



**1978**



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)



## 1978

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**Record: 8-7-1 (1st Place – Tie)**

**Coach: Bart Starr**

- The league began a 16-game regular season schedule.
- Rules changes disallowed contact with receivers within the first five yards from the line of scrimmage. Offensive linemen could now open their hands to block as long as their hands remained inside the shoulder pads.
- In Bart Starr's fourth season, a youth movement took hold. After linebacker Fred Carr was released, only four starters remained from 1975.
- Starr's relationship with the media became contentious.
- David Whitehurst would be the starting quarterback. A fast 6-1 start slowed to a 2-6-1 finish. They missed the postseason after losing two of their final three games.
- Great seasons by first team all-pro Willie Buchanon and pro bowler Ezra Johnson sparked the defense. Terrell Middleton and James Lofton were pro bowlers on offense.
- Defensively they had trouble stopping the run. The offense was inconsistent and finished in the bottom 1/3 of the league.



**PACKERS**  
DETROIT  
**LIONS**

**13**  
**7**

**9.3.1978**

The Packers opened the season with a win on the road for the second straight year. Two first-quarter field goals by Chester Marcol and an early third-quarter touchdown run by Barty Smith gave Green Bay a 13-0 lead.

Green Bay's defense had the upper hand all game. They sacked Detroit quarterback Greg Landry eight times for a loss of 76 yards. The defense allowed just 122 yards overall.

The Packers were powered by the ground game. They ran 55 times for 181 yards. Terdell Middleton set the pace with 91 yards while quarterback David Whitehurst threw nine passes and completed just three for 39 yards. But without a turnover and a stingy defense, the offense, "came through when it had to"<sup>1</sup> and the Packers spoiled the debut of Detroit's new coach Monte Clark.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Detroit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>51,187</b>				

*"It was only the first game of the season, but the Packers won, and several Green Bay fans showed their appreciation by showing up at Austin Straubel Field Sunday to welcome back their heroes."<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/4/78, Christl, p. 22  
<sup>2</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/5/78, p.8



NEW ORLEANS  
**SAINTS**  
**PACKERS**

**14**  
**28** 9.10.1978

## 2-0!

The Packers began the season with two wins for the first time since 1969 as David Whitehurst threw four touchdown passes and the ground game chewed up over 200 yards. Whitehurst and rookie James Lofton connected three times for scores and tight end Ric McGeorge got in on the act with one touchdown catch.

Lofton's first touchdown, a 42-yard bomb from Whitehurst, came on the opening drive. His second, a 47-yard touchdown pass, retook the lead 14-10. His third touchdown, midway through the third quarter, provided the winning points. "He (Whitehurst) has guts. You look at David and how intense he is and it kind of touches you,"<sup>1</sup> a complimentary Lofton said later.

Saints' quarterback Archie Manning threw 53 passes for 303 yards, and his touchdown gave the Saints a brief lead in the second quarter. Lofton's second touchdown took care of that!

<b>New Orleans</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>

**Milwaukee County Stadium**

**Attendance: 54,336**

*Letter to the Editor: "I have enjoyed Bob Woessner's articles in the past, and I am sure I will enjoy them in the future. However, his front page "Pope vs. Pack: A Test of Faith" was irreverent."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/11/78, p. 6



OAKLAND  
**RAIDERS**  
**PACKERS**

**28**  
**3**     **9.17.1978**

## Ouch!

Facing stiffer competition for the first time, the Packers stayed close for the first 23 minutes. Oakland took control with a powerful ground game that put up 348 yards. Mark Van Eeghen followed guard Gene Upshaw and tackle Art Shell on his way to 151 yards. The pummeling was so severe that Green Bay's defensive lineman spent so much time on their backs they had, "a chance to read each of those airplane streamers circling the stadium at least a couple of times."<sup>1</sup>

Oakland scored the game's first points after a David Whitehurst fumble. Quarterback Kenny Stabler threw an 11-yard touchdown pass to David Casper for the lead. Four minutes later, after a short punt by David Beverly, Terry Robiskie went 11 yards around left end to finish a 48-yard drive three minutes before halftime. The Raiders led at the break 14-3.

The Raiders ground game continued to maul Green Bay in the second half. After Barty Smith's fumble on Oakland's 15-yard line, the Raiders marched 85 yards for Arthur Whittington's first touchdown. Whittington scored again with four minutes left in the game, and the Raiders won easily.

<b>Oakland</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

**Attendance: 55,903**

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/18/78, Langenkamp, p. 21



**PACKERS**  
SAN DIEGO  
**CHARGERS**

**24**  
**9.24.1978**  
**3**

In the 102-degree heat, it was a day of turnovers and quarterback sacks. The Chargers turned the ball over 11 times with six fumbles and five interceptions. San Diego's quarterbacks James Harris and Dan Fouts (who left injured), were sacked eight times.

Green Bay went in front on two misplayed punt attempts by San Diego. In the second quarter, punter Jeff West fumbled a snap from center that was recovered on San Diego's 13-yard line. On the next play, Terdell Middleton took it around right end for a 7-0 lead. The second punt was blocked by rookie Estus Hood and returned for a touchdown by Walter Landers.

The star of the Packers' defense was Willie Buchanon. The San Diego native had the game of a lifetime with four interceptions. His 77-yard pick-six in the fourth quarter finished off the Chargers.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>San Diego</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

**Attendance: 42,755**

*QB David Whitehurst was sacked 10 times*



DETROIT  
**LIONS**  
**PACKERS**

**14**  
**35** 10.1.1978

The season was just four weeks old, but the Packers completed a sweep of Detroit. They also took over sole possession of first place in the NFC Central! Green Bay's offense exploded for 482 yards, including Terdell Middleton's 148 yards rushing. Middleton's 76-yard touchdown run in the third quarter also restored Green Bay's 21-point lead.

Green Bay led 21-0 at halftime with touchdowns by Barty Smith, David Whitehurst, and Audra Thompson. Whitehurst threw a second touchdown to Thompson to cap off a strong game (14-18-230-2-2). Lions quarterback Gary Danielson threw two second-half touchdown passes, but it wasn't enough. The Packers sacked both Danielson and Greg Landry six times.

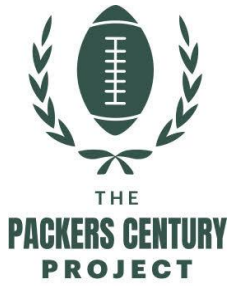
Immediately after the win, all eyes turned to the Chicago Bears game next week. As the Press-Gazette noted, the game finally, "means something more than a tired old rivalry game between two teams going nowhere."<sup>1</sup>

<b>Detroit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>

**Attendance: 54,601**  
**Milwaukee County Stadium**

*"Packermania, the most recent sports form of legal insanity to hit these parts, descended on County Stadium Sunday. There was the Dave Roller fan club which turned the parking lot into a pulsating disco scene after the game. And there was Dave Roller, reveling in the middle of the chaotic scene and mingling with his troops as any good folk hero should."*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/2/78, Langenkamp, p. 2  
<sup>2</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/2/78, Langenkamp, p. 1



1919-2019

CHICAGO  
**BEARS**  
**PACKERS**

**14**  
**24** 10.8.1978

*Mike Young, a Packer fan in Crystal Lake Illinois, tipped off Press-Gazette reporter Cliff Christl about a quote from Walter Payton about this game: "After they lose on Sunday, they'll have to regroup and put things back together, and I don't think they can do that."<sup>1</sup> The comment became bulletin board material late Sunday morning in the Green Bay locker room.*

**Luke!**

Coach Bart Starr had high praise for this victory. "It was as emotional a win as I've ever been around,"<sup>2</sup> he said, all smiles, as Green Bay moved to 5-1. The win spoiled the debut of new Chicago coach Neil Armstrong.

Packers safety Steve Luke took control with a clutch performance. For the only points of the first half, Luke recovered a Walter Payton fumble that led to Chester Marcol's 41-yard field goal. In the second half, an interception by defensive tackle Carl Barzillauskas led to Terdell Middleton's touchdown run. Steve Luke then nailed the coffin shut on the Bears before halftime with a 63-yard pick-six for 17-0 lead.

In the fourth quarter, Chicago quarterback Bob Avellini of the Bears and wideout James Scott connected for two touchdowns. In between, David Whitehurst came back for Green Bay with a 58-yard touchdown bomb to James Lofton to restore the a 17-point lead. The Bears struck again with 2:51 left, but that was it.

<b>Chicago</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>56,267</b>				

1 Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/9/78, Langenkamp, p. 15

2 Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/9/78, Christl/Langekamp, p. 16





SEATTLE  
**SEAHAWKS**  
**PACKERS**

**28**  
**45** 10.15.1978

### **No Problem**

The Packers were 6-1 after this annihilation of the Seahawks. Steve Odom returned the opening kickoff 95 yards for a quick 7-0 lead. The Packers then turned three first-quarter fumbles by Seattle into 28 unanswered points!

Terdell Middleton ran all over the Seahawks for four touchdowns and 121 yards. Seattle moved the ball easily as well – they outgained Green Bay 483-369 – but they turned the ball over seven times, and quarterback Jim Zorn was sacked three times. The win moved Green Bay three games ahead of the Bears, Lions, and Vikings who were all tied in second-place.

<b>Seattle</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>

**Attendance: 52,712**

**Milwaukee County Stadium**



1919-2019

**PACKERS**  
MINNESOTA  
**VIKINGS**

**7**  
**10.22.1978**  
**21**

Fran Tarkenton threw for 262 yards and three touchdowns to upset the first-place Packers. Chuck Foreman caught his first touchdown pass for a 7-0 lead. After Terdell Middleton's touchdown tied it, Tarkenton led an 81-yard touchdown drive just before halftime. He tossed a four-yard touchdown to Ahmad Rashard, and he connected with Rashard again in the fourth quarter to clinch it.

The Vikings sacked quarterback David Whitehurst five times. On one sack, his left shoulder popped out and had to be taped back in place at halftime! In the fourth quarter, Carl Eller recovered a Whitehurst fumble and Tarkenton's second touchdown to Rashard put matters to rest.

Packer defensive Dave Roller and Tarkenton exchanged words, and it got heated after Roller was ejected for a hitting Tarkenton out of bounds. "The Minnesota bench wanted to lynch Dave Roller for hitting Tarkenton late on the Viking sidelines. Roller was penalized and booted out of the game because of his action against his former New York Giant teammate."<sup>1</sup>

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>

**Attendance: 47,411**

*During the game, the wives of 14 Packer players gathered to watch the game on television as part of an American Cancer Society fundraiser. "We try to help out a lot of charities," said Mrs. (Barty) Smith.*

<sup>1</sup> Cold Wars, Mishler, p. xv

<sup>2</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/23, Mayer, p. 1



TAMPA BAY

**BUCCANEERS**

**PACKERS**

**7**

**9**

**10.29.1978**

Chester Marcol redeemed himself and won the game with a 48-yard field goal with 41 seconds left! The kick topped off a tight, defensive battle with the only points coming on touchdowns from each team's star running back.

Terdell Middleton gave the Packers a 6-0 first-half lead (Marcol missed the extra-point), and Ricky Bell put the Bucs in front 7-6 in the third quarter. Both offenses were held in check all the game with Green Bay outgaining Tampa Bay 249-171.

After Tampa's Neil O'Donoghue missed a field goal with 2:16 left, Green Bay took over at the 20-yard line. David Whitehurst passed the Packers into field goal position with completions to James Lofton, Aundra Thompson, and Steve Odom. The 10-play drive set up Marcol's winner with 41 seconds left.

<b>Tampa Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>55,108</b>				



1919-2019

**PACKERS**

PHILADELPHIA

**EAGLES**

**3**

**11.5.1978**

**10**

In the week leading up to this game, tense relations between Bart Starr and some media members boiled over about running back Duane Thomas being in Green Bay after working out for the Packers.

Green Bay beat themselves while outgaining the Eagles 385-148. The offense struggled all afternoon with five turnovers. Though they ran 19 more plays than Philly, Green Bay managed only a single field goal. In the second quarter, a fumble by punter David Beverly was recovered at the two-yard line. Two plays later, the Eagles led 7-3.

After David Whitehurst was picked off in the third quarter, Mike-Meyer's field goal proved to be enough. Herman Edwards held off Green Bay's final threat with an interception on the six-yard line with 1:16 left.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Philadelphia</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>64,215</b>				



DALLAS  
**COWBOYS**  
**PACKERS**

**42**  
**14**

**11.12.1978**

A stunning blowout by the Cowboys that blasted the Packers with 537 yards of offense. Green Bay scored the first and last points in the game, but otherwise, it was all Dallas.

The Cowboys ran 49 more plays than the Packers, and they pounded the ball on the ground 58 times for 313 yards. Tony Dorsett starred with 149 yards and two touchdown runs, and quarterback Roger Staubach threw for 200 yards and two touchdowns. No contest.

<b>Dallas</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>

**Attendance: 55,256**

**Milwaukee County Stadium**



**PACKERS**  
DENVER  
**BRONCOS**

**3**  
**11.19.1978**  
**16**

Chester Marcol's field goal started the scoring, but Denver did all the rest. The Broncos balanced offense produced 215 yards on the ground and 174 through the air.

A solid first-half performance by Green Bay slipped after halftime. Marcol's field goal held the lead until the third quarter when Denver struck twice to take the lead. With the second half kickoff, they drove 66 yards in 10 plays. Quarterback Craig Morton hit Haven Moses for a 14-yard touchdown. On their next possession, Rob Lytle's running led them to paydirt. The defense also chipped in with a sack of David Whitehurst in the end zone for a safety.

This third straight loss dropped the Packers back into a tie for the division lead with the Vikings.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Denver</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>74,743</b>				



MINNESOTA  
**VIKINGS**  
**PACKERS**

**10** 11.26.1978  
**10** (OT)

## Tie hurts

With the teams tied for the lead in the NFC Central, this was the biggest game at Lambeau Field in years. Terdell Middleton scored Green Bay's only touchdown after an interception by John Anderson. Middleton also became just the fourth player in Packer history to rush for 1,000+ yards in a season.

Fran Tarkenton of the Vikings, though, spoiled Middleton's day. Though it took Tarkenton some time to get going (he threw four interceptions), he found his rhythm in the fourth quarter. A touchdown pass to Ahmad Rashard with 10 seconds left in the game tied matters at 10.

In overtime, both clubs missed field goals, and the game ended 10-10. A somber Packer locker room acknowledged that the Vikings now held the tie-breaker in the event of a deadlock at season's end. As Tarkenton pointed out, "Our No. 1 objective today was not to lose. Our No. 2 objective was to win."<sup>1</sup>

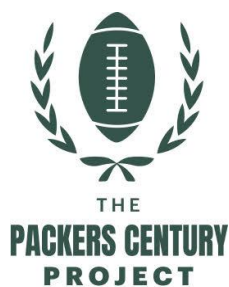
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10</b>

**Attendance: 51,354**

*"While his players seemed to be playing their hearts out, the fans at Lambeau Field were yelling their lungs out, also much to Starr's joy 'I've never in all my life seen fans like we have here in Wisconsin. They're something else and, I think, it meant a lot to our team.'"*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/27/78, Christl, p. 19

<sup>2</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/27/78, Christl, p. 19



1919-2019

**PACKERS**

TAMPA BAY

**BUCCANEERS**

**17**

**12.3.1978**

**7**

All of the scoring occurred in the first half. A David Whitehurst touchdown pass to James Lofton and a Chester Marcol field goal gave the Pack a 10-0 lead. The injury-ravaged Buccaneers cut it to 10-7 in the second quarter, and Barty Smith's one-yard plunge just before halftime restored the 10-point lead.

The second half was scoreless, and the Packers won despite generating just 65 yards rushing, 11 first downs, and 173 total yards.

**Green Bay    10    7    0    0    17**

**Tampa Bay    0    7    0    0    7**

**Attendance: 67,754**





**PACKERS**

CHICAGO

**BEARS**

**0**

**12.10.1978**

**14**

A season that began 6-1 was on the brink after this loss. In nine-degree wind chills on icy turf, the Packers offense stalled again. They turned the ball over three times and generated just 161 yards.

With under one minute to play in the first half, Chicago safety Doug Plank stripped the football from Terdell Middleton. The Bears marched 83 yards, and Walter Payton scored from the one-yard line 15 seconds before halftime.

In the third quarter, the Bears recovered Johnnie Gray's fumbled a punt when he was slammed hard by Steve Schubert. On the next play, the Bears cashed-in with a 35-yard touchdown pass from Mike Phipps to James Scott. Green Bay's offense never made it to the end zone, and the Packers now had to beat the Rams in the season's final game to make the postseason.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Chicago</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>34,306</b>				



**PACKERS**

LOS ANGELES

**RAMS**

**14**

**12.17.1978**

**31**

### **Just short**

On a rainy day in Southern California, the Packers needed to beat the Rams to make the postseason. They hung tough for the first 30 minutes and trailed only 7-0 at halftime.

After halftime, Terdell Middleton scored on the ground and on a 14-yard pass from David Whitehurst. But the Rams were more explosive, and they scored touchdowns after a partially blocked punt, a fumble by Middleton, and a pick-six.

The loss completed Green Bay's precipitous drop from playoff contention. "I thought we gave a good account of ourselves in a losing effort," said a disappointed, yet professional, Bart Starr. "I'm very disappointed but very proud."<sup>1</sup> Many fans weighed-in more angrily.

<b>Green Bay</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Los Angeles</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>42,500</b>				

<sup>1</sup> Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/18/78, Christl, p. 21



THE  
**PACKERS CENTURY  
PROJECT**

1919-2019

## 1978 Team Statistics

### FINAL STANDINGS – NFC Central

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>I</u>
Minnesota	8	7	1
Green Bay	8	7	1
Detroit	7	9	0
Chicago	7	9	0
Tampa Bay	5	11	0

### TEAM LEADERS

Passing Whitehurst  
Rushing Middleton  
Receiving Lofton  
Scoring Middleton  
Interceptions Buchanon

### ALL-PRO

Buchanon Cornerback

### NOTEABLE DRAFT PICKS (Round, Position)

James Lofton (1a, WR)  
John Anderson (1b, LB)  
Estus Hood (3, DB)  
Mike Douglass (5a, LB)



1919 - 2019

# **PACKERS CENTURY**

*with Jim Rice*

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