

FRUSTRATION AND BEAUTY



Green Bay faces another offseason of uncertainty

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Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, left, walks off the field with receiver Randall Cobb after a loss to the Detroit Lions on Jan. 8 in Green Bay.

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Green Bay falls one win short of playoffs

Rodgers not ruling out retirement

By **LUKE REIMER**
Reporter

After losing to the Philadelphia Eagles during week 12, the Green Bay Packers dropped to 4-8 and talk of Jordan Love starting for the rest of the year began to surface.

The team then inexplicably went on a four-game win streak, and with losses from the Seattle Seahawks and Washington Commanders, found themselves in control of its fate, before losing in week 18.

"It was frustrating at times, but ultimately some really beautiful moments," said Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, reflecting on the season after the week 18 loss to the Detroit Lions.

Starting in training camp before the season, the Packers had a picture of what the team was, as Rodgers was back at practice on a two-year deal. The worry though was where the production was going to come from on offense with Davante Adams gone.

General Manager Brian Gutekunst brought in veteran Sammy Watkins and drafted three rookies, Christian Watson, Romeo Doubs and Samori Toure to help fill that role. Even though there were doubts, many thought that the combination of those three with Aaron Jones, A.J. Dillon and Rodgers would be enough.

"I feel like obviously losing Davante was a big deal, but we didn't fill that void, and I mean no one can," said Rodgers. "I think that there is a lot of good, young talent on the team and if certain guys make the jumps from year one to year two, this offense could look a little different."

Going back to Rodgers' quote about the season, the Packers started on a frustrating moment — getting blown out by division-rival Minnesota Vikings. The beautiful quickly followed though, as Green Bay won three straight games.

Even though Davante Adams wasn't there, the Packers were winning games, hopes were high and this seemed like another playoff team.

The season turned upside down and frustration set in when Green Bay traveled to London. A loss to the New York Giants overseas was quickly fol-



Green Bay Packers running back Aaron Jones, right, fumbles as he is hit by Detroit Lions defensive end John Cominsky, center, during the first half of a game on Jan. 8 in Green Bay.

MIKE ROEMER | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

lowed by four more losses, to the New York Jets, Washington Commanders, Buffalo Bills and Detroit Lions.

During the five-game losing streak, almost everything came into question — the quarterback situation, the running back usage, the defensive scheme, the special teams — Green Bay looked like a shell of the team that started 3-1. Everyone was writing the Packers off, and rightfully so, but the Packers were still mathematically alive to make the playoffs.

The Packers snapped their losing skid with a hard-fought overtime victory over the Dallas Cowboys, and more than just the Dallas Cowboys, former head coach Mike McCarthy.

After the game, Rodgers told fans that, "we're not dead yet." Rodgers knew throughout the entire season that the Packers could not be counted out, until the team was mathematically eliminated, telling reporters that he believes in the team after each loss throughout the season.

Even though Green Bay's win over Dallas was followed by two losses to the Tennessee Titans and Philadelphia Eagles, a silver lining started to appear in the form of Christian Watson. In the three-game stretch, Watson caught six

touchdowns and added another one week later against the Bears.

In what had become a stagnant offense, Watson provided the spark that the Packers needed at the exact time that the team needed it. He became a focal point in the offense, catching 31 passes from the Dallas game forward.

While the offense was finding its footing, the defense was finding itself as well. With the losses of Rashan Gary and Eric Stokes, the team overcame the challenges and started forcing turnovers during the four-game win streak. The biggest moment for the Packers defense this season came when it intercepted Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa on three straight possessions to end the week 16 game.

Finally the Packers scored 41 points against the Vikings, before setting up a week 18 matchup with the Detroit Lions with the playoffs on the line. From the beautiful momentum of the Packers win streak, the season quickly ended back with frustration. While the defense was providing stops throughout the game, the offense turned back to what it had looked like during the five-game losing streak, scoring just one touchdown.

"I do commend our locker room

and the guys for their ability to overcome adversity throughout the course of the season, but I think ultimately we dug ourselves in too big of a hole, and the margin for error in this league is so small and if you don't capitalize on opportunities and you make mistakes — then you're going to lose," said Packers head coach Matt LaFleur.

The loss, while predictable, still felt somewhat heartbreaking, as a team that was counted out by everyone except the players and coaches had a win-and-you-are-in opportunity. There was hope and with Rodgers at quarterback, anything could happen.

Now Green Bay faces a reality of not having Rodgers anymore, an idea that he is not discounting, creating yet another offseason of uncertainty in Green Bay.

"It's a feeling, do I feel like I have anything left to prove to myself? Do I want to go back and gear up for another grind? Or is it time? Is it time to step away? Is it time for another voice to be leading this team?," said Rodgers. "I think I need to get away and contemplate those things, and those are real to me."

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Packers season ends at hands of Lions

Rodgers' future up in the air

By **LUKE REIMER**
Reporter

In what could be Aaron Rodgers' last game at Lambeau Field, the Green Bay Packers saw their magic run out to the Detroit Lions, losing 20-16 and ending Green Bay's playoff hopes.

This is the first time in head coach Matt LaFleur's four-year tenure that the Packers have missed the playoffs.

"To have an opportunity to go to the playoffs at home and not being able to get it done in that fashion is extremely disappointing," said LaFleur, following the game.

Rodgers finished the game with 205 passing yards and a touchdown pass on 17 completions. Christian Watson was the main benefactor of Rodgers, as the rookie receiver recorded 104 receiving yards on five catches. Allen Lazard added another 41 yards and a touchdown.

For the Lions, quarterback Jared Goff completed 23 out of 34 passing attempts for 224 yards and no touchdowns. Both of Detroit's touchdowns came by way of former Packer running back Jamaal Williams, who added another 72 yards on the ground.

The Packers, who have been averaging 140.5 rushing yards over the four-game win streak, garnered just 103 yards on the ground in this game. Aaron Jones led the way against Detroit with 48 yards on 12 carries. A.J. Dillon added another 33 yards on nine carries, snapping his streak of five straight games with a rushing touchdown.

"We didn't block movement very well," said LaFleur, on the team's inability to get a strong run game going.

Green Bay immediately marched down the field to open the game, with a defensive pass interference penalty putting the Packers on Detroit's 5-yard line. The drive stalled though, as Jones and Dillon combined for rushes of just one yard. That was followed up by an incompleting intended for Dillon, leading to Mason Crosby's first field goal of the game.

After trading possessions, which included a failed fourth-down rush from Lazard, the Packers were able to work down the field again on the back of a 27-yard reception from Watson. On third-and-five from Detroit's 20-yard line, Lions pass



Green Bay Packers wide receiver Allen Lazard, left, reaches for a pass against Detroit Lions cornerback Jerry Jacobs during a game on Jan. 8 in Green Bay.

JEFFREY PHELPS | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

rusher Aiden Hutchinson bull-rushed Packers tackle Yosh Nijman, sacking Rodgers for a loss of 11 yards.

Up 6-3, the Packers once again had their drive stalled at the Lions 24-yard-line after another Hutchinson sack on third-and-five resulted in a loss of six yards. Crosby once again finished the drive for the offense, making a 48-yard field goal.

With 1:16 left in the first half, Goff led the Lions down the field, throwing for 55 yards on 10 plays to bring the ball to the Green Bay 37-yard line with five seconds left. As the Lions were setting up for a field goal, the Packers called timeout and Packers cornerback Rasul Douglas attempted to stop the long snapper from snapping the ball.

A small fight followed, leading to Douglas being called for a 15-yard unnecessary roughness penalty, thus giving the Lions an easy 33-yard field goal make to enter halftime.

"The first half, I think we had a lot of opportunities that we let go away," said Rodgers. "Obviously the first

drive was a good drive, and I think we had four drives inside their territory and just didn't come up with enough points — didn't convert on third down."

Douglas was not the only one who seemingly lost his composure in this game, as linebacker Quay Walker was ejected from the game following him pushing a Lions staff member who was attending to an injured player. With the ejection, Walker became the first player in 15 years to be disqualified from two games in the same season.

"I don't know, but that is unacceptable," said LaFleur when answering why players lost their composure in this game. "I've got a much higher standard for our players than to do silly things like that. I mean we've had a guy get ejected twice. I don't think I have ever seen that in my career."

Down 20-16 with just under six minutes remaining, Rodgers tried to lead a charge to take the lead late.

Facing third-and-10 from Green Bay's own 33-yard line, Rodgers was met with pressure up the middle and as a result he heaved a pass down the right sideline, intended for Watson, which was intercepted by Lions safety Kerby Joseph. That was the last pass that Rodgers threw in the game, and it could be Rodgers last throw as a Packer.

With the season over and the future in question, Rodgers exited the field by walking to the locker room with Randall Cobb next to him, embracing each other. While he is under contract for another season, Rodgers said that he will take some time to figure out his immediate future.

"It's a little raw right now," said Rodgers. "It's just a little bit after the game, so I'm going to take the emotion out of it and have conversations and see where the organization's at and see how I feel after some time has passed."

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PACKERS REPORT CARD

By **BILL HUBER**

Correspondent

Green Bay Packers coach Matt LaFleur's first three teams each won 13 games. His first two teams reached NFC Championship Games.

His fourth team will watch the playoffs from home.

The offense never found its way after the offseason trade of Davante Adams. The defense rarely played to the preseason hype. The special teams improved as the season went on but couldn't deliver a game-turning play in the finale.

Here is a unit-by-unit report card, supplemented by stats from Pro Football Focus.

Quarterbacks

The numbers are pretty incredible. In winning MVP honors in 2020 and 2021, Aaron Rodgers' season averages were 69.6% completions, 4,200 yards, 42.5 touchdowns and 4½ interceptions. In 2022, he completed 64.7% of his passes for 3,490 yards with 25 touchdowns vs. 11 interceptions.

In his healthy seasons, he matched his career low in touchdowns, missed his career high in interceptions by one and had a career-worst 91.5 passer rating. Unbelievably, he threw almost as many interceptions as his first three seasons under LaFleur combined (13). For the first time in his career, he didn't have a single 300-yard game. He finished 16th in rating and 23rd in yards per attempt.

Everybody expected the passing of offense to endure growing pains without Adams. Those pains never went away. During the final eight games, Rodgers never reached even 240 yards. In the last five games — the four-game winning streak and the loss to Detroit — he threw five touchdowns vs. three interceptions.

There's more to playing quarterback than completing passes. LaFleur consistently praised Rodgers for his ability to get the team into the right play at the line of scrimmage. That skill is why older quarterbacks hold so much value.

Still, at the end of the day, a quarterback needs to be that rising tide that lifts all boats. This year's boat was sunk by a Detroit defense that ranked among the worst in the league in just about every important statistical area.

Grade: C

Running backs

Aaron Jones rushed for a career-high 1,121 yards, good for ninth in the league. It was a struggle at times down the stretch but he played in all



Green Bay Packers receiver Christian Watson signals for a first down during the team's game against the Miami Dolphins on Dec. 25 in Miami.

GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

17 games. His 5.3-yard average eclipsed his career mark of 5.1, which already was among the best in NFL history. His 59 receptions not only set a career high but were just one off the team lead.

On the other hand, he had a career-low two rushing touchdowns and career-high five fumbles. His final fumble of the season was a season-changer. On Sunday, Green Bay was leading 9-3 late in the first half and driving to at least another field goal when Jones fumbled on a screen. Rather than building on their lead, the Lions drove to a field goal to make it a three-point game at intermission.

AJ Dillon also played in all 17 games. As a runner, his 770 yards, 4.1 average and seven touchdowns were on par with last year. He wasn't nearly as good as a receiver, though, going from 34 receptions in 37 targets for 313 yards to 28 receptions in 43 targets for 206 yards. His yards per target plunged from 8.5 to 4.6 and his drops from zero to five.

Grade: B

Receivers

In the long run, maybe trading Adams, drafting Christian Watson in the second round and Romeo Doubs in the fourth round, and allocating Adams' cap money elsewhere will pay off. It didn't this year, though.

Allen Lazard, who was hyped as a No. 1 receiver by Rodgers, led the team with 60 receptions and 788 receiving yards and was second with six receiving touchdowns. Doubs was fourth on the team with 42 receptions (for 425 yards and three touchdowns) and Watson was fifth with 41 receptions (for 611 yards and a team-high seven touchdowns). The lone free-agent addition, Sammy Watkins, was a bust who sucked up too many snaps before he was released in December.

Combined, Lazard and Doubs caught 102 passes, and Lazard and Watson had 1,399 yards and 13 touchdowns. By himself, Adams caught 100 passes for 1,516 yards and 14 touchdowns.

It's not just the numbers. Rodgers and Adams had tens of thousands of practice and game reps to draw upon

in key situations. Need a critical conversion on third-and-8? With a wink and a nod, they made it happen. Rodgers had that connection with Lazard and Randall Cobb but they don't have Adams' talent; Watson and Doubs have the talent but not the experience.

Watson provided a game-breaking element and could be a star if he can stay healthy; following offseason knee surgery, he missed time with hamstring, ankle and hip injuries as well as a concussion. He and Doubs dropped five passes. Lazard dropped four.

The under-the-radar good: Lazard and Watson are tremendous blockers. The under-the-radar bad: Combined, every Packers receiver forced 13 missed tackles, led by Cobb and Watson with four apiece. Nine individuals had more than Green Bay's total.

Watson and Doubs are building blocks; Lazard and Cobb are headed to free agency.

Grade: C-minus

Tight ends

Green Bay's tight ends played exactly to the scouting report.

Robert Tonyan finished third on the team with 53 receptions, which he turned into 470 yards and two touchdowns. Possessing some of the best hands in the NFL, he finished first among tight ends in catch percentage (84.1) and second in drop percentage (1.9). Coming off a torn ACL, he didn't provide much of an explosive element and went 11 games between touchdowns.

Marcedes Lewis, the NFL's oldest tight end, blocks better than just about any tight end in the league. Josiah Deguara is a tight end on the depth chart but the fullback in reality. There weren't many explosive runs that didn't include one or both making the key block.

Tonyan and Lewis are set to be free agents. Given Green Bay's flirtation with the Raiders' Darren Waller at the trade deadline, it would appear the team is looking to upgrade. Lewis will turn 39 in May. He's played 17 seasons, tied with Tony Gonzalez and Jason Witten for most by a tight end in NFL history. He wants that record.

Grade: B

Offensive line

With David Bakhtiari and Elgton Jenkins coming off torn ACLs, uncertainty was the word of the day entering the season. Jenkins made his debut in week two and started 15 games. Bakhtiari made his debut in week three and started 11 games.

When the team became convinced Bakhtiari's three-times-repaired knee

could handle the weekly rigors, it made a big offensive line switch in moving Jenkins from right tackle to left guard, Jon Runyan from left guard to right guard and Yosh Nijman inserted into the lineup at right tackle. The more they played, the better they got.

Bakhtiari is a marvel. Despite limited practice reps and a three-game absence due to an appendectomy, he didn't allow a sack all season.

Jenkins, who was signed a contract extension late in the season, allowed two sacks and 12 pressures in five starts at right tackle and one sack and five pressures in 11 starts at left guard.

Center Josh Myers, a second-round pick in 2021, has been disappointingly mediocre. His pass protection has been fine; his run blocking has been ho-hum.

Runyan, a sixth-round pick in 2020, hadn't played a right-side snap in his life until the big line switch. Not surprisingly, it was a struggle at times for him. He should be better with a full offseason to work on the footwork.

Nijman has gone from undrafted practice squad player to an above-average starter. A shoulder injury factored in his allowing two sacks to Aidan Hutchinson in the finale.

The Packers drafted three linemen. Third-round pick Sean Rhyan didn't play and was suspended for the final six games for performance-enhancing drugs. Seventh-round pick Rasheed Walker didn't play, either.

Fourth-round pick Zach Tom, on the other hand, was one of the team's unsung heroes for delivering consistently strong performances on short notice at left tackle, left guard and right tackle. He'll contend for a starting job in 2023.

Grade: B

Defensive line

When it was time to go get the quarterback, the veteran tandem of Kenny Clark and Jarran Reed was up to the task. Clark had four sacks and was tied for 11th with 45 pressures. Reed, who was signed in free agency, had 2½ sacks and was 25th with 33 pressures.

The other veteran, Dean Lowry, had his consecutive-games streak snapped at 101 when he was put on injured reserve for the final two games. He had a half-sack after recording a career-high five last year. He's headed to free agency.

First-round pick Devonte Wyatt had 1½ sacks. The sacks and five of his eight pressures came in the four games after the bye. His athleticism is obvious, and a year of seasoning could set him up for a breakout season next year. Second-year player T.J. Slaton was one of the stars of the week 17 rout of Minnesota. The Pack-



Green Bay Packers linebacker Preston Smith (91) and defensive lineman Kenny Clark (97) chase down Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa (1) during a game on Dec. 25 in Miami. GREG MELLIS | NEW MEDIA

ers need that consistently.

The key here is run defense. There needs to be an attitude adjustment and a resolve that nobody is going to run against that group.

Grade: C

Outside linebackers

Rashan Gary's torn ACL changed everything. The Packers were one of the healthiest teams in the league but Gary was on the short list of players who the team simply couldn't afford to lose.

In nine games, Gary had six sacks and 38 pressures in 191 pass-rushing snaps. Of the 101 edge defenders with at least that number of pass-rushing opportunities, Gary finished second in PFF's pass-rushing productivity, which measures sacks, hits and hurries per pass-rushing snap.

In 17 games, the other veteran starter, Preston Smith, had 8½ sacks and 42 pressures and was 51st in pass-rushing productivity. In nine games with Gary, Smith had 26 pressures. In eight games without Gary, he had just 16.

Gary's injury meant a lot of playing time for fifth-round rookie Kingsley Enagbare. He had three sacks but just one after Gary went down. He finished 63rd in pass-rushing productivity. Justin Hollins was claimed off waivers from the Rams and had 2½ sacks in five games.

Grade: D-plus

Inside linebackers

The Packers re-signed All-Pro De'Vondre Campbell in free agency and used a first-round pick on Quay Walker. Combined with the additions of Reed and Wyatt on the defensive line, Green Bay's run defense was supposed to be strong. Instead, the Packers finished 28th in yards allowed per carry.

Campbell, who missed four games with a knee injury, was good but not great. Playing three fewer games than

last season, he produced 50 fewer tackles, two fewer passes defended and two fewer forced fumbles but missed seven more tackles. He did match last year's total of two interceptions; one of those was a huge one in the victory at Miami. A solid starter, his 2021 seems like an outlier.

Walker led the team with 119 tackles and was impressive with seven passes defended and three forced fumbles. He was great at times; he's got a chance to be great, period. His season ended with an ejection during the fourth quarter of the season-ending loss to Detroit, a penalty that set up the Lions for the game-winning touchdown.

Grade: C-plus

Cornerbacks

Entering the season, Jaire Alexander, Rasul Douglas and Eric Stokes had a chance to become the best cornerback trio in the NFL.

Alexander mostly did his part. With five interceptions and 14 passes defended, he finished one interception from the NFL lead and one pass defended from the top 10. He thrives on competition, which is why he delivered big-time performances vs. Miami's Tyreek Hill and Minnesota's Justin Jefferson down the stretch.

With Alexander out with a significant shoulder injury last year, Douglas was signed off Arizona's practice squad and saved the season. His four interceptions and 13 passes defended were about on par with last year's five interceptions and 13 passes defended but his play-to-play performance wasn't the same. His catch rate went from 50.8% to 67.1%, and officials frequently busted him for overly physical play.

Stokes was terrible after an all-rookie-caliber debut. In 2021, he gave up a 51% catch rate and had a forced-incompletion rate of 19%. Before his 2022 season ended with an ankle

injury in week 9, Stokes allowed an 84% completion rate and had a forced-incompletion rate of just 4%.

Keisean Nixon started three games in the slot late in the season before the Packers turned to Darnell Savage in that role and let Nixon focus on returns.

Grade: B-minus

Safeties

It was a typical season for steady Adrian Amos. In fact, he set career highs with 102 tackles and seven tackles for losses. He had one interception after four consecutive seasons of two, and five passes defended, down from eight last year. As always, he got his man to the turf. Amos will turn 30 in April and is headed to free agency.

Former first-round pick Darnell Savage went from starter and every-down player to the bench before being thrust into a key role for the final games. His good is great and his bad is terrible. Unfortunately, there's been more bad than good. Few players in the NFL are worse tacklers than Savage. That's a problem at any position but especially so at safety.

Rudy Ford, mostly a career-long special teams player, proved to be a valuable member of the defense. He started six games in his first five seasons but six games for the Packers. He picked off three passes and forced a fumble. He is unbelievably fast and a decent tackler.

Grade: C

Special teams

Rich Bisaccia's units got better and better as the season progressed.

Nixon was the star of the show. Taking over on returns at midseason, he emerged as the NFL's best kickoff returner with a 28.8-yard average and five returns of 50-plus yards. He is fast and tough — a good combination that allowed him to run through arm tackles.

Mason Crosby had a nice bounce-back season by making 25-of-29 field goals (86.2%). Crosby's leg is significantly below average — he statistically was the worst kickoff man in the NFL — but he's such an asset in the cold. While it was adventure for the Vikings' Greg Joseph and the Lions' Michael Badgley, Crosby was mostly money in the bank.

Veteran addition Pat O'Donnell finished only 30th in net average (38.9 yards) but successfully limited opposing returners and had 24 inside-the-20 punts vs. an NFL-best one touchback.

Undrafted rookie snapper Jack Coco will face a challenger in camp. O'Donnell saved his bacon on some low snaps.

Grade: B

NFL PLAYOFF GUIDE

By DAVID BRANDT

The Associated Press

The NFL's week 18 saved its best drama for the final game of the weekend.

The Detroit Lions — eliminated from playoff contention earlier Sunday when the Seahawks beat the Rams — pushed past their disappointment and played the role of a spoiler, rallying to beat Green Bay 20-16 on Sunday night. The win denied quarterback Aaron Rodgers and the Packers a spot in the postseason.

Instead of Green Bay, it's the Seahawks who will be the No. 7 seed in the NFC. They'll travel to face division rival San Francisco in next weekend's wild-card round.

The rest of next weekend's schedule is also set: In the AFC, it'll be the Miami Dolphins at the Buffalo Bills, Baltimore Ravens at the Cincinnati Bengals and Los Angeles Chargers at Jacksonville Jaguars. In the NFC, the Minnesota Vikings will host the New York Giants and the Tom Brady-led Tampa Bay Bucs host the Dallas Cowboys.

The Lions' upset win capped a weekend that saw the Dolphins make it back to the playoffs for the first time since 2016. The surprising Jaguars also return to the postseason for just the second time since 2007.

Seven of the 14 teams that qualified for the playoffs didn't make the field last season, including the Seahawks, Ravens, Jaguars, Chargers, Dolphins, Vikings and Giants.

Among those headed home: The New England Patriots and six-time Super Bowl-winning coach Bill Belichick, eliminated after a loss to the Bills.

The Lions didn't have much to play for against the Packers other than pride, but that was enough. They were knocked out of playoff contention when Seattle's Jason Myers kicked a 32-yard field goal to beat the Los Angeles Rams 19-16 in overtime.

The No. 1 overall seed in the AFC was claimed by Kansas City with its 31-13 win over Las Vegas on Saturday. The NFC's top spot was taken by Philadelphia, which beat the New York Giants 22-16 on Sunday.

The AFC bracket could still be affected by the cancellation of the Jan. 2 Bills-Bengals game. The Bengals avoided a coin flip for home field after beating the Ravens 27-16, but there still could be a neutral field AFC championship game if the Bills line up against the Chiefs.

Wild Card schedule

Saturday: Seattle Seahawks at San Francisco 49ers, 3:30 p.m., FOX; Los Angeles Chargers at Jacksonville Jaguars, 7:15 p.m., NBC.

Sunday: Miami Dolphins at Buffalo Bills, noon, CBS; New York Giants at Minnesota Vikings, 3:30 p.m., FOX; Baltimore Ravens at Cincinnati Bengals, 7:15 p.m. NBC.

Monday: Dallas Cowboys at Tampa Bay Buccaneers, 7:15 p.m. ESPN/ABC.

Playoff format

This is the third straight year of the current NFL playoff format, which includes the top seven teams from both the AFC and the NFC.

The four division winners in both conferences automatically get the top four seeds, regardless of record, and then the top three teams with the best record that didn't win their division are the wild-card selections. That's why it's fairly common for a wild-card selection to have a better record — but worse playoff seeding — than a team that finished as a division winner.

The No. 1-seeded team in each conference gets a bye into the second round — that's the Chiefs and Eagles — while No. 2 hosts No. 7, No. 3 hosts No. 6 and No. 4 hosts No. 5 during wild-card weekend.

The NFL has a re-seeding policy after each playoff round. That means that no matter how the bracket

started, the lowest-seeded team will always travel to the higher-seeded team.

There are four rounds to the playoffs: The wild-card round is during the upcoming weekend, the divisional round is Jan. 21-22, the conference championship games are on Jan. 29 and the Super Bowl is scheduled for Feb. 12 in Glendale, Arizona.

Changes due to Bills, Bengals cancellation

It was an eventful week for players and fans, who watched in horror on Jan. 2 as Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapsed on the field and had to be given CPR before leaving the field in an ambulance. A few days later, those same players and fans have watched with joy as Hamlin recovers.

That made it much easier to focus on Week 18 and now the playoffs.

The Bills-Bengals game had major playoff implications in the AFC, so the cancellation of the game due to Hamlin's injury could force some changes depending on playoff results.

The AFC Championship Game will be played on a neutral site if the Chiefs and Bills reach that point.

Buffalo's 35-23 win over New England on Sunday coupled with Kansas City's 31-13 victory at Las Vegas on Saturday means the No. 1 seed Chiefs (14-3) can't host the conference title game against the Bills (13-3) because the teams played an unequal number of games.

NFL owners approved a resolution on Jan. 6 that implemented new rules for this postseason in response to the cancellation of the Bills-Bengals game.

AP Pro Football Writer Rob Maaddi and AP Sports Writer Alanis Thames contributed to this report.

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Tower Clock Eye Center	12-5	174-98	Iverson’s Piggly Wiggly	11-6	165-107
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This Week’s Winner: Senn Insurance

Pack's linebacker Quay Walker apologizes after his 2nd ejection

By **STEVE MEGARGEE**
The Associated Press

Packers linebacker Quay Walker apologized via social media after getting ejected from Green Bay's regular-season finale for shoving a Lions team physician.

"I reacted off of my emotions again and take full responsibility of making another stupid decision," Walker tweeted Jan. 9. "Since then I've ques-

tioned myself on why did I do what I did when the trainer was doing his job!! I was wrong!!"

The incident occurred Jan. 8 during Detroit's go-ahead touchdown drive midway through the fourth quarter of a 20-16 Lions victory that prevented the Packers from reaching the playoffs. Walker was close behind two Lions staffers as they attended to Detroit running back D'Andre Swift, Walker's former Georgia teammate.

Lions team physician Sean Lynch put his left hand on Walker's right elbow to move him away from the staffers so he could check on Swift as well. Walker shoved Lynch in the back. Packers rookie defensive tackle Devonte Wyatt - who also played at Georgia with Walker and Swift - later appeared to bump his left shoulder into Lynch's back but wasn't penalized.

Cameras showed a visibly frustrated Walker head to the locker room.

"I understand I have to face everything that comes with the decision I've made, and I'm definitely paying for it now," Walker tweeted. "Also to explain my frustration in the tunnel. I wasn't upset about being kicked out, I just knew I messed up again and was wrong for what I did and couldn't believe I did it again. To the Detroit Lions and to the entire training staff, including the person I did that to, I'm sorry."



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