

DEFENSE KEEPS PLAYOFF HOPES INTACT

Packers need to rally around defense, momentum

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Green Bay Packers defensive players celebrate during the team's win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

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Packers now up to 30% chance to make playoffs

Green Bay needs 2 more wins, plus a Washington loss to make postseason

By **LUKE REIMER**
Reporter

A three-game winning streak has kept wind in the Green Bay Packers' sails, as the 2022-23 regular season reaches the home stretch.

That comes after five games went Green Bay's way in week 16, including its own win over the Miami Dolphins.

The Packers still being alive come week 17 may be a shocker for fans, as many wrote off the team during a stretch where Green Bay lost seven out of eight games in the middle of the season.

Those feelings have quickly flipped, as the Packers defense has really kept this season alive. During Green Bay's current three-game win streak, they have beaten the Chicago Bears, Los Angeles Rams and Miami Dolphins.

Beating the Bears and Rams seemed likely as both of those teams are eliminated from playoff contention, but a win over Miami means a little bit more.

Thanks in part to the defensive play on Christmas, the Packers got that win. In the second half of that game against the Dolphins, the Packers defense blanked Miami, forcing interceptions on each of the last three drives.

"This team is just so resilient," said Packers defensive tackle Kenny Clark.

Green Bay's defense was able to seal this victory by causing four turnovers. Even after giving up big plays in the first half, Clark's comment about resiliency is exactly what this Packers defense has shown.

That idea of resiliency will need to be carried through the last two games of the regular season.

Coming up, the Packers will host the Minnesota Vikings on Jan. 1, in a game that should be a slugfest. Green Bay needs to win to keep its playoff hopes alive, while the Vikings are looking to sneak into the top seed in the playoffs and get a first-round bye.

One would have to imagine, too, that the Vikings would love to crush the Packers' playoffs hopes in Green Bay.

With superstars like Justin Jefferson, Dalvin Cook and T.J. Hockenson, the Packers will need to ride



Green Bay Packers defensive tackle Kenny Clark, top, sacks Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa during the team's win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

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Green Bay Packers defensive linemen celebrate after a sack during the team's win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

its defense once again to continue its march to the playoffs.

Playing a team like Minnesota or Miami, who both have a flurry of offensive weapons, is something that safety Adrian Amos is accustomed to, and noted that getting turnovers is the way to combat the talent.

"With takeaways, you keep giving offense opportunities and we lessen their opportunities to get down the field," said Amos.

It makes sense — turning over the opposing team limits their opportunities to score the ball. That should be the trick as well to take

ONLINE

More photos from the Packers, Dolphins game can be found at www.newmedia-wi.com.

down Minnesota, who averages 25.2 points per game this year.

That might be easier said than done though, as Minnesota has only recorded 17 giveaways all season, which is tied for seventh fewest in the NFL. On the other hand, the Packers have recorded 20 takeaways this year, which is tied for 12th in the NFL.

"I think it comes down to all 11 playing the call and doing the best that they can," said Packers head coach Matt LaFleur on how the defense can continue to perform well through adjustments.

With the defense playing well and the offense complimenting the defense, the Packers have put together a three-game win streak. More than a three-game win streak though — the Packers have momentum.

After recording 13 wins in each of the last three seasons, the Packers have not needed regular season momentum in a number of years. Similar to the NCAA basketball tournament, a team that can get hot before the playoffs can do some damage once it is there. Think of the Cincinnati Bengals last season.

"We've been in a good rhythm, practice, energy, cohesion, and playing a little better complimentary football," said Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers. "It's a good win for us."

Building off that momentum, the Packers will need to win each of its final two regular season games. That's not it though. Moving forward, the Packers also need either the Washington Commanders to lose one of its last two games, or the New York Giants to lose both of its remaining games.

Washington ends its season with two home games, one against the Cleveland Browns in week 17 and one against the Dallas Cowboys in week 18. The Giants, on the other hand, have the Colts and Eagles on the schedule. It seems more likely for Washington to lose one game — especially since Dallas needs to win that week 18 matchup if it wants to take home the NFC East crown.



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PACKERS ROSTER

Active							
#	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	AGE	EXP.	COLLEGE
2	Mason Crosby	K	6-1	207	38	16	Colorado
6	Dallin Leavitt	S	5-10	195	28	4	Utah State
7	Quay Walker	LB	6-4	241	22	R	Georgia
9	Christian Watson	WR	6-5	208	23	R	North Dakota State
10	Jordan Love	QB	6-4	219	24	3	Utah State
12	Aaron Rodgers	QB	6-2	225	39	18	California
13	Allen Lazard	WR	6-5	227	27	4	Iowa State
16	Pat O'Donnell	P	6-4	220	31	9	Miami
18	Randall Cobb	WR	5-10	195	32	12	Kentucky
20	Rudy Ford	S	6-0	200	28	6	Auburn
22	Shemar Jean-Charles	CB	5-10	184	24	2	Appalachian State
23	Jaire Alexander	CB	5-10	196	25	5	Louisville
24	Tariq Carpenter	S	6-3	230	23	R	Georgia Tech
25	Keisean Nixon	CB	5-10	200	25	4	South Carolina
26	Darnell Savage	S	5-11	198	25	4	Maryland
27	Patrick Taylor	RB	6-2	217	24	2	Memphis
28	AJ Dillon	RB	6-0	247	24	3	Boston College
29	Rasul Douglas	CB	6-2	209	27	6	West Virginia
31	Adrian Amos	S	6-0	214	29	8	Penn State
33	Aaron Jones	RB	5-9	208	28	6	Texas-El Paso
35	Corey Ballentine	CB	5-11	196	26	4	Washburn
38	Innis Gaines	S	6-1	202	24	1	TCU
45	Eric Wilson	LB	6-1	230	28	6	Cincinnati
47	Justin Hollins	LB	6-5	248	26	4	Oregon
50	Zach Tom	OL	6-4	304	23	R	Wake Forest
51	Krys Barnes	LB	6-2	229	24	3	UCLA
53	Jonathan Garvin	LB	6-4	257	23	3	Miami
55	Kingsley Enagbare	LB	6-4	258	22	R	South Carolina
56	Jack Coco	LS	6-2	248	24	R	Georgia Tech
58	Isaiah McDuffie	LB	6-1	227	23	2	Boston College
59	De'Vondre Campbell	LB	6-3	232	29	7	Minnesota
63	Rasheed Walker	T	6-6	324	22	R	Penn State
69	David Bakhtiari	T	6-4	310	31	10	Colorado
70	Royce Newman	T/G	6-5	310	25	2	Mississippi
71	Josh Myers	C/G	6-5	310	24	2	Ohio State
72	Caleb Jones	T	6-9	370	23	R	Indiana
73	Yosh Nijman	T	6-7	314	26	3	Virginia Tech
74	Elgton Jenkins	G	6-5	311	27	4	Mississippi State

76	Jon Runyan	G	6-4	307	25	3	Michigan
78	Luke Tenuta	T	6-8	314	23	R	Virginia Tech
81	Josiah Deguara	TE	6-2	238	25	3	Cincinnati
83	Samori Toure	WR	6-1	191	24	R	Nebraska
84	Tyler Davis	TE	6-4	252	25	3	Georgia Tech
85	Robert Tonyan	TE	6-5	240	28	5	Indiana State
87	Romeo Doubs	WR	6-2	204	22	R	Nevada
89	Marcedes Lewis	TE	6-6	267	38	17	UCLA
90	Jarran Reed	DL	6-3	307	30	7	Alabama
91	Preston Smith	LB	6-5	265	30	8	Mississippi State
93	T.J. Slaton	DL	6-4	330	25	2	Florida
94	Dean Lowry	DL	6-6	296	28	7	Northwestern
95	Devonte Wyatt	DL	6-3	304	24	R	Georgia
97	Kenny Clark	DL	6-3	314	27	7	UCLA
99	Jonathan Ford	DL	6-5	338	24	R	Miami
Reserve/Injured							
21	Eric Stokes	CB	6-0	194	23	2	Georgia
40	Tipa Galeai	LB	6-5	229	25	2	Utah State
52	Rashan Gary	LB	6-5	277	25	4	Michigan
67	Jake Hanson	C	6-4	296	25	2	Oregon
Reserve/Suspended by Commissioner							
75	Sean Rhyan	T/G	6-5	321	22	R	UCLA
Practice Squad							
17	Ramiz Ahmed	K	5-11	193	27	1	Nevada
19	Danny Etling	QB	6-3	222	28	1	LSU
34	Micah Abernathy	S	6-0	195	25	1	Tennessee
39	Tyler Goodson	RB	5-9	197	22	R	Iowa
43	Kiondre Thomas	CB	6-0	186	24	1	Kansas State
46	Nick Guggemos	TE	6-5	247	27	1	University of St. Thomas
48	DQ Thomas	LB	6-2	216	24	R	Middle Tennessee State
54	La'Darius Hamilton	LB	6-2	261	24	2	North Texas
57	Tim Ward	LB	6-6	255	25	3	Old Dominion
65	Michal Menet	C	6-4	301	25	1	Penn State
79	Jean Delance	T	6-4	303	24	R	Florida
82	Jeff Cotton	WR	6-2	206	25	1	Idaho
86	Travis Fulgham	WR	6-2	211	27	3	Old Dominion
88	Juwann Winfree	WR	6-1	210	26	3	Colorado
98	Chris Slayton	DL	6-4	307	26	1	Syracuse

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#	NAME	POS.	HT.	WT.	AGE	EXP.	COLLEGE
1	Greg Joseph	K	6-0	206	28	3	Florida Atlantic
2	Alexander Mattison	RB	5-11	215	24	4	Boise State
3	Cameron Dantzler Sr.	CB	6-2	190	24	3	Mississippi State
4	Dalvin Cook	RB	5-10	210	27	6	Florida State
5	Jalen Reagor	WR	5-11	197	23	3	TCU
7	Patrick Peterson	CB	6-1	198	32	12	LSU
8	Kirk Cousins	QB	6-3	205	34	11	Michigan State
12	Nick Mullens	QB	6-0	210	27	4	Southern Mississippi
14	Ryan Wright	P	6-3	245	22	R	Tulane
17	K.J. Osborn	WR	5-11	203	25	3	Miami (Fla.)
18	Justin Jefferson	WR	6-1	195	23	3	LSU
19	Adam Thielen	WR	6-2	200	32	9	Minnesota State
20	Duke Shelley	CB	5-8	183	26	4	Kansas State
22	Harrison Smith	S	6-2	211	33	11	Notre Dame
24	Camryn Bynum	S	6-0	200	24	2	California
25	Theo Jackson	S	6-1	198	24	R	Tennessee
26	Kene Nwangwu	RB	6-1	210	24	2	Iowa State
27	Kalon Barnes	CB	6-0	186	24	R	Baylor
29	Kris Boyd	CB	5-11	195	26	4	Texas
30	C.J. Ham	FB	5-11	250	29	6	Augustana (S.D.)
33	Brian Asamoah II	LB	6-0	226	22	R	Oklahoma
34	Nick Muse	TE	6-5	252	24	R	South Carolina
39	Chandon Sullivan	CB	5-11	189	26	5	Georgia State
42	Andrew DePaola	LS	6-1	229	35	8	Rutgers
43	Luiji Vilain	OLB	6-4	252	24	R	Wake Forest
44	Josh Metellus	S	5-11	207	24	3	Michigan
45	Troy Dye	LB	6-3	225	26	3	Oregon
47	William Kwenkeu	LB	6-1	235	25	R	Temple
54	Eric Kendricks	LB	6-0	232	30	8	UCLA
55	Za'Darius Smith	OLB	6-4	272	30	8	Kentucky
56	Garrett Bradbury	C	6-3	300	27	4	North Carolina State
58	Jordan Hicks	LB	6-1	236	30	8	Texas
62	Chris Reed	G/C	6-3	314	30	7	Minnesota State
63	Vederian Lowe	T	6-6	320	23	R	Illinois
65	Austin Schlottmann	G/C	6-6	300	27	4	TCU
67	Ed Ingram	G	6-3	307	23	R	LSU
68	Kyle Hinton	G	6-2	315	24	1	Washburn
71	Christian Darrisaw	T	6-5	315	23	2	Virginia Tech
72	Ezra Cleveland	G	6-6	312	24	3	Boise State
74	Olisaemeka Udoh	G	6-6	320	25	4	Elon

75	Brian O'Neill	T	6-7	310	27	5	Pittsburgh
83	Jalen Nailor	WR	6-0	190	23	R	Michigan State
86	Johnny Mundt	TE	6-4	233	28	5	Oregon
87	T.J. Hockenson	TE	6-5	248	25	4	Iowa
90	Ezezi Otomewo	DL	6-5	282	23	R	Minnesota
91	Patrick Jones II	OLB	6-4	264	24	2	Pittsburgh
92	James Lynch	DL	6-4	295	23	3	Baylor
94	Dalvin Tomlinson	DL	6-3	325	28	6	Alabama
95	Khyiris Tonga	DL	6-4	338	26	2	BYU
96	Ross Blacklock	DL	6-5	307	24	3	TCU
97	Harrison Phillips	DL	6-3	307	26	5	Stanford
98	D.J. Wonnum	OLB	6-5	258	25	3	South Carolina
99	Danielle Hunter	OLB	6-5	263	28	8	LSU

Reserve/Injured

6	Lewis Cine	S	6-2	199	23	R	Georgia
21	Akayleb Evans	CB	6-2	198	23	R	Missouri
23	Andrew Booth Jr.	CB	6-0	194	22	R	Clemson
64	Blake Brandel	T	6-7	315	25	2	Oregon State
79	Kenny Willekes	DE	6-3	264	25	3	Michigan State
81	Bisi Johnson	WR	6-0	210	25	4	Colorado State
82	Ben Ellefson	TE	6-3	250	26	3	North Dakota State
84	Irv Smith Jr.	TE	6-2	240	24	4	Alabama
89	Thomas Hennigan	WR	6-1	210	24	R	Appalachian State
93	Jonathan Bullard	DL	6-3	290	29	7	Florida

Reserve/Injured; Designated for Return

32	Ty Chandler	RB	5-11	204	24	R	North Carolina
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Practice Squad

9	Trishton Jackson	WR	6-1	191	24	2	Syracuse
13	Blake Proehl	WR	6-1	190	23	2	East Carolina
15	Josh Rosen	QB	6-4	226	25	4	UCLA
31	Tay Gowan	CB	6-2	185	24	2	UCF
35	Parry Nickerson	CB	5-10	179	28	4	Tulane
38	Bryant Koback	RB	6-0	210	24	R	Toledo
46	Myles Dorn	S	6-2	210	24	3	North Carolina
48	Chris Garrett	OLB	6-4	245	24	2	Concordia College St. Paul
50	T.J. Smith	DL	6-3	300	25	1	Arkansas
51	Benton Whitley	OLB	6-3	260	23	R	Holy Cross
52	Sheldon Day	DL	6-1	294	28	7	Notre Dame
57	Ryan Connelly	LB	6-2	234	27	4	Wisconsin
60	Josh Sokol	C	6-3	290	25	R	Sacred Heart University
85	Dan Chisena	WR	6-3	203	25	3	Penn State
89	James O'Shaughnessy	TE	6-4	245	30	8	Illinois State

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GAME VITALS PACKERS DEPTH CHART

GREEN BAY PACKERS (7-8)
VS. MINNESOTA VIKINGS (12-3)
WHEN: 3:25 p.m. Sunday
WHERE: Lambeau Field
TV: CBS
RADIO: 620 AM (WTMJ), Sirius
Satellite Radio (WTMJ feed)

THE SERIES

Packers vs. Vikings
All-time, regular season: 63-56-3
All-time, postseason: 1-1
All-time, at Packers: 34-26-3
Streaks: The Minnesota Vikings have won three of the past four matchups against the Green Bay Packers, but the Packers have taken four of the past seven. Green Bay has won 11 of its past 17 matchups at home, with two ties also over that span.
Last meeting, regular season: Sept. 11, 2022, Vikings won 23-7 at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis. The Packers fell behind 17-0 by halftime and were only able to put together one scoring drive.

SCHEDULE

Date	Opponent	Time	TV
Sept. 11	at Minnesota	Loss 23-7	
Sept. 18	vs. Chicago	Win 27-10	
Sept. 25	at Tampa Bay	Win 14-12	
Oct. 2	vs. New England	Win 27-24 (OT)	
Oct. 9	vs. N.Y. Giants (London)	Loss 27-22	
Oct. 16	vs. N.Y. Jets	Loss 27-10	
Oct. 23	at Washington	Loss 23-21	
Oct. 30	at Buffalo	Loss 27-17	
Nov. 6	at Detroit	Loss 15-9	
Nov. 13	vs. Dallas	Win 31-28	
Nov. 17	vs. Tennessee	Loss 27-17	
Nov. 27	at Philadelphia	Loss 40-33	
Dec. 4	at Chicago	Win 28-19	
Bye week			
Dec. 19	vs. L.A. Rams	Win 24-12	
Dec. 25	at Miami	Win 26-20	
Jan. 1	vs. Minnesota	3:25 p.m.	CBS
Jan. 7/8	vs. Detroit	TBD	TBD

OFFENSE

WR

Christian Watson
Samori Toure

RB

Aaron Jones
A.J. Dillon

QB

Aaron Rodgers
Jordan Love

WR

Randall Cobb
Samori Toure

WR

Allen Lazard
Romeo Doubs

TE

Mercedes Lewis
Robert Tonyan

RT

Yosh Nijman
Rasheed Walker

RG

Jon Runyan
Royce Newman

C

Josh Myers
Zach Tom

LG

Elgton Jenkins
Royce Newman

LT

David Bakhtiari
Zach Tom

DEFENSE

DE

Dean Lowry
Devonte Wyatt

NT

Kenny Clark
T.J. Slaton

DE

Jarran Reed
Devonte Wyatt

CB

Rasul Douglas
Shemar Jean-Charles

CB

Jaire Alexander
Keisean Nixon

OLB

Preston Smith
Jonathan Garvin

ILB

De'Vondre Campbell
Isaiah McDuffie

ILB

Quay Walker
Krys Barnes

OLB

Kingsley Enagbare
Justin Hollins

S

Adrian Amos
Dallin Leavitt

S

Darnell Savage
Rudy Ford

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Rosters and depth charts are accurate as of Dec. 26, 9 a.m.

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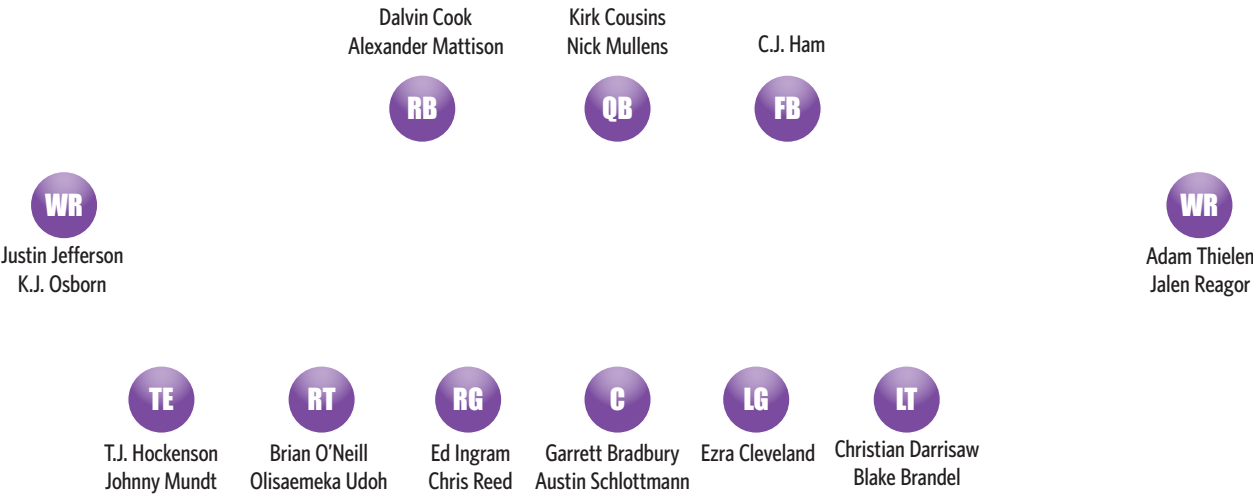
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VIKINGS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE



DEFENSE



SCHEDULE

Thursday's Game
Dallas at Tennessee, 7:15 p.m.

Sunday's Games
Arizona at Atlanta, noon
Pittsburgh at Baltimore, noon
Chicago at Detroit, noon
Jacksonville at Houston, noon
Denver at Kansas City, noon
Miami at New England, noon
Indianapolis at N.Y. Giants, noon
New Orleans at Philadelphia, noon
Carolina at Tampa Bay, noon
Cleveland at Washington, noon
San Francisco at Las Vegas, 3:05 p.m.
N.Y. Jets at Seattle, 3:05 p.m.
Minnesota at Green Bay, 3:25 p.m.
L.A. Rams at L.A. Chargers, 7:20 p.m.

Monday's Game
Buffalo at Cincinnati, 7:30 p.m.

STANDINGS

NFC East				AFC East			
Team	W	L	T	Team	W	L	T
Philadelphia	13	2	0	Buffalo	12	3	0
Dallas	11	4	0	Miami	8	7	0
N.Y. Giants	8	6	1	New England	7	8	0
Washington	7	7	1	N.Y. Jets	7	8	0
North				North			
Team	W	L	T	Team	W	L	T
Minnesota	12	3	0	Cincinnati	11	4	0
Detroit	7	8	0	Baltimore	10	5	0
Green Bay	7	8	0	Pittsburgh	7	8	0
Chicago	3	12	0	Cleveland	6	9	0
South				South			
Team	W	L	T	Team	W	L	T
Tampa Bay	7	8	0	Jacksonville	7	8	0
Carolina	6	9	0	Tennessee	7	8	0
New Orleans	6	9	0	Indianapolis	4	10	1
Atlanta	5	10	0	Houston	2	12	1
West				West			
Team	W	L	T	Team	W	L	T
San Francisco	11	4	0	Kansas City	12	3	0
Seattle	7	8	0	L.A. Chargers	9	6	0
L.A. Rams	5	10	0	Las Vegas	6	9	0
Arizona	4	11	0	Denver	4	11	0



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KEYS TO THE GAME

By **BILL HUBER**

Correspondent

The Green Bay Packers (7-8) will host the Minnesota Vikings (12-3) on noon Sunday at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. CBS will televise the game.

History

In a series that dates to 1961, the Packers lead 64-57-3. Green Bay won nine of the first 10 matchups. While Packers coach Matt LaFleur has had a lot of success against the NFC North, he's just 4-3 against Minnesota. The Vikings won 23-7 in week one at U.S. Bank Stadium.

Coaches

Green Bay — Matt LaFleur (fourth season, 46-18). Vikings — Kevin O'Connell (first season, 12-3).

When the Packers have the ball

Green Bay's offense has made some slow but steady progress. Over its last five games, the Packers are ninth in scoring. They scored 26 points against Miami on Sunday, a rather underwhelming performance considering the incredible field position delivered by the defense and special teams.

Minnesota's defense is terrible. The Vikings are 28th in points allowed with 24.9 per game. They are good on third down (ninth) and decent in the red zone (15th) but 31st in total defense (402.3 yards per game) and yards allowed per passing attempt (7.5).

Can Aaron Rodgers and an inconsistent passing attack take advantage? The health of rookie receiver Christian Watson (hip) to catch those passes and right tackle Yosh Nijman (shoulder) to provide protection will be vital.

The Vikings operate out of a 3-4 scheme. The defensive line consists of Harrison Phillips, James Lynch and Dalvin Tomlinson. It's an underrated group. Tomlinson is the big name and Phillips was a key offseason addition.

The run defense provided by that trio is the key to everything. If they can stop the run, then outside linebackers Za'Darius Smith and Danielle Hunter can attack the quarterback.

Smith, whom the Packers released this past offseason, was picked for the Pro Bowl last week. He has 10 sacks and 24 quarterback hits and, according to Pro Football Focus, ranks third in the NFL with 78 pressures. He had one sack



Green Bay Packers receiver Romeo Doubs, left, runs with the ball during a win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

against Green Bay in week one.

The Vikings are 7-1 when Smith gets at least a ½ sack. Hunter has 10½ sacks and 20 quarterback hits.

The prospect of Smith and Hunter going against Zach Tom (if David Bakhtiari isn't back from his appendectomy) and Royce Newman (in place of Nijman) has to be at the forefront of LaFleur's game-planning. Tom has played well, but Newman really struggled against the Dolphins.

Longtime standout Eric Kendricks and Jordan Hicks are the linebackers. Both players have more than 120 tackles. Hicks has three sacks and 10 passes defended; Kendricks has eight tackles for losses.

The secondary is where there are all sorts of problems. The Vikings shook up the group a bit recently with limited impact last week against the Giants. Patrick Peterson and Duke Shelley are the corners, former Packers player Chandon Sullivan mans the slot, and Harrison Smith and Camryn Bynum are the safeties.

The 32-year-old Peterson, an All-Pro during his days with the Cardinals, has allowed only a 59.4% catch rate, according to PFF. He has four interceptions and a team-high 14 passes defended.

Shelley was on the bench for most of the season before being thrust into a prime role the last five weeks. He's allowed only a 56.3% catch rate, a huge upgrade over the benched Cameron Dantzler's 79.2%.

Smith might not be the all-around menace of yesteryear but

leads the team with five interceptions and is third with 80 tackles. Bynum has two picks.

When the Vikings have the ball

Coming off a season-saving second half at Miami in which they intercepted three passes and pitched a shutout, the Packers will have to contend with one of the best offenses in the NFL.

Minnesota is seventh with 25.2 points per game. The Vikings are only 18th in yards per play, 25th in rushing per carry and 18th in passing per attempt. They're only 15th on third down and 19th in pass protection. That's a lot of mediocrity. But when Kirk Cousins and Justin Jefferson get rolling, look out.

The 34-year-old Cousins has thrown for 4,117 yards with 27 touchdowns. After three consecutive seasons with 100 passer ratings, he's at only 93.3 this year. But he is hot with 425 yards and two touchdowns in a loss to Detroit, 460 yards and four touchdowns in the historic comeback over Indianapolis and 299 yards and three touchdowns in last week's win vs. the Giants.

The Packers allowed more than 100 yards apiece to Tyreek Hill and Jaylen Waddle at Miami. This week, the challenge is the indomitable Jefferson, sidekicks Adam Thielen and KJ Osborn, and tight end T.J. Hockenson.

Jefferson leads the NFL with 123 receptions for 1,756 yards. In three seasons, he has 4,772 receiving yards. He is the total package, and as hot as they come with 35 recep-

tions for 379 yards and two scores the last three games. In week one against Green Bay, he caught nine passes for 184 yards and two touchdowns.

Maybe defensive coordinator Joe Barry will do more to put Jaire Alexander on Jefferson. But that doesn't take into account the veteran Thielen (67 receptions, 692 yards, five touchdowns) or the underrated Osborn, who caught 10 passes for 157 yards and a touchdown in the comeback vs. Indy.

Hockenson was acquired from the Lions at the trade deadline. Against the Giants on Saturday, he caught 13 passes for 109 yards and two scores.

And if that's not enough, Dalvin Cook is sixth in the NFL with 1,109 rushing yards. Cook had 226 total yards and four touchdowns as the Vikings won at Lambeau in 2020 but just 13 total yards on 12 touches as Green Bay rolled at Lambeau last year.

The offensive line consists of left tackle Christian Darrisaw, left guard Ezra Cleveland, center Austin Scholttman, right guard Ed Ingram and right tackle Brian O'Neill. Darrisaw and O'Neill are high-quality bookends.

Ingram has struggled as a rookie. Scholttman has started the last three games for Garrett Bradbury (back). Kenny Clark needs a big game against Minnesota's interior trio.

Special teams

In Football Outsiders' rankings from before week 16, Green Bay was 27th and Minnesota was 30th.

The game could feature two of the NFL's premier kickoff returners. Minnesota's Kene Nwangwu is averaging 26 yards per runback this season and has three touchdowns in two seasons. Green Bay's Keisean Nixon leads the NFL with a 27.5-yard average. He had a 93-yarder vs. Miami, his league-leading fourth of 50-plus yards, but missed the second half with a groin injury.

Vikings kicker Greg Joseph is 19-of-19 on field goals from inside of 50 yards but only 3-of-8 from distance. But he's got a huge leg, as evidenced by his 61-yarder that beat the Giants. Punter Randy Wright has a 42.8-yard net average and a sensational 32 punts inside the 20 vs. only one touchback.

Receiver Jalen Reagor has only a 6.8-yard average on punt returns but had a 73-yard touchdown at Lambeau with the Eagles in 2020.

Packers pick off Tagovailoa 3 times, top Dolphins

Green Bay keeps playoff hopes alive

By **ALANIS THAMES**
The Associated Press

Packers cornerback Jaire Alexander knew the secondary needed to start playing better against the Miami Dolphins after defensive backs coach Jerry Gray surprisingly yelled at them at halftime.

“That woke us up for sure,” Alexander said. “He doesn’t really yell, but he was yelling at us then. And you see the results. He probably needed to yell at us at the beginning of the game.”

Gray’s motivational effort worked: The Packers intercepted Tua Tagovailoa three times in the fourth quarter to complete their comeback and defeat the Dolphins 26-20 to keep their playoff hopes alive.

The Packers had a season-high four takeaways in the game — three interceptions, one fumble recovery. Alexander caught one of Green Bay’s three interceptions early in the fourth.

“That’s how it is. You get one pick, more are going to come,” said cornerback Rasul Douglas, who caught the game-sealing pick. “Keep catching those, and you keep getting them. I’m just glad we caught them.”

Aaron Rodgers threw for 238 yards and a touchdown and was intercepted once, helping the Packers (7-8) to their third straight win.

After leading by as many as 10, the Dolphins trailed by six points with a chance to take the lead in the final two minutes, but Tagovailoa threw his third interception in three possessions to end Miami’s comeback bid. He threw a pick with about six minutes left that set up a Packers field goal.

Packers kicker Mason Crosby made the go-ahead field goal early in the fourth after turnovers by both offenses.

Undrafted Miami rookie Kader Kohou intercepted a pass by Rodgers intended for Allen Lazard, but the Dolphins gave it right back when Alexander intercepted Tagovailoa on the very next play.

Miami’s defense held the Packers to six points off turnovers in the second half, and also held Green Bay to two TDs and three field goals in five trips to the red zone.

“It wasn’t pretty, certainly,” Packers coach Matt LaFleur said. “I think a lot of times, when you kick a bunch of field goals, that’s usually just enough to get you beat.”



The Green Bay Packers sideline cheers on defensive back Keisean Nixon as he races down the field on a kick return during the team’s win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

A.J. Dillon led the Packers with 36 yards rushing on 11 carries, and Lazard had 61 yards receiving on five catches.

Tyreek Hill had four catches for Miami to give him 113 for the season, setting a Dolphins’ single-season receptions record previously held by Jarvis Landry. Jaylen Waddle added five receptions for 143 yards.

But Miami spoiled those big receiving days with turnovers. Raheem Mostert fumbled in the first half, and Tagovailoa’s three interceptions were the most he has thrown all season.

Miami committed to the run game early, rushing for 82 yards against Green Bay after a season-high 188 yards against Buffalo in week 15.

The Dolphins ran four times for 38 yards on their opening drive and took a 3-0 lead, and Green Bay countered with a field goal to tie it after Keisean Nixon’s 93-yard kickoff return set up the Packers at the 9-yard line.

Miami built a 20-13 halftime lead after an 84-yard TD by Waddle and 1-yard TD run by Jeff Wilson.

Dillon’s 1-yard touchdown run on Green Bay’s first possession of the third quarter tied the game.

Tight end Marcedes Lewis also had a 1-yard TD catch in the first quarter.



Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, right, signs a football for Miami Dolphins defensive back Kader Kohou after Kohou intercepted Rodgers during a game on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

BEAT The Expert



Morgan Rode
NEW Media Sports Editor

Week 17 Games: Sunday, January 1

No teams on bye

Dallas @ Tennessee Thur., Dec. 9

Arizona @ Atlanta

Pittsburgh @ Baltimore

Chicago @ Detroit

Jacksonville @ Houston

Denver @ Kansas City

Miami @ New England

Indianapolis @ NY Giants

New Orleans @ Philadelphia

Carolina @ Tampa Bay

Cleveland @ Washington

San Francisco @ Las Vegas

NY Jets @ Seattle

LA Rams @ LA Chargers

Buffalo @ Cincinnati Mon., Jan. 2

Tie Breaker Game:

Minnesota @ Green Bay



Morgan Rode
New Media

This Week's Picks:

Tennessee	New England	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Buffalo
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	Las Vegas	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score : Minnesota 27 @ Green Bay 24



Tim Murphy
New Media

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Buffalo
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 21 @ Green Bay 7



Luke Reimer
New Media

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Buffalo
Detroit	Carolina	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 21 @ Green Bay 24

FOLLOW YOUR FAVORITES!

2022 PACKERS

REGULAR SEASON

1 Sunday, September 11	at Minnesota Vikings	3:25 p.m.	FOX
2 Sunday, September 18	CHICAGO BEARS	7:20 p.m.	FOX
3 Sunday, September 25	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers	8:25 p.m.	FOX
4 Sunday, October 2	NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS	3:25 p.m.	CBS
5 Sunday, October 9	at New York Giants (1 game)	8:30 a.m.	
6 Sunday, October 16	NEW YORK JETS	12 p.m.	FOX
7 Monday, October 23	at Washington Commanders	10 p.m.	FOX
8 Sunday, October 30	at Dallas Cowboys	7:45 p.m.	FOX
9 Sunday, November 6	at Detroit Lions	12:30 p.m.	FOX
10 Sunday, November 13	DALLAS COWBOYS	3:25 p.m.	FOX
11 Thursday, November 17	TENNESSEE TITANS	7:15 p.m.	FOX
12 Sunday, November 27	at Philadelphia Eagles	7:20 p.m.	FOX
13 Sunday, December 4	at Chicago Bears	12 p.m.	FOX
14	BYE WEEK		
15 Monday, December 19	LOS ANGELES RAMS	7:15 p.m.	FOX
16 Sunday, December 26	at Miami Dolphins	12 p.m.	FOX
17 Sunday, January 1	MINNESOTA VIKINGS	12:25 p.m.	CBS
18 Sunday, January 8	DETROIT LIONS	1 p.m.	TWO

This Week's Winner: Charter Aarrowcast

Weekly Standings

	Weekly Record	Overall Record
22 Shell	12-4	154-86
Buss Automoitve.....	11-5	151-89
Tower clock Eye Center.....	10-6	151-89
Tim Murphy.....	10-6	149-91
Charter Aarrowcast	13-3	148-92
Shawano Seasons Restaurant.....	11-5	148-92

Weekly Record

Overall Record

Weekly Standings

	Weekly Record	Overall Record
Bill Huber.....	9-7	145-95
Luke Reimer	11-5	145-95
Iverson's Piggly Wiggly	12-4	143-97
Morgan Rode	10-6	141-99
Gene's Floor coverings	8-8	139-101
Senn Insurance	9-7	136-104



Robert Buss
Buss Automotive

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	New England	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Cleveland	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 21 @ Green Bay 24



Shane Senn
Senn Insurance

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 27 @ Green Bay 31



Charter
Aarrowcast
Shawano

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 23 @ Green Bay 24



Iverson's Staff
Iverson's
Piggly Wiggly

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	NY Jets
Arizona	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Pittsburgh	Philadelphia	Buffalo
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 24 @ Green Bay 28



In Memory of
Patty Lasher
Shawano Seasons
Restaurant

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	New England	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 21 @ Green Bay 28



Gene Maas
Gene's Floor
Coverings

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 28 @ Green Bay 31



Bill Huber
New
Media

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	New England	NY Jets
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Bills
Detroit	Carolina	
Jacksonville	Cleveland	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 23 @ Green Bay 24



Brenda
22 Shell

This Week's Picks:

Tennessee	Miami	Seattle
Atlanta	NY Giants	LA Chargers
Baltimore	Philadelphia	Cincinnati
Detroit	Tampa Bay	
Jacksonville	Washington	
Kansas City	San Francisco	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 27 @ Green Bay 28



Jim Wiegand
Tower Clock
Eye Center

This Week's Picks:

Dallas	Philadelphia	LA Chargers
Atlanta	Tampa Bay	Baltimore
Detroit	Washington	Buffalo
Kansas City	Jacksonville	
Miami	San Francisco	
NY Giants	Seattle	

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Minnesota 13 @ Green Bay 27

PLAYOFF PICTURE

By **BILL HUBER**

Correspondent

When the Green Bay Packers lost to the Philadelphia Eagles in week 12, their record was 4-8, their quarterback had broken ribs and the season looked doomed.

The Packers' playoff chances were so remote that one of the country's biggest sportsbooks, FanDuel, no longer listed them in their "Odds to make playoffs" market.

The Packers not only are back on the list, they became the favorite to claim the final spot in the NFC playoffs after beating the Miami Dolphins on Sunday.

Officially, the Packers remain in 10th place in the NFC. As was the case after beating the Los Angeles Rams last Monday night, the Packers trail the New York Giants, Washington Commanders, Seattle Seahawks and Detroit Lions in the race for the final two playoff spots. But, after the Giants, Commanders, Seahawks and Lions all lost on Saturday and the Packers upset the Dolphins on Sunday, Green Bay is just a half-game behind Washington for the final spot.

"I'd like to be, you know, 10-5, 11-4, but, considering where we were a few weeks ago, a lot of has happened in our favor," quarterback Aaron Rodgers said after the game. "All the games that needed to go a certain way went a certain way. Now, there's obviously much left, but we've played meaningful games in December, we won all three of those. Now we're playing meaningful games in January, and we've got to win those."

It won't be easy. Of the five teams chasing the final two spots, the Packers have the toughest remaining schedule with home games against the Minnesota Vikings (12-3) and Detroit Lions (7-8). But with the momentum of three consecutive wins, homefield advantage and a battle-tested team, Green Bay is surging at the right time.

"It means that the work is working and just keep doing the things that we've been doing and things like that happen," tight end Marcedes Lewis said. "We've just got to stay the course. You don't really control wins and losses, but your attitude and your effort and your preparation going into games, you have complete control over that and today, we handled business."

With the Dallas Cowboys having secured one spot, here is a look at the race for the final two spots in



Green Bay Packers wide receiver Christian Watson, left, is tackled inches before the goal line during the team's win over the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

the NFC playoffs.

New York Giants (8-6-1)

Week 17: vs. Indianapolis Colts (4-9-1)

Week 18: at Philadelphia Eagles (13-2)

The Giants need only to win one game to get in the playoffs. They're in good shape with the slumping Colts coming to town next week.

"We control our own destiny," Giants running back Saquon Barkley said. "Win and you're in. At home. That's beautiful."

If they were to somehow lose that game, they'd face the powerhouse Eagles in the finale. Philadelphia might have the No. 1 seed wrapped up, so it could be the Giants facing Gardner Minshew instead of MVP candidate Jalen Hurts, though Minshew almost won at Dallas on Saturday.

Washington Commanders (7-7-1)

Week 17: vs. Cleveland Browns (6-9)

Week 18: vs. Dallas Cowboys (11-4)

Washington is the target. The Commanders are slumping and have no idea what they're doing at quarterback. At one point, Taylor Heinicke led them to six wins in seven games. Now, they're 0-2-1 in their last three games. Carson Wentz replaced Heinicke for the end of Saturday's loss to San Francisco.

On one hand, their final two games are at home and both are winnable. Cleveland is 2-5 on the road and has scored just 33 points its last three games.

If Washington were to lose that game, it would host Dallas in the finale. The Cowboys might be locked into the No. 5 seed. If that's the case, chances are coach Mike McCarthy will rest his key play-

ers with an eye toward a wild-card game the following weekend.

Thus, the Packers' playoff hopes might hinge on quarterback Cooper Rush, running back Malik Davis and rookie receiver Jalen Tolbert.

"We still control our destiny," Washington receiver Terry McLaurin said. "Other teams in contention with us lost, as well, so it's kind of like a stalemate. But we've got to find a way to come back and get a win against Cleveland back at home. These last two at home, you can't really ask for much more to have an opportunity to get into the playoffs. We have two chances at home to do it, and we just got to get back and see what we can do to get that done."

Seattle Seahawks (7-8)

Week 17: vs New York Jets (7-8)

Week 18: vs. Los Angeles Rams (5-10)

The Seahawks are in eighth place because of tiebreakers. Detroit owns the tiebreaker over Green Bay because of its week nine victory, and Seattle owns the tiebreaker over Detroit because of its week four win.

Really, though, Seattle is irrelevant from Green Bay's perspective. If the Packers and Seahawks win out and tie at 9-8, Green Bay would win the tiebreaker based on conference records.

Seattle has fallen apart. A four-game winning streak lifted it to 6-3 and into first place in the NFC West. However, it's 1-5 in its last six games. It does get its last two games at home, where it's dropped three straight.

"These last two games will be enormous for us, obviously," Seattle coach Pete Carroll said following the loss to the Chiefs on Saturday. "We are playing the championship of the season right now. That is how we are going to approach it to get it done and give us a chance to be in it in the end."

Detroit Lions (7-8)

Week 17: vs Chicago Bears (3-12)

Week 18: at Green Bay Packers (7-8)

The Lions were the darlings of

the NFL after winning six of seven games to charge into the play-off hunt following a 1-6 start. But Detroit was upset on the road by the Carolina Panthers on Saturday. The Lions' horrendous defense was torched for 320 rushing yards.

Presumably, Detroit will beat Chicago next week. That would set the stage for a make-or-break week 18 showdown at Lambeau Field. The Lions haven't made the playoffs since 2016 and haven't won a playoff game since reaching the NFC Championship Game in 1991.

For what it's worth, the Lions have played one game on grass all season, a 31-30 win over Chicago on Nov. 13.

"I've been saying it all along while we were winning games, none of it matters if we don't go out there and perform again for the next one," left tackle Taylor Decker said. "And we were kind of in a position to control our own destiny and we kind of fumbled it away. So, all we can do now is go and play these next two games. We got two divisional opponents coming up and whatever happens, happens."

Green Bay Packers (7-8)

Week 17: vs Minnesota Vikings (12-3)

Week 18: vs Detroit Lions (7-8)

With three consecutive victories and everybody else dropping like bowling pins, the Packers have put themselves in position for the most unlikely of playoff berths. They'll have to beat two quality teams, and get some more help, to turn those dreams into reality.

For what it's worth, Mother Nature is going to release her icy grip on the area just in time for two dome teams to come to town. According to Accuweather, the forecast for Sunday's game against the Vikings is calling for a high of

37 with a chance of showers.

For the finale against Detroit, the long-range projection is a high of 26. With the potential of the game being flexed into primetime, the predicted low is 19 with wind chills in the single digits.

"We like our position, but it starts one game at a time with an NFC North opponent, which is Minnesota. (We have to) handle that first," running back Aaron Jones said.

"Before we look past or look forward to anything, you have to handle what's in front of you."

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Q&A WITH DAVID BAKHTIARI

By **BILL HUBER**
Correspondent

Having worked his way back from a knee injury that sidelined him for the 2020 playoffs, most of the 2021 season and the start of the 2022 season, former All-Pro left tackle David Bakhtiari had an emergency appendectomy a couple days before the Packers faced the Bears on Dec. 4. A few days later, on Dec. 7, he and his wife had a baby girl, Felix Ann Bakhtiari.

Q: Can you take us through what happened?

A: I thought I maybe strained my ab or had a contusion in my ab. I talked to my wife about it and I was like, 'If I feel the same pain, I'll bring it up to the doctors tomorrow.' So, I woke up the next morning, felt totally fine. Came in here and went and saw (team Dr. Pat) McKenzie and I'm like, 'Can you check this out real quick?' He thought I was just messing around. He said, 'Let me bring in Dr. (James) Ebben.'

Dr. Ebben came in, did a couple tests and he was like, 'Let's just rule out the worst-case scenario. Let's

give you a CT scan.' I was like, 'OK, Friday's my big practice day, so as long as I can get it done before so I can practice.' I go in there, I do the test, waiting for the doctor to clear it and she [Ebben's assistant] said, 'The doctor wants to talk to you.' When that happens, you're like, 'OK, what the (expletive) happened?'

They come in and he tells me. Long story short, he said, 'You're a couple days away, from what it looks like, and it's pressing on your abdomen. That's why you're having the pain.' So, I had to go to the surgery. When I woke up, she's like, 'We had to do the big surgery because it was leaking.' She thought I was a week from the CT but she's like, 'If it didn't burst Saturday, you would've burst it Sunday.'

Q: That's scary. If doesn't burst on Saturday, you're playing on Sunday and then what?

A: Then I'm on the field. The scary part for me that people don't understand is when we have adrenaline going, so much stuff gets covered up. I would probably bet I wouldn't even know I would've burst it until postgame. I would've thought I got hit in the

guts and I would have been like, 'Suck it up. Let's finish out the game and then let's figure it out.'

Q: Can you put into words what these last couple years have been like?

A: I think anyone that looks at the journey I've been on the last two years, I've been put under four times in Jan. 7 will be two years. That's not cool. I don't wish that on anyone and I don't enjoy it but that's the road, that's what's written on my life. Tough times don't last but tough people do. I'll keep rolling with it and eventually it's going to calm down and I can get back to what has been my regularly programmed scheduling of my life.

No matter what happens here at work or anything, the moment I walk through the door, it doesn't matter what kind of day you've had. Chest time's the best time. Being with my baby girl, being with my wife and family, it's been a blessing, it's been great and I love those moments.

With what's going on outside of my wife and my daughter, people say, 'You don't you just want to fast-forward through it?' But when

AT A GLANCE

Number: 69
Position: Offensive tackle
Age: 31
Season: 10th
College: Colorado

I spend every second with her, not a chance. I would never want to fast-forward. Every hiccup to yawn to cry to diaper change, those are moments that make it worth it. It's going to go through and I don't want to speed it up at all.

Q: How's fatherhood?

A: Not much has changed, really. My sleep – everyone talks about the sleep, I think it's a little blown out of proportion. Maybe I have a good baby. She's amazing. I'm getting six to eight hours of sleep. We had a plan where I was going to go sleep in a different room, but I didn't really feel like I needed to.

Now, do I sleep all throughout the night? No, I wake up when I hear her wanting to feed and there's not much I can do. Every now and then, I can help out if she needs me to hold a bottle in the middle of the night. It's awesome. Chest time's the best time for me. Big fan.

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CORRESPONDENTS

Correspondents serve as extra eyes and ears in the community to keep readers informed about all aspects of the place they call home, supplementing NEW Media's print and online products. Self-starting writers and photographers work on a freelance basis. Currently, we have the following available:

- Oconto County correspondent needed to cover community events and tell feature stories in Gillett, Oconto Falls, Lena and Suring.
- Western Shawano County correspondent needed to tell feature stories and cover events in Wittenberg, Birnamwood, Tigerton, Aniwa, Mattoon and Bowler.
- Menominee County correspondent needed to cover events and tell feature stories on the Menominee Reservation.
- The sports editor needs correspondents to write about high school sporting events and take photos in Shawano, Menominee and/or Oconto counties.

Send a cover letter detailing your writing and photography experience and your fees, along with any clips you might have, to news@newmedia-wi.com. Put "Correspondent" in the header.



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Shredded
Cheese
16 oz

\$3.49

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Features Entrees
8-11.5 oz
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10 ct or 11-12 oz

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