

SEASON  
**63**

**1981**



THE  
**PACKERS CENTURY**

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**P R O J E C T**

*ALL THE GAMES. ALL THE STORIES.*

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**1919-2019**

BY JIM RICE

[packerscentury.com](http://packerscentury.com)



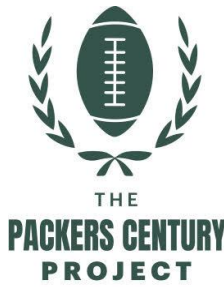
## 1981

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**Record: 8-8-0 (2nd Place – tie)**

**Coach: Bart Starr**

- The Packers selected quarterback Rich Campbell from the University of California with their #1 pick in the 1981 draft.
- The pressure continued to mount on Bart Starr to produce a winner. The coach was stripped of his general manager duties after the 1980 season.
- Another poor start (1-3) was followed by an amazing turnaround that saved the season. The strong finish (6-2) left the Packers one game shy of the postseason.
- On September 17, the Packers traded for wide receiver John Jefferson of San Diego. To acquire Jefferson, the teams traded their first-round picks in 1982. The Packers also gave up a second-round choice in 1982 and their first-round pick in 1983.
- The acquisition of veteran kicker Jan Stenerud in late 1980 resolved the team's kicking problems in 1981, and his leadership inspired the team.
- Offensively and defensively the team improved slightly.



1919-2019

**PACKERS**

CHICAGO

**BEARS**

**16**

**9.6.1981**

**9**

Before Eddie Lee Ivery's season ended with a knee injury at Soldier Field for the second time in three years, both he and Gerry Ellis stepped all over the Bears for first-half touchdowns. Ivery ran for 72 yards, and Ellis put 94 while capitalizing on a fumble by quarterback Vince Evans for his touchdown.

Green Bay's defense contained Walter Payton (81 yards). He scored Chicago's lone touchdown after a fumble by Gerry Ellis in the third quarter. With the Bears within striking distance 13-6 in the fourth quarter, the teams traded field goals.

Amazingly, with four minutes remaining, the Packers did all they could to give the game away. Crucial personal foul calls on Ezra Johnson and Mark Lee along with a late fumble almost signaled a major collapse. But with 23 seconds left, fullback Matt Suhey fumbled on Green Bay's goal line. Safety Johnnie Gray recovered the loose ball to end the comeback.

The Packers won for the first time in Chicago since 1973! But few were happy about the performance. Bart Starr summed it with, "I think both of us will look at it as a poorly played game. It was an emotional game, and everybody was giving a great effort. But there were fundamental mistakes made that you don't make in high school."<sup>1</sup>

<b>Chicago</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>16</b>

**Attendance: 62,411**

*Turnovers: GB 3 CH 4*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/8/81, Christl, p. 33



ATLANTA  
**FALCONS**  
**PACKERS**

**31**  
**17** 9.13.1981

A shocking home opener.

The Packers held the Falcons *scoreless* until the fourth quarter. They forged the lead on two touchdown passes by Lynn Dickey. One was a tackle-eligible play to Karl Swanke, and the other went to Gerry Ellis for a 14-0 lead after 30 minutes.

With two minutes left in the third quarter, Jan Stenrud's 44-yard field goal made it 17-0. The Packers inexplicably fell apart in the fourth quarter. Atlanta capitalized with a pick-six, a 57-yard fumble recovery for a touchdown, and a 53-yard punt return that set up another score. "We just collapsed. It looked like we ran out of gas. I don't know why"<sup>1</sup> said Starr.

<b>Atlanta</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>

**Attendance: 55,382**

*Sacks: GB 3 ATL 5*

*Turnovers: GB 5 ATL 4*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/14/81, Christl, p. 19



**PACKERS**

LOS ANGELES

**RAMS**

**23**

**9.20.1981**

**35**

In a classic opening line the day after the game, Cliff Christl of Press-Gazette wrote on Monday following, "The Green Bay Packers weren't trying to lose here Sunday. It just looked that way."<sup>1</sup>

The Rams scored 21 points following Green Bay turnovers. It started with a fumble returned for a touchdown in the second quarter. Another fumble, on a lateral from Dickey to Terdell Middleton, led to a 14-7 L. A. lead.

Three Jan Stenerud field goals put the Packers back in front. But the Rams came back without Green Bay's help when quarterback Jeff Rutledge, who replaced an injured Pat Haden, uncorked a 30-yard bomb to Drew Hill to take the lead for good 21-16. Rutledge directed two more scoring drives to close it out. The second followed an interception of Dickey.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Los Angeles</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>35</b>

**Attendance: 61,286**

*GB gave up 6 sacks and turned the ball over 4 times.*



1919-2018

MINNESOTA  
**VIKINGS**  
**PACKERS**

**30**  
**13** 9.27.1981

In his first introduction to the home crowd after being acquired from San Diego, "Jefferson charged out to midfield giving it the victory sign and exchanged a leaping high five with Lofton. The crowd loved it!"<sup>1</sup>

The Packers took an early 10-0 lead, but then it was all Minnesota. Three Rick Danmeier field goals backed up two Tommy Kramer touchdown passes. The first gave Minnesota a lead it never gave up (17-10). He threw the second to Ahmad Rashad that pretty much put the game away in the third quarter 27-10.

Minnesota's offense generated over 400 yards. The defense held Green Bay to 71 yards rushing, and quarterbacks Lynn Dickey and David Whitehurst were sacked eight times. In his first game with the Packers, John Jefferson caught seven passes for 121 yards, and James Lofton caught eight more for 101 and a touchdown.

<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>

**Attendance: 5,012**

**Milwaukee County Stadium**

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/28/81, McGinn, p. 20



**PACKERS**

NEW YORK

**GIANTS**

**27**

**10.4.1981**

**14**

### **A win!**

The Packers upset the Giants to end a three-game losing streak. They did it by getting out to an early lead, and they reversed a recent trend with a good second half.

Lynn Dickey and Jan Stenerud led the offense. Dickey and tight end Paul Coffman hooked up for six, and the Packers led at halftime 13-0. In the third quarter, an interception by Mike Douglass led to Harlan Huckleby's touchdown run. Huckleby ran 30 times for 88 yards, and his touchdown run made it 20-0.

The Packer defense allowed just 41 yards rushing. When the Giants scored late in the third quarter to make it 20-7, Green Bay responded with a 19-play drive that "J. J." brought home with his first touchdown catch as a Packer. Dickey delivered it with eight minutes left. While the Giants struck again with 80 seconds left, the Packers prevailed.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>New York</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>73,684</b>				



TAMPA BAY

**BUCCANEERS 21**

**PACKERS 10**

10.11.1981

The teams traded touchdowns in the first half with Gerry Ellis scoring for Green Bay and Jimmy Giles for the Bucs. In the third quarter, Tampa scored twice to take control. Quarterback Doug Williams capped an 85-yard drive with a one-yard plunge for a 14-7 lead. Two minutes later, linebacker Cecil Johnson intercepted a Lynn Dickey pass. He returned it to the Packer one-yard line, and James Wilder scored on the next play to put the game away 21-7. The interception was one of four thrown by Dickey (19-33-21-0-4).

<b>Tampa Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>

**Attendance: 55,264**

*TB ran the ball 45 times for 171 yards.*





SAN FRANCISCO

**49ers**

**PACKERS**

**13**

**10.18.1981**

**3**

Green Bay managed one first-half field goal by Jan Stenerud against the up and coming 49ers. The game's only touchdown came in the third quarter when quarterback Joe Montana marched the Niners 46 yards in 10 plays with Johnny Davis going over from one-yard out.

Lynn Dickey left the game with a neck injury early in the second half after being sacked by Dwaine Board. Dickey and backup quarterback David Whitehurst were sacked four times. The Packers managed just 13 first downs, 78 yards rushing, and they were outgained 337-241.

After the game, former Packer Ricky Patton now with San Francisco opened up to reporters about the Packers being a divided team. "You can't blame Coach Starr for everything. You got guys who don't even like each other on the team. Nothing is done together."<sup>1</sup>

**San Francisco 0 3 7 3 13**

**Green Bay 0 3 0 3 6**

**Milwaukee County Stadium**

**Attendance: 50,171**

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/19/81, Wheatley, p. 17)



**PACKERS**

DETROIT

**LIONS**

**27**

**10.25.1981**

**31**

Quarterback Eric Hipple of the Lions opened and closed the game with touchdown runs. He also passed for another score and 271 yards overall.

Detroit led 17-10 at intermission with 10 points coming after Green Bay turnovers. The Lions also sent quarterback Lynn Dickey to the bench when he was speared in the back by defensive tackle William Gay (Gay was fined \$2,000). David Whitehurst replaced Dickey, and the Packers rallied.

A 46-yard touchdown pass to Gerry Ellis in the third quarter cut Detroit's lead to 24-20. Whitehurst led a 69-yard march to take the lead 27-24 on a second touchdown by Gerry Ellis with 7:34 left. With plenty of time remaining, Hipple led a 76-yard march in 12 plays to win it. He scored the winner on the ground from the five with 1:54 left.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Detroit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>31</b>

**Attendance: 76,063**

*GB passed for 340 yards.*



SEATTLE

**SEAHAWKS**

**PACKERS**

**24**

**34**

11.1.1981

*"This week an appeal is being made to the fans to throw their wholehearted support behind the team for Sunday's game against Seattle."<sup>1</sup>*

The lead in this game went back and forth seven times! In the first half, Packer quarterback David Whitehurst threw a pick-six, ran for a touchdown, and threw for two more scores! He gave Green Bay the lead for good late in the third quarter. He uncorked a 38-yard touchdown bomb to James Lofton for a 28-24 lead! Two Jan Stenerud field goals and a Rich Wingo interception followed to finish-off Seattle.

<b>Seattle</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>

**Attendance: 54,099**

*"Wingo was clutching the ball to his chest in front of the Packer bench, accepting congratulations for his interception, which ended any chance of the Seahawks tying the game. But, after listening to the rhythmic chant of "Wingo! Wingo!", the third year linebacker decided to donate his souvenir to Section 18. Good decision. It served as a symbolic gesture. The crowd got a game ball it deserved."<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/9/81, Christl p. 29

<sup>2</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/2/81, Walter, p. 17



NEW YORK

**GIANTS**

**PACKERS**

**24**

**26**

**11.8.1981**

With a two-touchdown lead after 15 minutes, Green Bay held on for the win with a Jan Stenerud field goal. They also received a lot of help from the Giants who turned the ball over seven times, including four interceptions.

The Packers scored on a pick-six by Estus Hood, and on a 94-yard punt return by Mark Lee for a 14-0 lead. Though a second win in a month over the Giants looked like a certainty, Green Bay's offense struggled and produced only four Jan Stenerud field goals. New York quarterback Scott Brunner heated-up and threw two first-half touchdown passes. He threw another to start the fourth quarter to cut the Packer lead to 23-21. After Joe Danelo's field goal made it 24-23 Giants with 6:14 left, Stenerud's fourth field goal won it with just over two minutes remaining.

<b>New York</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26</b>

**Attendance: 54,138**

**Milwaukee County Stadium**

*"David Whitehurst, on being cheered after receiving boos during the last two games at County Stadium: 'I have to say it did make a difference. It's human nature.'<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/9/81, p. 20



CHICAGO  
**BEARS**  
**PACKERS**

**17**  
**21** 11.15.1981

The Packers revived their postseason hopes with three straight wins at home against teams they were expected to beat.

Quarterback David Whitehurst threw three first-half touchdown passes to lead the Pack. His first came on a one-yard toss to Harlan Huckleby. Midway through the second quarter with the Packers trailing 10-7, an interception by safety Mark Murphy set-up Whitehurst's second touchdown. A 39-yard bomb to Huckleby put Green Bay back in front. With 1:17 left before the half, his third touchdown pass to Terdell Middleton made it 21-10.

In the second half, the Bears trimmed the lead to 21-17. But with eight minutes left a pass from quarterback Vince Evans to Ken Margerum bounced off Margerum's chest and into the arms of cornerback Mark Lee. The Bears never threatened again. On Whitehurst's three touchdown day, (11-31-140-3-1) Starr was honest. "It was gritty.....but David can play better than that."<sup>1</sup>

Defensively, the Packers sacked Vince Evans three times and forced three turnovers.

<b>Chicago</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Attendance</b>	<b>55,338</b>				

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/16/81, p. 23



**PACKERS**

TAMPA BAY

**BUCCANEERS**

**3**

**11.22.1981**

**37**

Quarterback David Whitehurst suffered a groin injury in the first quarter and was replaced by rookie Rich Campbell. Campbell, making his first appearance for the Packers, fared poorly. He threw four interceptions, and the Bucs cashed-in with 17 points. The rout began with a 81-yard pick six by Cedric Brown.

Green Bay avoided the shutout with Jan Stenerud's 53-yard field goal in the fourth quarter, the longest field goal in Packer history at the time. The poor performance ended the winning streak, and brought this observation in the Press-Gazette, "The case against the Green Bay Packers, charged with impersonating professional football team, appears to be open and shut."<sup>1</sup>

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Tampa Bay</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>37</b>

**Attendance: 63,251**

*GB was outgained 348-282.*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/23/81, Walter, p. 23



**PACKERS**  
MINNESOTA  
**VIKINGS**

**35**  
**11.29.1981**  
**23**

### **Dickey returns**

After missing three games, quarterback Lynn Dickey returned to throw three touchdown passes and the Packers “thoroughly dominated the team that has won 11 of the last 13 division championships.”<sup>1</sup>

Dickey’s first touchdown didn’t come until there were 27 seconds left in the first half. With Green Bay trailing 14-7, Estus Hood intercepted Viking quarterback Tommy Kramer. Dickey capitalized with a touchdown to John Jefferson to tie the game just before halftime.

In the second half, Kramer’s second interception led to another Dickey touchdown pass. This time it was Harlan Huckleby from nine yards out for a 21-14 lead. After Minnesota cut it to 21-20, Huckleby scored again on the ground. Dickey then threw his third touchdown pass of the day to James Lofton. The win put the Packers one game behind Tampa Bay for the division lead.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>23</b>

**Attendance: 46,025**

*The teams committed 9 turnovers.*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/1/81, Christl, p. 18



DETROIT  
**LIONS**  
**PACKERS**

**17**  
**31** 12.6.1981

### **Nice goodbye!**

In the last home game of the year, the Packers bounced back after falling behind 10-0. Lynn Dickey's strong performance showed the way (20-31-279-2-0), and receivers John Jefferson, James Lofton, and Paul Coffman all had fine games. Dickey guided four touchdown drives, and his two touchdown passes went to Coffman and Lofton. Harlan Huckleby also scored twice on the ground. In the second half, Detroit got to within four, 21-17, before the Packers pulled away. Green Bay got back to .500 at 7-7, and they remained a game behind Tampa Bay (along with the Vikings).

<b>Detroit</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>

**Attendance: 54,481**

*The fun after the game was, "as emotional a postgame celebration as Lambeau Field has seen in years. Suddenly, after they gathered around and Starr gave them instructions, the players scattered to the elevated first row of seats in all parts of the stadium and began pumping hands with the paying customers."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/7/81, McGinn, p. 1





**PACKERS**

NEW ORLEANS

**SAINTS**

**35**

**12.13.1981**

**7**

### **Go Pack Go!**

A big win for Green Bay kept their playoff hopes alive! Lynn Dickey had a remarkable game (19-21-218-5-0), and his five touchdown passes tied a Packer record. John Jefferson caught two while Gerry Ellis, James Lofton, and Paul Coffman caught the others.

The defense intercepted four passes and the last-place Saints turned the ball over six times. The Packers won for the sixth time in seven games!

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>New Orleans</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>

**Attendance: 45,518**

*An estimated 5,000 fans showed up at Austin Straubel Field to welcome home the team. "It was believed to be the largest reception for the Packers since their glory years of the 1960s."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/14/81, McGinn, p. 1



**PACKERS**  
NEW YORK  
**JETS**

**3**  
**12.20.1981**  
**28**

**This one hurt.**

Needing a win to have any chance of making the postseason, the Packers lay a colossal egg. The Jets defense dominated the game, and they sacked quarterback Lynn Dickey nine times and held the Packers to 84 total yards.

Quarterback Richard Todd completed his best season to date for New York by throwing for 247 yards and two touchdowns. The win clinched a Wild Card berth for the Jets who hadn't been to the postseason since the 1969 season. Green Bay's loss also helped the New York Giants clinch their first postseason berth since 1963.

After the tough loss, a disappointed and testy Bart Starr fended off questions about the team choking. "Getting this close will help the team next year."<sup>1</sup> he said.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>New York</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>56,340</b>				

<sup>1</sup> packershistory.net/1981Packers



## 1981 Team Statistics

### FINAL STANDINGS – NFC Central

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>
Tampa Bay	9	7	0
Green Bay	8	8	0
Detroit	8	8	0
Minnesota	7	9	0
Chicago	6	10	0

### TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Dickey
Rushing	Ellis
Receiving	Lofton
Scoring	Stenerud
Interceptions	Lee, Harvey tied w/6

### ALL-PRO

Lofton            Wide Receiver

### NOTEABLE DRAFT PICKS (Round, Position)

Rich Campbell (1, QB)  
 Ray Stachowicz (3, P)  
 Rich Turner (4b, DT)  
 Byron Braggs (5, DT)



1919 - 2019

# **PACKERS CENTURY**

*with Jim Rice*

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