

WILD CARD, SEASON A TALE OF TWO HALVES

Great start ends bad: Meltdown leaves players, fans empty, unfulfilled

BY LUKE REIMER
Green & Gold Express

The Packers' 2025-26 season came to an end Saturday as the Packers lost to the Chicago Bears 31-27 in the Wildcard Round of the NFL playoffs at Soldier Field.

Late in the fourth quarter, Chicago took a four-point lead, giving Packers quarterback Jordan Love the opportunity to march down the field and win the game with 1:43 remaining. Love and the offense quickly moved down the field by way of completions to Jayden Reed, Matthew Golden and Romeo Doubs. Green Bay eventually worked down to the Chicago 28-yard line with seven seconds left.

On the ensuing play, Love fumbled the snap, picked up his fumble and worked around the pocket, looking for an open receiver. Nobody was able to get open, and in a desperation attempt, Love's pass to the end zone was batted down, giving Chicago the win and ending Green Bay's season.

"This one is going to hurt for a really, really long time," said Packers head coach Matt LaFleur.

The ending of the game was a far cry from the beginning. In the first half, Green Bay looked dominant. After Chicago jumped out to a 3-0 lead, the Packers rattled off 21 straight points to go into halftime with Love looking as good as had all season.

Coming out of the half, that quickly changed though, as Chicago ramped up its defense and pass rush, effectively killing Green Bay's run game and making throws difficult for Love.

Coming out of halftime, Green Bay's first four pos



Final 2 minutes

Caleb Williams leads the Bears to 25 fourth-quarter points, the largest fourth quarter comeback in team history. Kingsley Enagbare reacts to the Bears' game-winning touchdown with less than two minutes to go.

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WRAPUP, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Christian Watson, targeted with a Jordan Love pass, comes up empty on the Packers' final drive, ending the Packers' 2025 season.

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Matt LaFleur walks the sidelines during the fourth quarter of the Packers 31-27 Wild Card loss to the Bears. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Injuries, poor execution lead to 5-game losing streak

BY LUKE REIMER
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As has been the case for each of the last 14 seasons for Green Bay, the Packers bowed out of the playoffs much earlier than anyone around the organization would have hoped.

After being up 21-6, Green Bay suffered a monumental collapse in the second half of its Wild Card matchup with the Chicago Bears, ultimately resulting in a 31-27 loss and ending the Packers' season. While Green Bay fans

and players have become used to falling short in the playoffs, having a season end against the team's biggest rival in a game that looked over at halftime may be one of the most heart-breaking losses in not only Matt LaFleur's tenure, but in Packers history.

"I am disappointed for everybody that is associated with the Green Bay Packers," said LaFleur. "I am disappointed for our locker room, I am disappointed for our fans, I am disappointed for our lead-

ership, all of our employees, everybody involved with the Green Bay Packers right now."

LaFleur is right to be disappointed, as Green Bay now enters what is sure to be a long offseason full of question marks surrounding the team.

The Packers have not won a divisional title since 2021 and have entered the NFL playoffs as the NFC's seventh seed in three straight seasons. While making the playoffs is certainly an accomplishment, for an organization as

prestigious as Green Bay, making the playoffs and losing as the seventh seed is not going to cut it.

That is where the questions start. What is next for a Packers organization that has seemingly stagnated under LaFleur, quarterback Jordan Love and general manager Brian Gutekunst?

When looking at the makeup of the team, Green Bay does have talent on the roster.

Next season, Micah

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Magical start melted away



Brandon McManus contributed to the special teams breakdown during Saturday's Wild Card loss to the Bears. McManus missed three kicks, including two field goals and an extra point.

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WRAPUP, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sessions of the second half totaled 14 plays, resulting in four punts. During Chicago's first four possessions of the second half, it combined for 13 points, bringing the difference to just five points.

"The second half - you just look back on it and we just couldn't get anything going," said Love. "We came out, a couple three-and-outs to start and it was really disappointing. It is lack of execution and finding ways to make plays that really just hurt us."

In the midst of Chicago's comeback, it was Golden who was able to provide his first real spark of the season for the Packers.

Following Chicago cutting the lead to five in the fourth quarter, Green Bay elected to shy away from the run game. This resulted in 40 yards on the drive for Romeo Doubs, setting up a first-and-10 for the Packers from the Chicago 23-yard line. Love completed a pass to the flat to Golden, who broke tackles and avoided defenders, scampering in for a 23-yard touchdown, the first of his NFL career.

Chicago matched with a touchdown and converted on a two-point attempt on its next possession bringing the score to within

three points. On Green Bay's ensuing possession, kicker Brandon McManus was set up with a 44-yard field goal. His attempt was missed, giving Chicago prime field position.

The miss for McManus was his third miss on the day (two field goals and one extra point). Chicago responded by working its way down the field and scoring the go-ahead touchdown with 1:43 remaining.

"One of those kicks was a long kick at the end of the half," said LaFleur, on McManus' struggles. "Obviously, the conditions are windy, but the difference was they made theirs and we did not."

McManus finished the game missing both of his field goal attempts, while converting three-of-four extra point attempts. Bears kicker Cairo Santos made all three of his field goal attempts and hit both his extra point attempts.

Love finished the game completing 24-of-46 passes for 323 yards, four touchdowns and no interceptions.

Doubs was the biggest benefactor of Love's day, as he finished the game with 124 yards and one touchdown on eight receptions. Golden had his best day as a pro as well,



First-round pick Matthew Golden scores his first NFL touchdown in the fourth quarter against the Bears. Jordan Love completed touchdowns to four different receivers during Saturday's loss in Chicago.

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finishing the game with 84 yards and a touchdown on four receptions. Reed and Christian Watson were the only other two pass catchers with multiple receptions, as both also found the end zone in the game.

In the run game, Josh Jacobs, who had been dealing with a knee injury toward the end of the regular season, finished the game with 55 yards on 19 carries.

For the Bears, quarterback Caleb Williams com-

pleted 24-of-48 passes for 361 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

Tight end Colston Loveland hauled in eight passes, finishing with 137 yards. D.J. Moore added another 64 yards and a touchdown

on six receptions, while Olamide Zaccheaus was the recipient of Williams' other touchdown pass.

Chicago's run game was somewhat neutralized, as D'Andre Swift was held to 54 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries, while Kyle Monagai mustered 27 yards on eight rushes.

With Green Bay's Super Bowl hopes ending in Chicago, it now marks 15 years since the Packers have participated in the Super Bowl and five years since it made an NFC Championship. Since Jordan Love became the starting quarterback for Green Bay, the Packers have entered every postseason as the seventh seed, not winning the NFC North since 2021.

"It's going to take a lot of work, a lot of work," said LaFleur, on how Green Bay gets over the hump for the future. "We are not where we want to be. I know we have fought through a lot of adversity this year; unfortunately, we didn't do enough to overcome that adversity. That's all of us collectively. We have to do more, we have to be better."

Green Bay will enter the 2026-27 season without a first-round draft pick, as the pick was a piece in the trade to land Micah Parsons.

NFL PLAYOFFS

NFL Wild Card Round
Saturday, Jan. 10
LA Rams 34, Carolina 31
Chicago 31, Green Bay 27

Sunday, Jan. 11
Buffalo 27, Jacksonville 24
San Francisco 23, Philadelphia 19
New England 16, LA Chargers 3

Monday, Jan. 12
Houston 30, Pittsburgh 6
NFL Divisional Round
Saturday, Jan. 17

Buffalo at Denver, 3:30 p.m.
San Francisco at Seattle, 7 p.m.
Sunday, Jan. 18
Houston at New England, 2 p.m.

LA Rams at Chicago, 5:30 p.m.
NFL Conference Championships,
Sunday, Jan. 25
Super Bowl, Sunday, Feb. 8

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Parsons, Devonte Wyatt, Tucker Kraft and Elgton Jenkins will all be returning from season ending injuries, and players like Love, Josh Jacobs and Xavier McKinney have proven that they will produce when called upon, but what about everyone else?

In what feels like an endless loop, Green Bay has a problem at the defensive back position.

Keisean Nixon, while he had moments of strong play, seems to be too inconsistent to be relied upon as the number one corner on this team. Carrington Valentine is in a similar situation, where there have been flashes, but overall, it appears that opposing teams are not afraid of him.

The Packers attempted to remedy this issue before the playoffs by signing Trevon Diggs. It is unclear what Diggs' future will be in Green Bay as his cap hit for 2026 is just north of \$15 million and with no guaranteed money left on his deal, there is not a strong financial burden that is going to hit Green Bay if he is released.

Another issue that is seemingly never ending for the Packers is the lack of pass rush.

This issue is likely to resolve itself as Green Bay will have Micah Parsons, who may be a top five player in football, back next season, but coming off of an ACL tear, Parsons will need time to be worked back into the defense. With this being the case, or if Parsons were to suffer another injury next season, there is little confidence the Packers pass rush will be enough as it stands to make an impact.

After Parsons' injury in Week 15, Green Bay recorded just four combined sacks in four games. That just isn't going to



Micah Parson celebrates a sack of Pittsburgh quarterback Aaron Rodgers on Oct. 26. Parsons tore his ACL in Green Bay's loss to Denver on Dec. 14, and the Packers failed to win another game in the 2025 season.

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cut it when the team does not have the secondary needed to cover some of the better offenses in the NFL.

On the offensive side of the ball, it certainly looks like offensive line depth is a major concern.

Outside of Jenkins and Zach Tom, it does not appear that Green Bay's offensive line is consistent enough to be relied upon in big games. Sean Rhyhan's versatility on the offensive line is an asset, but at this point in his career, he has worked better as a plug-and-place player rather

than a full-on starter. Aaron Banks certainly struggled this season after signing a \$77 million deal in the offseason, and Anthony Belton and Jordan Morgan are in a similar situation to Rhyhan where they are better as depth pieces.

It is no secret that injuries played a major factor in this season, as having Parsons, Jenkins, Kraft and Wyatt all season would have put the Packers in a better spot.

"I know we lost some key players, but you have to find a way to overcome

that, because I think we do have a lot of talent on our team and it's disappointing," said LaFleur.

While the noise surrounding LaFleur's future in Green Bay is the loudest that it has been since he has taken over, is that truly what is best for this team? Can bringing in a new coach next season help to jumpstart a franchise that can't get over the hump?

Maybe. What is certain though is that the Packers have a long offseason ahead with many questions to answer.

Wittenberg woman named finalist for FAN Hall of Fame

Ten finalists have been named in the search for the 28th member of the Packers FAN Hall of Fame, and voting has begun for fans to make the selection.

Among those finalists is Lorraine Mueller, of Wittenberg.

The first professional football team to have a hall of fame, the Green Bay Packers enhanced that distinction in 1998 by establishing a Packers FAN Hall of Fame. It was founded for the purpose of annually honoring a devout and longtime Packers fan.

Packers fans were asked to nominate themselves or a friend for the honor with an essay of 500 words or fewer, accompanied by a photo, explaining why he or she should be recognized. From those nominations, 10 finalists were selected by the Packers FAN Hall of Fame selection committee.

Joining Mueller as finalists are Jeff Goldapske, Appleton; Patrick Hare, Moreno Valley, California; Jeff Lanier, Green Bay; Mark Murphy, La Crosse; Dean Schmitz, Wausau; Daniel Schneider, Crystal Lake, Illinois; Valerie Ann Smickk, Yorkville, Illinois; Patrick Suplicki, Stevens Point; and Thomas Thrall, Durham, North Carolina.

Fans can read the finalists' profiles and vote online by visiting packers.com/fhof. The winner will be selected by Packers fans and the Packers' selection committee.

For Mueller's 102nd birthday on Sept. 4, 2025, she received a box from the Packers containing a hat, a blanket and an auto-



Wittenberg's Lorraine Mueller is among 10 finalists to be named as the 28th member of the Packers FAN Hall of Fame, and voting has begun for fans to make the selection. At 102, Mueller has been to many Packer games. CONTRIBUTED

graphed Packer football.

She has been to many Packer games, but for the last nine years, she has been confined to the Homme Home due to a stroke.

Packers game day is the highlight of her week. She paints her nails in green and gold and dresses in a Packers hat and clothes. Mueller also wears Packers jewelry that she makes. She has made more than 3000 necklaces, bracelets, leaves and gnomes. She gives these away and also sells them for \$1. This is how she spends her day.

She is deaf in both ears and a stroke took her sight in one eye. She makes all the jewelry with just one eye.

The voting deadline is 11:59 p.m. Jan. 31. Voters will be entered into a random drawing to win Packers merchandise.

The honoree's selection will be announced in late February.

Past local winners include John Brosig, of Pound, in 2024, and John Breske, of Elderon, in 2022.



Tucker Kraft was like a man possessed in Week 8 against the Pittsburgh Steelers with 143 yards and two touchdowns. The next week, against Carolina, he tore his ACL and missed the rest of the season.

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MOMENTS

CHICAGO BEARS 31, GREEN BAY PACKERS 27



The Packers second half offensive struggles included poor offensive line execution leading to Jordon Love under constant pressure and two intentional grounding penalties and a fourth quarter pass to lineman Darian Kinnard. GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

News of the Weird

Tom Pelissero of the NFL Network posted on social media that Kinnard is unofficially the first offensive lineman in NFL history with a catch, two broken tackles, a fumble and a 15-yard punt on the same play.

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