared up at a pretty inopportune time.”

Zuerlein kicked two first-quarter field goals, but an extra-point attempt bounced off an upright, several kickoffs were uncharacteristically short and one bounced out of bounds.

The Rams went for it on an ill-fated fourth-and-one play in the second quarter because Zuerlein was not physically capable of attempting a field goal, McVay said.

“It just totally locked up on him,” McVay said.

The Rams were “hopeful that maybe you give him some time off, he’d miss this week and then maybe it would quiet down,” McVay said.

Instead, Zuerlein’s season is over.

The Rams did not practice Wednesday, but in two workouts special teams coordinator John Fassel evaluated about 10 kickers, including Travis Coons and Roberto Aguayo, McVay said.

“Basically like a Rolodex of guys,” McVay said, adding, “There was a handful of the usual suspects, if you will, that are kind of out there and have some experience.

“And then some of the guys like Ficken that really haven’t kicked in games.”

McVay left the decision to Fassel.

“I said, ‘Hey, totally trust you,’ ” McVay said, “and that’s the direction we’re going

to go.”



Gary Klein



Gary Klein covers the Los Angeles Rams for the Los Angeles Times. Before that, he covered USC's football program and athletic department. He began working for The Times in the San Fernando Valley edition and has reported on high school, college and pro sports. He grew up in Southern California and graduated from Cal State Northridge.

LATEST NEWS

Government shutdown: How much longer can Mitch McConnell sit it out?

17m



Winter movie preview: 'Captain Marvel,' 'Miss Bala,' 'Dumbo' and nearly 200 more new releases

17m



Jury orders Mongols motorcycle club to forfeit logo trademarks

22m



What don't we know about the Russia investigation?

32m



Lionsgate lays off 25 at movie studio and ends Codeblack Films initiative

32m



LATEST RAMS

Rams or Cowboys — Who will feel more at home for NFL playoff game at Coliseum?

JAN 10, 2019



Rams' Andrew Whitworth has never experienced an NFL playoff victory

JAN 10, 2019



Will Rams' Todd Gurley or Cowboys' Ezekiel Elliott keep playoff run going?

JAN 10, 2019



Rams' Todd Gurley finally back on practice field testing his injured knee

JAN 9, 2019



Success at arms length for Rams' Jared Goff, Cowboys' Dak Prescott in their NFC playoff game

JAN 9, 2019



Sign up for our newsletters

Subscribe for unlimited access

- [About/Contact](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Terms](#)
- [Site map](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [L.A. Times careers](#)
- [Find a job](#)
- [Shop](#)



Copyright © 2019, Los Angeles Times