

BITTER RIVALS BATTLED

Vikings fourth quarter blitz eliminated all signs of Love; losing streak continues

By LUKE REIMER
Green & Gold Express

Eight months removed from blowing a first-half lead to the Chicago Bears in the playoffs, the Green Bay Packers squandered a 12-point lead in their Week 1 loss to the Minnesota Vikings, 39-22.

With 5:09 left in the third quarter, rookie kicker Trey Smack connected on a 26-yard field goal to give the Packers a 22-10 lead and what appeared to be the momentum to carry the team through the fourth quarter. What happened in the last 20 minutes of the game is something that Matt LaFleur, Jordan Love and Packers fans across the world are going to want to forget.

Minnesota ripped off 29 unanswered points while stopping the Packers offense in its tracks. While Green Bay was on offense, Minnesota defensive coordinator Brian Flores dialed up blitz after blitz leading to four sacks, two fumbles (one lost), an interception and no points scored.

“You are playing this defense, you know that there is going to be pressure. You know that is part of it,” Love said. “Like I said though, we’ll look back at the film, but there is just a lot of missed opportunities, which there are couple I wish we could get back.”

When Green Bay went up 22-10, it appeared the Packers were going to come away with an easy divisional win, given that Vikings quarterback Kyler Murray went down with a head injury after a brutal hit in the first quarter. It was backup quarterback Carson Wentz and Flores’ pressure-filled defense



Jordan Love was under pressure all day, even worse in the fourth quarter when the Packers’ offensive line failed to respond to the highest blitz percentage delivered in Week 1. The Vikings blitzed the Packers on 82.1% of their plays. Only one other team in Week 1 had a blitz percentage above 50%.

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At left, an unnecessary roughness call against Javon Bullard knocked out Kyler Murray with a concussion in the first quarter. At right, rookie Chris McClellan was called for roughing the passer against Carson Wentz on a third down play that kept the Vikings’ drive alive in the fourth quarter.

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Truly offensive: What’s the answer?

By JACOB WESTENDORF
Green & Gold Express

Green Bay will travel to the Big Apple (sort of) when they take on the New York Jets at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Packers offense vs. Jets defense

Green Bay’s offense was mostly excellent when they put the ball in the air in their season opener against the Minnesota

Vikings. Jordan Love threw two touchdown passes, including an 81-yard play to Christian Watson where Watson racked up 65 yards after the ball was in his hands.

Watson finished the game with more than 100 yards receiving and got off to an excellent start, fresh off a new contract extension. Matthew Golden had a solid debut as well, and Tucker Kraft made his return to the lineup with a

couple of nice plays down the field.

The problems Green Bay faced were whenever they tried to run the football, and eventually they were overwhelmed in pass protection. A make-shift offensive line that included Donovan Jennings as a surprise starter at left guard got Love hit a whopping 15 times on 46 drop-backs. He was sacked four times and snowed under by Minnesota’s defense

once they were trailing.

In the run game, Green Bay really struggled. Marshawn Lloyd and Chris Brooks did not have much going when the ball was in their hands. There was not a lot of room, which led to both of them finishing below 50 total yards rushing.

The offensive line is going to continue to be a major concern for this Packers team until the

JETS, continued on page 2



Rookie kicker Trey Smack connected on a 59-yard field goal in his first regular season attempt. On the day, he made three field goals and an extra point but also missed an extra point.

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problems at hand gets fixed. Jacob Monk and Donovan Jennings could both find themselves on the bench this weekend after being preferred starters in the first week of the regular season.

Aaron Banks, the \$77 million man has been out of the lineup with knee tendinitis for most of the offseason, and it's unclear how much the Packers will be able to count on him. That's assuming they can even count on him at all. Whoever is in front of Love on Sunday has protect him better than they did Sunday afternoon. Love is excellent, but no quarterback is going to be able to withstand a beating like the one he took in Minnesota.

Defensively, the New York Jets are still, amazingly without an interception in Aaron Glenn's era as the head coach. The former defensive back, in theory, would be able to get his team to force some turnovers, but it simply has not happened yet for Glenn's defense.

Packers defense vs. Jets offense

Green Bay's defense probably deserved a better fate than what the stat sheet will ultimately say about their performance Sunday. They allowed fewer than 300 yards on fewer than four yards-per-play.

Somehow, they still gave up 39 points on the scoreboard. A blunder on special teams and a fumble put the Vikings in business on two separate drives. Another was aided by three questionable penalty calls.

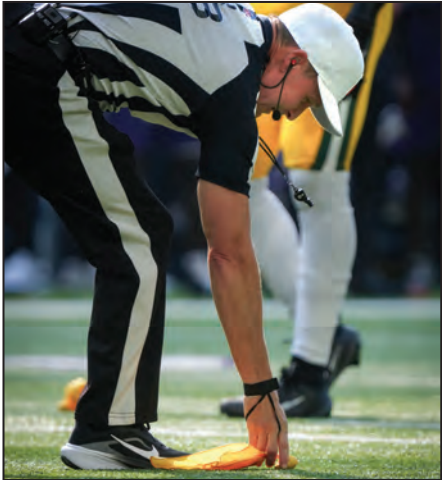
That being said, there is some reason for optimism on that side of the ball.

Linebacker Edgerrin Cooper looked like a man possessed at linebacker, and he could be poised for a breakout year. Keisean Nixon was active in the run game and secured the first interception of the season. Javon Bullard looked physical in the run game, and could be poised to be a breakout player as well.

Special teams

Bo Melton had an explosive return to set the Packers up for three points. Skyy Moore looked more comfortable as a punt returner than anyone Green Bay has thrown back there during Matt LaFleur's tenure as the head coach.

Smack made all of his field goals, including a 59-yard bomb for the first points of the season.



The Packers had 12 penalties vs. the three for the Vikings. The flags impaired both the offense and defense in the fourth quarter.

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Bo Melton returns a kickoff 59 yards in the first quarter Sept. 13 against the Minnesota Vikings. Melton was elevated from the practice squad for the game after earlier being released by the Packers. It is expected he will be a special teams players much of the season.

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that prevented the Packers from starting the season 1-0.

Wentz finished the game by completing 12-of-19 passes for 133 yards and three touchdowns. Two of Wentz's touchdown passes went to Justin Jefferson, with the other going to T.J. Hockenson.

In the run game, Jordan Mason led the way for the Vikings, totaling 59 yards a touchdown on 15 carries. Former Packers running

back Aaron Jones finished the game with 40 yards and a touchdown on 12 carries.

On the Packers side of the field, Love completed 21-of-42 passes for 387 yards, two touchdowns and one interception. Christian Watson was the leading receiver for Green Bay, as he totaled 147 yards and two touchdowns on six receptions, including an 81-yard touchdown, in which Love was able to beat the blitz.

In the absence of Josh Jacobs, it was MarShawn Lloyd who led the Packers in rushing, totaling 37 yards on 13 carries. Chris Brooks added another 29 yards on seven carries.

While it didn't end up costing Green Bay the game, LaFleur was presented with an interesting scenario early in the fourth quarter. On fourth-and-six from the Vikings' 22-yard line, Smack connected

on a 40-yard field goal giving Green Bay a 25-17 lead. An offsides penalty against Minnesota nullified the kick. Now faced with a fourth-and-one, LaFleur elected to take the field goal off the board and attempt to pick up the first down. On the ensuing play, Love attempted a quarterback sneak, but was stuffed, giving the ball back to the Vikings without Green Bay scoring any points.

Sunday's fast start solidifies new role, contract

Watson finishes the day with six catches, two touchdowns

By LUKE REIMER
Green & Gold Express

Green Bay's gamble started off with a bang.

Back in June, the Packers and wide receiver Christian Watson agreed to a maximum value contract for \$110.5 million, according to Spotrac, and cementing the North Dakota State alum as the perceived go-to pass catcher in the Green Bay offense.

"I am grateful. It feels real good," said Watson on his extension in June. "It was a blessing for sure."

After the extension was finalized, questions surrounding Watson appeared, given that he has never amassed 620 receiving yards or played a full season.

Packers general manager Brian Gutekunst and the rest of the front office didn't listen to the noise though. When Watson has been on the field, he has been one of



Packers fans celebrate Christian Watson's first touchdown of the season. It was also Jordan Love's first complete pass of the season.

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Green Bay's better offensive playmakers.

Watson didn't listen to the noise, either. Instead, he put together one of the best games

of his five-year career. Against Minnesota, Watson finished the game with six catches for 147 yards and two touchdowns. In what can often be a confusing offense on deciding who the No. 1 receiver is, Watson's extension in addition to his performance indicates that it is indeed him.

The next step is making sure he can stay on the field to continue to produce.

"I am capable of having a full season. That is the main thing," said Watson in June. "That is the main thing that everybody wants to see. That is my goal going forward, to put myself in the best position to stay healthy throughout the entire season."

More than just when he has the ball in his hands, one of Watson's strengths is the gravity around him. Defenses have to know where Watson is at all times and cannot leave just one defender on him. With his speed, opposing

teams have to shade a safety over the top of his routes, which in turn opens a spot in the middle of the field for players like Jayden Reed and Tucker Kraft.

More than just the passing game though, having the threat of Watson taking the top off of the defense opens up the run, as safeties do not have the ability to cheat up. Without knowing the status of Josh Jacobs partnered with the inconsistent play on the offensive line, using Watson's threat to keep safeties backed up will benefit the offensive line.

Given Watson's injury history and his work to get back on the field, there is no doubt Watson has done his part in earning this extension. The point still stands though that he has never topped 620 receiving yards, so giving him \$115 million is a gamble that he can finally be what Green Bay drafted him to be.

GREEN BAY PACKERS AT NEW YORK JETS

Time and date: Noon, Sunday, Sept. 20

Location: MetLife Stadium, East Rutherford, New Jersey

TV: FOX

Radio: Flagship WRIT-FM, Milwaukee, 95.7. Packers Radio Network includes WRLO-FM Antigo, 105.3; WMJQ-FM, Clintonville, 92.3; WIXX-FM, Green Bay, 101.1; WLST-FM, Marinette, 95.1; and WSAU Wausau, 550 AM and 95.1 FM

2026 records: Packers 0-1, Jets 1-0

History: The Jets and Packers have played 14 times in the history of the two teams. The

Jets lead the series 9-5, with the most recent matchup coming in 2022 where the Jets knocked off the Packers at Lambeau Field 27-10.

The last time these two teams played at MetLife Stadium, a wild game broke out with Aaron

Rodgers and the Packers eliminating a double-digit fourth quarter deficit to force overtime. In overtime, Rodgers hit Davante Adams for a game-winning touchdown to give the Packers their final win of the 2018 season. It was a memorable moment in an otherwise forgettable

year.

Coaches: Packers, Matt LaFleur, eighth season, 75-40-1. Jets, Aaron Glenn, second season, 4-14.

Packers Schedule

Sunday, Sept. 13, at Minnesota, 3:25 p.m., L 39-22

Sunday, Sept. 20, at NY Jets, noon, FOX

Thursday, Sept. 24, vs. Atlanta, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Oct. 4, at Tampa Bay, noon, FOX

Sunday, Oct. 11, vs. Chicago, 3:25 p.m., FOX

Sunday, Oct. 18, vs. Dallas,

7:20 p.m., NBC

Sunday, Oct. 25, at Detroit, 3:25 p.m., FOX

Thursday, Oct. 29, vs. Carolina, 7:15 p.m., Prime Video

Sunday, Nov. 8, at New England, 3:25 p.m., FOX

Sunday, Nov. 15, vs. Minnesota, noon, FOX

Week 11 BYE

Wednesday, Nov. 25, at LA Rams, 7 p.m., Netflix

Sunday, Dec. 6, at New Orleans, noon, FOX

Sunday, Dec. 13, vs. Buffalo, 7:20 p.m., NBC

Sunday, Dec. 20, vs. Miami, noon, FOX

Friday, Dec. 25, at Chicago, noon, Netflix

Monday, Jan. 4, vs. Houston, 7:15 p.m., ESPN

Week 18, vs. Detroit, TBD

NFL Schedule

Thursday, Sept. 17

Detroit at Buffalo, 7:15 p.m.

Sunday, Sept. 20

Cincinnati at Houston, noon

Green Bay at NY Jets, noon

New Orleans at Baltimore, noon

Philadelphia at Tennessee, noon

Minnesota at Chicago, noon

Cleveland at Tampa Bay,

noon

Pittsburgh at New England, noon

Carolina at Atlanta, noon

Las Vegas at LA Chargers, 3:05 p.m.

Jacksonville at Denver, 3:05 p.m.

Washington at Dallas, 3:25 p.m.

Miami at San Francisco, 3:25 p.m.

Seattle at Arizona, 3:25 p.m.

Indianapolis at Kansas City, 7:20 p.m.

Monday, Sept. 21

NY Giants at LA Rams, 7:15 p.m.

MOMENTS

MINNESOTA 39, GREEN BAY 22



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QUICK PICK

NIXON’S TURNOVER FLIPS OFFSEASON NARRATIVE

On the second play of the game, Minnesota quarterback Kyler Murray’s first pass attempt was intercepted by Packers starting safety Keisean Nixon. In two plays, Nixon matched his 2025 interception total. The play led to rookie kicker Trey Smack’s 59-yard field goal to give the Packers a quick 3-0 lead.

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MOMENT

TWO-TOUCHDOWN DAY



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WATSON'S FIRST CATCH IS 81-YARD TD

Christian Watson had six targets with 131 yards, a pair of 20-plus yard completions and two touchdowns at halftime. His 81-yard touchdown was aided by fellow starting wide receivers Matthew Golden, left, and Jayden Reed. Golden provided a crucial block on the play, which was initially flagged as a block in the back, but the referees picked up the flag and the touchdown counted.

HO-CHUNK



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