

BACK TO THEIR OLD WAYS

**PACKERS' PLAYOFF
HOPES DIMMED WITH
LOSS TO TAMPA BAY**



Jayden Reed caught six passes for 52 yards and a touchdown against the Buccaneers on Dec. 17. However, Green Bay as a whole faltered, losing the game 34-20 and dimming their chances at a playoff berth. With the score tied at 10-10 late in the first half, Tampa Bay's Baker Mayfield led the Bucs to a field goal, and that started a roll Tampa Bay carried over to the second half. The Bucs scored touchdowns on three straight possessions through the third and fourth quarters to open up the advantage. They likely would've scored a fourth straight TD, but running back Rachaad White slid down in the red zone late in the game to run out the clock.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

Baker Mayfield, Buccaneers too much for Green Bay

Packers chances to make the playoffs drop to 26%

By **LUKE REIMER**
Green & Gold Express

Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield became the first visiting quarterback to ever record a perfect passer rating at Lambeau Field as the Buccaneers beat Green Bay 34-20 on Dec. 17.

Mayfield gashed the Green Bay defense as he completed 22-of-28 for 381 yards and four touchdowns.

Chris Godwin was Mayfield's number one target on the day, as the Pennsylvania State alum recorded 155 yards on 10 receptions. Superstar receiver Mike Evans was held to just 57 yards on four receptions, but one of those receptions went for a touchdown. That touchdown for Evans was his 97th career touchdown, which puts him 12th on the all-time list and ties former NFL tight end Rob Gronkowski and Las Vegas wide receiver Davante Adams.

Green Bay's run defense continued to struggle in this game as well, as Tampa Bay's running back RaShaad White picked up 89 yards on 21 carries. White also recorded two receptions for 50 yards.

"We have to challenge much better in the backend, I get it, they have some good wideouts, but you have to be willing to challenge, especially if you are getting gashed," said Packers coach Matt LaFleur.

Mayfield's biggest throw of the day came late in the game, as the Buccaneers were up 27-20 and facing a third-and-four from its own 48-yard line. Mayfield dropped back and hit David Moore right past an outstretched hand from Packers line-backer De'Vondre Campbell. Moore took the pass and ran down the right side of the field before scoring a touchdown. The play was originally reviewed but was determined that Moore crossed the goal line to give the Buccaneers a 14-point lead with 6:30 left in the game.



Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield diced up Joe Barry's defense to the tune of 381 yards on 22-of-28 passing with four touchdowns for a perfect 158.3 passer rating in the 34-20 win over the hometown Packers. It marked the most points the Buccaneers have ever scored at Lambeau Field.

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Green Bay was unable to rebound from the two-score deficit, as its final push came up short.

On the first five plays of the ensuing drive, Packers quarterback Jordan Love got five different Packers involved with Romeo Doubs, Malik Heath, Patrick Taylor, Tucker Kraft and Dontayvion Wicks helping to advance the ball to the Tampa Bay 30-yard line. From there, three incomplete passes set up a fourth-and-10 for Love and the offense. On fourth down, Love dropped back and was sacked for a loss of 19 yards, ending Green Bay's hopes of winning a game with huge playoff implications.

For Green Bay, Love completed 29-of-39 for 284 yards and two touchdowns.

In his first game since Nov. 19 against the Los Angeles Chargers, Aaron Jones recorded 13 carries for 53 yards, adding another 16 yards through the air on four receptions. Wicks was the leading receiver for Green Bay in the game, recording 97 receiving yards on six receptions.

"I think that they easy we started was decent - we put some good drives together, and I think the the thing that hurt us was getting down to the red zone and not capitalizing on some of those opportunities," said

Love, alluding to the two field goals and a turnover on downs that Green Bay was forced to settle for. "That's definitely what hurt us tonight."

Green Bay opened its scoring early, as Mayfield was stripped of the ball on the Buccaneers four-yard line. After Jones got stuffed for a one-yard loss, LaFleur called for a screen pass on the next play. Love dropped back and hit Kraft, and with a great block from Rasheed Walker, Kraft leaped into the end zone for his second career touchdown.

Love's second touchdown pass came on one of his best plays in his young career.

On third-and-14 from the Tampa Bay 17-yard line, Love took the snap and was forced to roll to his right. It appeared Love could have ran for the first down, but instead he threw a dart to the corner of the end zone. In heavy traffic, Jayden Reed made a contested catch, while keeping both feet in bounds in what was reminiscent of Aaron Rodgers throwing a touchdown to Davante Adams.

"On those plays, anything can happen. Basically, I had a corner route - I was kind of a decoy route," said Reed, on his touchdown. "It was kind of scramble mode and I turned towards Jordan and we locked eyes. He made a great throw, so I could make the catch."

The loss for Green Bay now gives the Packers a 6-8 record. With the Chicago Bears losing this week, Green Bay still holds a one game lead over its rivals to avoid the bottom of the NFC North. The Minnesota Vikings also lost this week, maintaining Green Bay's one-game deficit to the team.

That may all be for nothing though, as the Packers now slide to the 11th seed in the NFC, making the next three games on its schedule as close to a must win as possible.

For what it is worth, according to the New York Times Playoff Simulator, the Packers currently hold a 26% chance to make the playoffs. If the Packers were to beat the Carolina Panthers next week, those chances only rise to 34%. If the Packers do beat the Panthers, then a win in week 17 against the Minnesota Vikings would spike those chances all the way up to 65%.

BEAT The Expert

Week 15 Games: Sun., Dec. 17



Luke Reimer
New Media

Denver @ Detroit
Minnesota @ Cincinnati
New York Jets @ Miami
Chicago @ Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:
Tampa Bay @ Green Bay

**Week 14
Winner :**

**Jacob
Westendorf
New Media**

Weekly Standings

	Weekly Record	Overall Record
Jim Wiegand, Tower Clock Eye Center	2-3	47-23
Jacob Westendorf, New Media	3-2	47-23
Tim Murphy, New Media	1-4	46-24
Robert Buss, Buss Automotive	2-3	44-26
Staff, Iverson's Piggly Wiggly	0-5	39-31
Kevin Passon, New Media	2-3	39-31
Staff, Shawano Health Services	1-4	38-32
Shane Senn, Senn Insurance	1-4	38-32
Luke Reimer, New Media	1-4	37-33
Staff, Walsh Dental Group	1-4	34-36
Sue Moede, Moede Plumbing	1-4	34-36



Jim Wiegand
Tower Clock
Eye Center

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Chicago

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 17 @ Green Bay 21



Robert Buss
Buss
Automotive

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 17 @ Green Bay 28



Shane Senn
Senn
Insurance

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 13 @ Green Bay 31



Staff
Walsh Dental Group
Shawano

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Minnesota
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 24 @ Green Bay 28



Staff
Shawano
Health Services

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Minnesota
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 24 @ Green Bay 28



Moede & Sons
Plumbing
Shawano

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 14 @ Green Bay 24



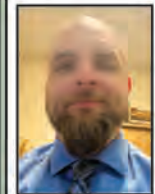
Staff
Iverson's
Piggly Wiggly

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 17 @ Green Bay 27



Jacob Westendorf
New
Media

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 20 @ Green Bay 27



Luke Reimer
New
Media

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score : Tampa Bay 21 @ Green Bay 23



Tim Murphy
New
Media

This Week's Picks:

Detroit
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 20 @ Green Bay 23



Kevin Passon
New
Media

This Week's Picks:

Denver
Cincinnati
Miami
Cleveland

Tie Breaker Game:

Final Score: Tampa Bay 14 @ Green Bay 28

VITALS

GREEN BAY PACKERS AT CAROLINA PANTHERS

TIME AND DATE: Noon on Sunday, Dec. 24

LOCATION: Bank of America Stadium

TV: Fox **RADIO:** Flagship WRNW-FM Milwaukee - 97.3; Packers Radio Network includes WIXX-FM Green Bay - 101.1, WRLO-FM Antigo - 105.3, WLST-FM Marinette - 95.1, and WSAU Wausau - 550 AM and 95.1 FM

2023 RECORDS: Packers, 6-8. Panthers 2-12.

HISTORY: These two teams have met 17 times with the Packers boasting an 11-6 record. The most famous meeting between the two teams came in January 1997. The Packers had disposed of the San Francisco 49ers with the entire crowd chanting, "We want Dallas."

The crowd would not get their wish as the upstart Carolina Panthers led by future Packers' defensive coordinator Dom Capers would upset the Cowboys. A rout would follow. The Packers won the NFC Championship Game 30-13 against an overwhelmed Panthers team.

The last time these teams met was during the COVID-19 season, with the Packers winning 24-16.

The last time these two teams met in Carolina was in 2017. Aaron Rodgers returned from a broken collarbone suffered earlier in the season to try and make a late season run at the playoffs.

His return would last one game, as the Panthers would beat the Packers 31-24, effectively ending the Packers' season.

COACHES: Packers Packers - Matt LaFleur (fifth season, 53-27). Panthers - Chris Tabor (Interim, 1-2).

PACKERS SCHEDULE

Sept. 10 at Chicago W 38-20
Sept. 17 at Atlanta L 25-24
Sept. 24 vs. New Orleans Noon W 18-17
Sept. 28 vs. Detroit 7:15 p.m. L 34-20
Oct. 9 at Las Vegas 7:15 p.m. L 17-13
Oct. 15 BYE
Oct. 22 at Denver 3:25 p.m. L 19-17
Oct. 29 vs. Minnesota Noon L 24-10
Nov. 5 vs. LA Rams W 20-3
Nov. 12 at Pittsburgh L 23-19
Nov. 19 vs. LA Chargers W 23-20
Nov. 23 at Detroit W 29-22
Dec. 3 vs. Kansas City W 27-19
Dec. 11 at NY Giants 7:15 p.m. L 24-22
Dec. 17 vs. Tampa Bay L 34-20
Dec. 24 at Carolina Noon FOX
Dec. 31 at Minnesota 7:20 p.m. NBC
Jan. 7 vs. Chicago, TBD

NFL SCHEDULE

Thursday, Dec. 21

Saints at Rams, 7:15 p.m.

Saturday, Dec. 23

Bengals at Steelers, 3:30 p.m.

Bills at Chargers, 7 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 24

Commanders at Jets, Noon

Lions at Vikings, Noon

Browns at Texans, Noon

Packers at Panthers, Noon

Seahawks at Titans, Noon

Colts at Falcons, Noon

Jaguars at Buccaneers, 3:05 p.m.

Cowboys at Dolphins, 3:25 p.m.

Cardinals at Bears, 3:25 p.m.

Patriots at Broncos, 7:15 p.m.

Monday, Dec. 25

Raiders at Chiefs, Noon

Giants at Eagles, 3:30 p.m.

Ravens at 49ers, 7:15 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 28

Jets at Browns, 7:15 p.m.

KEYS TO THE GAME

A win over the Panthers not a given for the Packers

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Just two weeks ago, the Green Bay Packers controlled their own playoff destiny. They were 6-6 coming off a massive win against the Kansas City Chiefs. The playoffs were an expectation. They even had an outside shot at winning the NFC North if they continued their winning ways and got some help from the teams around them.

Now, all of those dreams have been dashed. The Packers are 6-8 after back-to-back disappointing losses to the New York Giants and Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Through 14 games, this team has proven one thing clearly. They are capable of beating anyone, as evidenced by back-to-back wins over the Chiefs and Detroit Lions.

They are also capable of losing to anyone, as evidenced by the last two games they've played.

The Packers are favored on the road against the worst team in the NFL this week. The Carolina Panthers are coming off a 9-7 win over the Atlanta Falcons.

In the era of Aaron Rodgers, this game was considered a layup. Jordan Love, while improving, is not to that point of his career where any game can be considered a layup. That's especially true in a road game.

To avoid hitting rock bottom, here is what the Packers need to do to beat the Panthers on the road:

Packers secondary vs. Bryce Young

Bryce Young had high hopes surrounding him when he was the top pick of the 2022 draft. Those hopes have not shined through on the field this year.

Young has not thrown a touchdown pass since before Thanksgiving Day. He has nine touchdown passes on the season and nine interceptions.

The team has struggled mightily to move the ball through the air. The good news for Carolina is that their stoppable force is about to meet what proved to be a very movable object with the Packers' pass defense



The Packers' defense cannot take the upcoming Carolina team for granted, even if the Panthers have the worst record in the NFL. Tampa Bay quarterback Baker Mayfield on Dec. 17 completed 22-of-28 for 381 yards and four touchdowns against that Packers' defense. The defense allowed Mayfield to reach his season-high for passing yards before the third quarter expired. They gave up a perfect passer rating to a guy on his fourth team in three years. They allowed more than 100 yards on the ground, including more than four yards per carry to Rachaad White and Chase Edmonds. This game felt like one where the Bucs could have thrown for 400 or run for 200. It was just a matter of what they chose to do.

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coming to town.

With Jaire Alexander missing his sixth consecutive game for a shoulder injury, Baker Mayfield and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers piled up more than 350 yards through the air. He threw four touchdown passes on his way to a perfect passer rating. Mayfield's perfect day was the second in the history of Lambeau Field, the other belonging to Aaron Rodgers in 2019 when he tore apart the Oakland Raiders.

The secondary, and pass defense as a whole, is reeling. They need the Panthers to be some medicine to cure what has ailed them.

If they're not, the Packers have some big questions they'll need to be asking as soon as the game ends.

Ground game vs. Panthers' defense

The Packers' ground game has never felt like it's been at full strength this season. AJ Dillon just missed Sunday's game with a broken thumb, which coincided with Aaron

Jones' return from a knee injury.

Jones started the season on the wrong foot with a hamstring injury that kept him out of two games and limited for several others.

The reality of the situation is Green Bay has not had an individual 100-yard rusher on the season. The bread and butter of this offense was supposed to go through the ground game spearheaded by these two running backs.

It's unclear if Dillon will be able to play Sunday with the thumb injury, but even if he doesn't, the Packers need more from their ground game.

Love and the passing offense have done their part, but this is not an offense at a stage where it can be one-dimensional.

Carolina is 22nd in the NFL in rush yards allowed per game. They allow 123 yards on the ground.

There should be some opportunities for the Packers to get back to their bread and butter on Sunday afternoon.

Packers' tackles vs. Brian Burns

When the Packers were on the clock in the 2019 draft, they were targeting a pass rusher. Brian Burns was on the board, as was Michigan's Rashan Gary. The Packers took Gary and the two careers became intertwined. Both players have become two of the better pass rushers in all of football through their short careers.

Gary signed a contract extension earlier in the year, and it remains likely that Burns will get one from Carolina sooner rather than later.

Love has played much better of late, but any quarterback is going to struggle if he is not protected.

Rasheed Walker and Zach Tom both performed admirably against Tampa Bay on Sunday. Love was only sacked twice, one of which came late in the game against an all-out blitz when the game had already been decided.

Burns is a game wrecker, and the Packers have had their struggles against players of his ilk.

Aidan Hutchinson had a big game against them in September. Maxx Crosby did as well.

The Packers' offense should be able to find some holes in the Panthers' secondary, but protecting the quarterback is always at a premium.



Patrick Taylor had one carry for six yards and two receptions for minus-four yards in Sunday's 34-20 loss to the Buccaneers. With AJ Dillon (thumb) sidelined, Taylor worked as the backup behind Aaron Jones, and he played 26 snaps compared to the 29 Jones received. However, Taylor only tallied three touches while Jones finished with 17. The Packers used a similar distribution in recent weeks when Jones was sidelined and Dillon wasn't, so there is little reason to expect much from Taylor -- he has not recorded more than six touches in a game this season -- unless both of his fellow running backs are unavailable.

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Bulaga grateful for time spent in Green Bay

By JACOB WESTENDORF

Green & Gold Express

Bryan Bulaga, a first-round draft pick in 2010 from Iowa who manned right tackle for the better part of a decade, returned to officially retire as a Packer on Nov. 17.

He had not played since the last of his two years with the Chargers in 2021.

"Being drafted here and being part of this organization — I think the greatest organization in the NFL — was an absolute honor. Green Bay, it feels like home to me for more than one reason.

"Getting drafted and winning a Super Bowl and all that here, that's part of it, but I think coming here as a 21-year-old, really had no responsibility besides play football and worry about myself, and then becoming a man here, getting married, having kids, make relationships outside of this building. It felt like home from the minute I stepped down here till I left in 2020.

"So, to make it official as a Green Bay Packer to me means the most, be-

cause it's truly where I felt I belonged, where I felt the most comfortable, where it felt like home and family. For me, it truly is a special moment.

"Obviously start right away with Ted Thompson. Took a gamble on a short-armed, small-handed guy from Iowa. Probably not the greatest 40 time and stuff like that. But selected me in the first round and I will be forever grateful for that. Hell of a guy, the times he actually wanted to talk to me. Ted was a man of few words, so the times I did get to speak to him, he was a helluva guy to be around, so very thankful.

"And finally, obviously, Aaron (Rodgers). I'd like to think from time to time we made Aaron look good. Maybe some people would disagree. But he made us look good a lot.

"Being able to block for a Hall of Fame quarterback and experience what it's like to watch greatness and be a part of greatness with him is something I'll always be appreciative of."

What was your message to the team after practice Nov. 17?

"What I told them, it's cliché and

things like that, but times weren't always good for even us when we were here. I mentioned 2017 and '18, we went through some hard times.

"But the thing we believed in that locker room with the guys that we had we could come out the other side better than what we were in right now. We trusted in each other, and we stuck together. There was never any finger-pointing; there was never any getting down on each other. We knew we had the guys. We just needed to pull it together and get it together, and we eventually did.

"My message to them was stick together during this. It's not always going to be pretty; it's not always going to go the way you want. But if you guys hold together, keep fighting for each other, keep fighting for the guys you have in the huddle, you'll come out of this better."

What do you miss?

"I miss the locker room. I miss the guys. I miss the camaraderie. Sundays, it's hard to replicate Sundays and the feeling you get going out there in front of all the fans on Lambeau, you'll never replicate it, because it's

awesome. But the thing you miss is the locker room, the guys, the camaraderie, the O-line dinners, the meeting rooms, the BSing. That's literally the hardest part of walking away is knowing you're not in that little group anymore. You're excluded. Yeah, you may be in a group text, but you're not there doing it. So I think for me, that's probably the toughest part.

Talk about the Super Bowl run.

"I didn't really realize what was happening until we beat the Eagles in that first-round playoff game. I remember, we're sitting on the bench and Cliffy, he looked at me, he was like, 'Man, this doesn't happen every day. Like, we have a really good team; we're hot.'

"At the end of the season, we got hot. Going to Philly against one of the better teams in the league and we kind of took care of them. We didn't blow him out by any stretch, but it was a comfortable win — at least we felt it was in the locker room. And he goes, 'This kind of stuff doesn't happen every year, so just start enjoying this and taking this in, this playoff run.'

NOTEBOOK

Packers have edge on paper but can't take Panthers for granted

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Packers' offense vs. Panthers' defense

Carolina's defense has kept them competitive throughout the season, and they have some star power to give them some teeth on that side of the ball.

Brian Burns is one of the league's best pass rushers and has continued to wreak havoc on opposing quarterbacks this season. He has six sacks and one forced fumble on the season.

Jaycee Horn is working his way back from injured reserve and has a world of potential at cornerback.

The unit is led by Ejiro Evero. Evero, of course, was the runner-up in the Packers' 2021 search for a defensive coordinator.

After Jim Leonhard turned the Packers down, LaFleur was left with two choices, Evero, and Joe Barry.

LaFleur chose Barry, and Barry has yet to outperform Evero, in either Denver or Carolina. That is a blunder that could keep LaFleur up at night as the team went from Super Bowl contender, to fringe playoff team.

The Packers' offense continues to play well. The offense scored 20 points against a tough Tampa Bay defense but was a mistake or two away from putting up more points. Jordan Love missed an open Jayden Reed on the opening possession that caused them to come away empty as opposed to having an opening drive touchdown.

They were 2-for-5 in the red zone after struggling against the Giants as well.

The red zone issues need to get cleaned up. If they do, the Packers could light up the scoreboard, as they've continued to move the ball well between the 20s.

Jordan Love bounced back from a below average game against the Giants, with a strong showing against Tampa Bay. Love threw for 284 yards and two touchdown passes against a Bucs defense led by the well-respected Todd Bowles.

Dontayvion Wicks shook off an ankle injury to catch six passes for 97 yards. The Packers were uncertain



Quarterback Jordan Love was 29-of-39 for 284 yards with two touchdowns, no interceptions and a 111.5 rating. Rookie tight end Tucker Kraft (four catches for 57 yards) and wide receiver Jayden Reed (six catches for 52 yards) caught the TDs.

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as to whether Wicks was going to be able to play after his ankle injury last Monday night.

Jayden Reed caught six more passes and is becoming a focal point of the offense.

Ditto for Tucker Kraft, who made a nice 40-yard catch on a wheel route last week against Tampa Bay.

The team clearly misses Christian Watson and his deep speed. It's unclear if he will be able to play this week. He was listed as doubtful for Sunday's game against Tampa Bay. If he can play, however, that should open up more things underneath for the other receivers similar to the way it did against Detroit and Kansas City.

The run game is still struggling, and that may be the case all season. AJ Dillon and Aaron Jones have rarely been on the field at the same time this year as Jones has battled

injuries all year.

Once Jones finally returned, Dillon missed Sunday's game with a broken thumb. His status for the rest of the month is unclear, but ball security is difficult without a working thumb.

The third running back spot has been a bit of a revolving door, and there weren't many opportunities for the other running backs last week.

Jones carried the ball 13 times Sunday. The other two backs combined for two carries for six yards. Considering the way LaFleur likes to rotate his running backs, that was an odd development. Maybe it was just a byproduct of trailing by two scores for a majority of the second half.

We'll see if LaFleur wants to give Jones more of a workload, or if he pulls the reigns back a bit as Kenyan Drake and Patrick Taylor should be more comfortable in the offense.

Packers' defense vs. Panthers' offense

Carolina's offense has struggled mightily this season. Bryce Young has clearly not developed at the same rate as his draft classmate, CJ Stroud.

Young has not been surrounded by a strong supporting cast. His best receiver on the season is former Minnesota Viking Adam Thielen. Thielen has had a strong season, but he should not be the best receiver on any team that has any sort of aspirations of developing a young quarterback.

As a result, Young has struggled. In fact, at the completion of Sunday's game against Atlanta, Young has not thrown a touchdown pass in a month. His last scoring throw was Nov. 19 against Dallas.

He has nine touchdowns and nine interceptions on the season. If the Panthers had not traded their first-round pick to acquire him, they would likely be in the quarterback market. As it is, they'll look to continue to build around him this offseason.

Perhaps some good news is on the way for Young. The Packers' defense allowed Tommy DeVito to earn NFC Offensive Player of the Week honors, and likely will play a large part in Baker Mayfield receiving that honor as well.

Mayfield finished Sunday's game with more than 350 passing yards and a perfect passer rating to go along with four touchdown passes.

The Bucs could have traveled through the air or on the ground to do whatever they wanted.

Despite the poor performance, Matt LaFleur made it clear that he is not thinking about an in season change at defensive coordinator.

With that being the case, it will be more of the same blueprint for Joe Barry in this defense.

They followed some of that blueprint last week against Tampa Bay. They sacked Baker Mayfield five times, only to see Mayfield convert on third-and-long scenarios through the air later in the drive.

Lukas Van Ness has two sacks in three weeks. Rashan Gary and Kenny Clark continued what has been a strong December in rushing the

passer.

The secondary got a boost last week with Eric Stokes returning as a full-time starter to the defensive backfield after being activated from injured reserve.

It was Stokes' first action on defense since a gruesome leg injury knocked him out for the remainder of the 2022 season and all of training camp this year.

Stokes will have his ups and downs. Carrington Valentine has continued to have his ups and downs as well.

This team was shredded on Sunday by Chris Godwin, who had more than 100 yards receiving in the first half. He finished the day with more than 150.

They gave up three touchdown passes of more than 20 yards, including a 52-yarder to seal a win for Tampa Bay.

The run defense only allowed 102 yards to Tampa Bay's running backs, but both backs averaged more than four yards per carry. Tampa Bay was ranked 29th in the NFL in rush yards per game coming into Sunday's game.

Green Bay's defense, as has been the case for years, is simply not good enough. They peacock a little



Second-year linebacker Kingsley Enagbare (55) and rookie linebacker Lukas Van Ness (90) celebrate their efforts against Tampa Bay on Dec. 17. Any positive plays were overshadowed by negative ones and a loss that dims Green Bay's playoff hopes.

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about a solid points-per-game track record earlier in the season, but the underlying metrics that suggested a regression was coming have hit at the worst possible time.

Special teams

The ups and downs of a young kicker is showing for this team. After making all of his kicks against Kansas City, Anders Carlson missed a crucial field goal against the Giants in a game the Packers lost by two.

Against the Tampa Bay Bucca-

neers, he made all of his kicks.

The December temperatures that typically occupy Green Bay have not shown up. The Packers' most recent game against Tampa Bay had a kick-off temperature over 40 degrees in the middle of December.

Because of that, Keisean Nixon has mostly been put on ice for the season. The Packers have clearly coached him to be more cautious on kicks he takes out of the end zone.

The Packers' special teams as a whole are ranked toward the bottom of the league in almost any metric and are the most penalized team in that unit. For a team that promoted their special teams coordinator in the offseason, Rich Bisaccia's unit has been the biggest disappointment on the team.

Carolina's special teams has been in flux this season with Chris Tabor getting promoted to interim head coach. He is unlikely to keep that title beyond this season. They finished fourth in Rick Gosselin's special teams rankings from a season ago. Their kicker is former Chicago Bear Eddy Pineiro.

Former Packers' draft favorite Ihmir Smith-Marsette is the Panthers' punt returner, and he does have a return for a touchdown this season.

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Ballentine makes the most of opportunities

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Cornerback Corey Ballentine played college football at Washburn and was selected by the New York Giants in the sixth round of the 2019 NFL Draft. He also played for the New York Jets, Detroit Lions, Atlanta Falcons and Arizona Cardinals before joining the Green Bay Packers.

What's this season been like for you?

This season has obviously been up and down for me. I started on practice squad, and I've kind of worked my way up. That's kind of how every year my whole journey to the league has been. It hasn't always been easy or how I thought it would be, but I just kept my head down, kept working and let it all play out how it plays out. When I get my opportunity, take that opportunity and make the best of it.

Was it hard to stay positive?

There's been times where it was hard, yeah. I mean, switching teams or being released for whatever reason, or things that were out of my control. It was hard at some points

– just believing in myself. But I feel like over time, I just kind of, firstly, relied on my faith and believing in God and believing that whatever is happening, it's happening for a reason and he'll get me through it. And to this point, he has. I feel like when there's times where I doubt myself, I have to have something else to lean on, and that's kind of what I go to.

There's that phrase that you don't have to get ready if you stay ready. A challenge when back on practice squad?

I wouldn't say it was necessarily super hard, because I feel like I always have tried to prepare like that anyway. Especially since being activated, I prepare like anything could happen if somebody gets injured and I get thrown in. It's happened before in my career where I've just been thrown in, and I've been expected to play at a certain level. So I kind of know how it goes already, and I try to stay ready before I get out there so I don't have anything sneak up on me and I'm prepared for whatever situation that's in front of me.

I'm guessing it's maybe not exactly what you thought your ca-



Cornerback Corey Ballentine chases down Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

GREG MELLIS | GREEN & GOLD EXPRESS

reer was going to play out, right?

I wouldn't necessarily say it was a surprise. I didn't really look at it in any type of way. I just kind of went to practice one day and they were just like, 'Hey you're going to be up.' Or just kind of how everything played out this season, just getting my opportunity, getting elevated off of the practice squad, getting signed. I just stayed ready. I just kept working. I didn't let the moment get too big, made plays where I needed to make plays, be where I was supposed to be, know my job, know my assignment, execute that, and don't make it harder than it needs to be.

And I really think that's just how I got to this point. I don't do more than I need to do; I don't do less than I need to do. I don't make it bigger than what it is. I do my job and let the rest handle itself.

What's it been like going out of the tunnel, 'Starting at corner from Washburn'? It's got to be pretty cool, considering everything.

It's a wild moment. It's a blessing. Being out there, my teammates supporting me, trusting me to be out there, and just the atmosphere, especially (against the Chiefs), was amazing. I'm glad I got the opportunity. I'm glad I could go out there and show what I can do.

Are you happy with how you've played?

Yeah, obviously, there's things that I could clean up, but I feel like, so far, I've done pretty well.

The only thing I would like

more is turnovers. But those come. I try not to force it. I don't want to sacrifice the integrity of the defense trying to chase plays. I want to let it come to me whenever it comes. Put myself in the best position to make the play, play the ball and, when it comes, it'll come. As of right now, I'm more focused on doing my job and then making sure we win the game.

What was the key on the defense with so many second-stringers in the secondary?

I feel like initially we were losing close games, and it was more so because of execution. We were practicing hard; we were doing everything we needed to do in practice. But I feel like when it came to the game, it was things like penalties that were throwing us off, or small mental errors here or there, or a missed cue here or there, or we didn't see this quite fast enough or whatever.

I feel like as time has went on, we've kind of meshed a little better. We looked back on what we could do as individuals to help the team get better. And I feel like everybody's kind of taken hold of that and tried to pick something out of their own game to make themselves better. And then, as we've been on the field together, we kind of just jelled together. We're just executing a lot better, getting off the field, offense putting together drives, special teams making plays and giving us good field position. I feel like it's all complementary ball. We're just playing executing much more efficiently than we were.



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GREEN BAY PACKERS

Player	#	Pos	HT	WT	Age	Exp	College
Jaire Alexander	23	CB	5-10	196	26	6	Louisville
Zayne Anderson	39	S	6-2	206	26	1	BYU
Corey Ballentine	35	CB	5-11	196	27	5	Washburn
Karl Brooks	94	DL	6-3	296	23	R	Bowling Green
De'Vondre Campbell	59	LB	6-4	232	30	8	Minnesota
Anders Carlson	17	K	6-5	219	25	R	Auburn
Kenny Clark	97	DL	6-3	314	28	8	UCLA
Sean Clifford	8	QB	6-2	218	25	R	Penn State
Brenton Cox Jr.	57	LB	6-4	250	23	R	Florida
Josiah Deguara	81	TE	6-2	238	26	4	Cincinnati
AJ Dillon	28	RB	6-0	247	25	4	Boston College
Romeo Doubs	87	WR	6-2	204	23	2	Nevada
Kingsley Enagbare	55	LB	6-4	258	23	2	South Carolina
Rudy Ford	20	S	6-0	210	29	7	Auburn
Rashan Gary	52	LB	6-5	277	26	5	Michigan
Malik Heath	18	WR	6-2	213	23	R	Mississippi
Elgton Jenkins	74	G/T	6-5	311	27	5	Mississippi State
Anthony Johnson Jr.	36	S	6-0	205	24	R	Iowa State
Aaron Jones	33	RB	5-9	208	29	7	Texas-El Paso
Caleb Jones	72	T	6-9	370	24	2	Indiana
Tucker Kraft	85	TE	6-5	259	23	R	South Dakota State
David Long Jr.	30	CB	5-11	196	25	5	Michigan
Jordan Love	10	QB	6-4	219	25	4	Utah State
Isaiah McDuffie	58	LB	6-1	227	24	3	Boston College
Josh Myers	71	C/G	6-5	310	25	3	Ohio State
Royce Newman	70	G/T	6-5	310	26	3	Mississippi
Yosh Nijman	73	T	6-7	314	27	4	Virginia Tech
Keisean Nixon	25	CB	5-10	200	26	5	South Carolina
Matt Orzech	42	LS	6-3	245	28	4	Azusa Pacific
Jonathan Owens	34	S	5-11	210	28	5	Missouri Western
Jayden Reed	11	WR	5-11	187	23	R	Michigan State
Sean Rhyan	75	G	6-5	321	23	2	UCLA
Robert Rochell	22	CB	6-0	193	25	3	Central Arkansas
Jon Runyan	76	G	6-4	307	26	4	Michigan
Darnell Savage	26	S	5-11	198	26	5	Maryland
Ben Sims	89	TE	6-5	250	23	R	Baylor
T.J. Slaton	93	DL	6-4	330	26	3	Florida
Preston Smith	91	LB	6-5	265	31	9	Mississippi State
Eric Stokes	21	CB	6-0	194	24	3	Georgia
Patrick Taylor	27	RB	6-2	217	25	3	Memphis
Zach Tom	50	OL	6-4	304	24	2	Wake Forest
Samori Toure	83	WR	6-1	191	25	2	Nebraska
Carrington Valentine	37	CB	6-0	189	22	R	Kentucky
Lukas Van Ness	90	LB	6-5	272	22	R	Iowa
Quay Walker	7	LB	6-4	241	23	2	Georgia
Rasheed Walker	63	T	6-6	324	23	2	Penn State
Christian Watson	9	WR	6-4	208	24	2	North Dakota State
Kristian Welch	54	LB	6-3	240	25	4	Iowa
Daniel Whelan	19	P	6-5	216	24	1	UC Davis
Dontayvion Wicks	13	WR	6-1	206	22	R	Virginia
Eric Wilson	45	LB	6-1	230	29	7	Cincinnati
Colby Wooden	96	DL	6-4	273	22	R	Auburn
Devonte Wyatt	95	DL	6-3	304	25	2	Georgia
Reserve/Injured							
David Bakhtiari	69	T	6-4	310	32	11	Colorado
Tyler Davis	84	TE	6-4	252	26	4	Georgia Tech
Luke Musgrave	88	TE	6-6	253	23	R	Oregon State
Luke Tenuta	78	T	6-8	314	24	2	Virginia Tech
Emanuel Wilson	31	RB	5-11	226	24	R	Fort Valley State Univ.

CAROLINA PANTHERS

Player	#	Pos	HT	WT	Age	Exp	College
Amaré Barno	90	OLB	6-6	245	24	2	Virginia Tech
Vonn Bell	24	S	5-11	205	29	8	Ohio State
Raheem Blackshear	3	RB	5-9	190	25	2	Virginia Tech
Bradley Bozeman	56	C/G	6-5	325	29	6	Alabama
Derrick Brown	95	DT	6-5	320	25	4	Auburn
Brian Burns	0	OLB	6-5	250	25	5	Florida State
DJ Chark Jr.	17	WR	6-3	200	27	6	LSU
Jeremy Chinn	21	S	6-3	220	25	4	Southern Illinois
Alex Cook	27	S	6-1	196	24	R	Washington
Andy Dalton	14	QB	6-2	220	36	13	TCU
Tae Davis	33	LB	6-0	222	27	5	Tennessee-Chattanooga
Ikem Ekwonu	79	T	6-4	320	23	2	N.C. State
Sam Franklin Jr.	42	S	6-3	210	27	4	Temple
Shaquill Griffin	20	CB	6-0	198	28	7	UCF
Yetur Gross-Matos	97	OLB	6-5	265	25	4	Penn State
Kamu Grugier-Hill	54	LB	6-2	220	29	8	Eastern Illinois
Marquis Haynes Sr.	98	OLB	6-2	235	30	6	Mississippi
Johnny Hekker	10	P	6-5	225	33	12	Oregon State
CJ Henderson	23	CB	6-1	205	25	4	Florida
Troy Hill	13	CB	5-10	182	32	8	Oregon
Jaycee Horn	8	CB	6-1	200	24	3	South Carolina
Chuba Hubbard	30	RB	6-1	210	24	3	Oklahoma State
Donte Jackson	26	CB	5-10	180	28	5	LSU
D'Shawn Jamison	29	CB	5-9	186	24	R	Texas
JJ Jansen	44	LS	6-2	235	37	16	Notre Dame
Nash Jensen	66	G	6-4	328	24	R	North Dakota State
DJ Johnson	52	OLB	6-4	260	25	R	Oregon
Deion Jones	40	LB	6-1	222	29	8	LSU
Ricky Lee	61	T	6-5	289	24	R	North Carolina A&T
Eku Leota	46	OLB	6-3	252	24	R	Auburn
Frankie Luvu	49	LB	6-3	235	27	6	Washington State
Terrace Marshall Jr.	88	WR	6-2	200	23	3	LSU
Cade Mays	68	G	6-6	325	24	2	Tennessee
Jonathan Mingo	15	WR	6-2	220	22	R	Mississippi
Taylor Moton	72	T	6-5	325	29	7	Western Michigan
Eddy Piñeiro	4	K	5-11	190	28	6	Florida
LaBryan Ray	93	DT	6-4	290	26	1	Alabama
Jammie Robinson	22	S	5-11	190	22	R	Florida State
Miles Sanders	6	RB	5-11	210	26	5	Penn State
David Sharpe	74	OT	6-6	343	28	5	Florida
Ihmir Smith-Marsette	11	WR	6-1	185	24	3	Iowa
Mike Strachan	86	WR	6-5	225	26	3	Charleston
Stephen Sullivan	84	TE	6-5	245	27	2	LSU
Adam Thielen	19	WR	6-2	195	33	10	Minnesota State
Ian Thomas	80	TE	6-4	260	27	6	Indiana
Nick Thurman	91	DE	6-4	305	28	2	Houston
Tommy Tremble	82	TE	6-4	250	23	3	Notre Dame
Shy Tuttle	99	DT	6-3	300	28	5	Tennessee
DeShawn Williams	96	DT	6-1	295	30	5	Clemson
Xavier Woods	25	S	5-11	200	28	7	Louisiana Tech
Chris Wormley	71	DE	6-5	300	30	7	Michigan
Bryce Young	9	QB	5-10	204	22	R	Alabama
Reserve/Injured							
Henry Anderson	94	DE	6-6	300	32	9	Stanford
Dicaprio Bootle	32	CB	5-10	180	26	1	Nebraska
Claudin Cherelus	53	LB	6-2	230	24	R	Alcorn State
Brady Christensen	70	G	6-6	300	27	3	BYU
Austin Corbett	63	G	6-4	305	28	6	Nevada
Justin Houston	50	OLB	6-3	270	34	13	Georgia
Hayden Hurst	81	TE	6-4	245	30	6	South Carolina
Justin McCray	67	G	6-3	320	31	7	UCF
Giovanni Ricci	45	TE	6-3	240	27	3	Western Michigan
Laviska Shenault Jr.	5	WR	6-1	220	25	4	Colorado
Shaq Thompson	7	LB	6-0	230	29	9	Washington
Luiji Vilain	43	LB	6-4	252	25	2	Wake Forest
Chandler Wooten	57	LB	6-3	230	24	2	Auburn
Chandler Zavala	62	G	6-3	322	24	R	NC State

Packers' defensive coordinator's job still safe

By **LUKE REIMER**
Green & Gold Express

A career day from Buccaneers quarterback Baker Mayfield was not enough for Packers head coach Matt LaFleur to commit to giving up on Packers defensive coordinator Joe Barry yet.

In what started out as an underperforming season for the Packers' defensive, given the expectations coming into the year, has quickly turned tumultuous for Barry, as over the previous two losses for Green Bay, the Packers have given up 539 passing yards and five passing touchdowns to Mayfield and Giants quarterback Tommy DeVito. In total, Green Bay has given up 819 total yards in the last two games. That equates to 17% of the total amount of yards Green Bay has given up all season.

"Now is not the time for that to be honest with you," said LaFleur, when asked if he would consider a change at defensive coordinator. "Now is not the time. I am trying to find solutions."

LaFleur's comments seem to

indicate that Barry will remain the defensive coordinator through the end of the season, but what does that cost? Green Bay now sits in a must-win situation for what feels like each of its last three games and an obvious deficiency has been the play of the defensive unit, especially on third downs. Just last week against Tampa Bay, the Buccaneers converted seven of 11 times when it was faced with a third down.

The inability to get off of the field on third down is not the only issue though, as the run defense has been less than impressive over the past two weeks as well. The Buccaneers and the Giants combined for 308 rushing yards, which brings Green Bay's total rushing yards given up to 1,943. That ranks 30th in the NFL. Given those alarming stats, it begs a fair question, why is Barry still employed by the Green Bay Packers?

Making a coaching change at any level and at any point in the season is a major event for a football team. That becomes exemplified when a team is as young as Green Bay is and is in a spot where it needs to win

to keep its season alive. Making a coaching change, especially one as important as the leader of the defensive unit, more often than not takes time to prove to be successful and time is something that is not really on the Packers' side right now.

Possibly to the dismay of Packers fans, it appears that Barry is going to remain the signal caller for the Packers for at least the next three games.

That stems from there not really being a plan for life beyond Barry yet. If Barry were to get fired, names like Jerry Montgomery (defensive line coach/run game coordinator) or Greg Williams (passing game coordinator) would probably be at the front to succeed him. If that were to happen, it would be hard to imagine that there would be any kind of overhaul on the scheme that Green Bay would run for the remainder of the season.

As much as Packers fans want to put all of the blame on Barry, he has had to manage injuries all season long. Jaire Alexander, De'Vondre Campbell, Eric Stokes, Quay Walker, Rashan Gary, Devonte Wyatt and Keisean Nixon are all starters on this

defense who have missed time due to injuries. As anyone who has ever played football will tell you, it is really hard to play, let alone win when you don't have your best players on the field.

With that being said, there have been numerous times this season where the opposing team was faced with a third-and-short, and Green Bay's corners have lined up 10 yards or more off of the receiver. There have also been times where inside linebackers were forced to cover slot receivers and times where linebackers and safeties were in no-man's-land in zone coverage.

It is obvious that something needs to change on the defensive side of the ball, but that may not come until the offseason. If Green Bay does in fact decide to fire Barry, some names that could be brought in for an interview might include Jacksonville Jaguars passing game coordinator Deshaea Townsend, San Francisco 49ers linebackers coach Johnny Holard or Dallas Cowboys defensive backs coach and former Green Bay Packers great Al Harris.

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