

SEASON
61

1979



THE
PACKERS CENTURY

P R O J E C T

ALL THE GAMES. ALL THE STORIES.

1919-2019

BY JIM RICE

packerscentury.com



1979

Record: 5-11-0 (4th Place)

Coach: Bart Starr

- Defensive Coordinator Dave Hanner, who had been with the Packers since 1952, was fired after the season. Green Bay had the worst run defense in the league, and they gave up more than 150 yards rushing in 14 games. Nine-year veteran tight end Rich McGeorge was also let go.
- As another disappointing season unfolded, Bart Starr found himself on the hot seat. This would be Green Bay's fourth losing season in five years. Starr also had a few flare-ups with players and the media.
- The first Monday Night Football game was played at Lambeau Field.
- On both sides of the ball the Packers did not perform as well as 1978. Injuries took their toll as Eddie Lee Ivery suffered a season-ending knee injury at Soldier Field in the opener. Injuries also ended the seasons of Barty Smith, Steve Atkins and Mike Hunt.



PACKERS

CHICAGO

BEARS

3

9.2.1979

6

A warm day greeted the fans and the players as renovated Soldier Field opened. The Bears celebrated by unleashing their defense on Green Bay quarterback David Whitehurst. They got to Whitehurst for six sacks, and they held the Packers to 149 total yards.

Walter Payton ran for 125 yards, but Bob Thomas' two field goals gave Chicago a 6-0 lead. In the third quarter, Chester Marcol's field goal cut it to 6-3. Later in the quarter, Marcol's second field goal attempt was blocked by Virgil Livers.

It was a less than positive opener for Green Bay. "There was no rhythm to the passing game. There was an epidemic of holding and illegal motion penalties. There was no continuity to the running game." Eddie Lee Ivery's season-ending knee injury on his third carry just added to the misery.

Green Bay	0	0	3	0	3
Chicago	0	6	0	0	6

Attendance: 56,515

GB had 9 first downs.

*"Allouez Supervisor Alvin Jenkel and the Green Bay Packers had something in common this week – they both lost in the name of football. The Packers lost to the Bears Sunday, while Jenkel lost to his colleagues on the board Tuesday night. Two proposals made by Jenkel were defeated. He first proposed that the board change its meeting from Monday to Tuesday during the months of September, October, and November – to avoid a conflict with Monday Night Football games on television. The motion was defeated 3-2. Jenkins then proposed that the meetings at least be started earlier – at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m. when the game begins. That motion was also defeated 3-2."*¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/5/79, p. 4



NEW ORLEANS
SAINTS
PACKERS

28
19 9.9.1979

Storming back!

In the first half, it was last week all over again. New Orleans led 12-0 on two field goals and Archie Manning's touchdown pass to Henry Childs. As the Packers left the field at halftime, they heard the boos.

Green Bay charged out the locker room and scored 21 unanswered points. It began with a successful onside kick that led to Barty Smith's touchdown run. Three minutes later, they took the lead on a quick drive that featured a 52-yard pass play from David Whitehurst to James Lofton. An interception by linebacker Mike Douglass led to another touchdown and a 21-12 lead at the start of the final quarter.

New Orleans regrouped with a 76-yard touchdown drive to make it a two-point game 21-19. But a 60-yard run by Steve Atkins put the ball at the Saints three-yard line! Eric Torkelson closed out the scoring with 8:57 left.

New Orleans	3	9	0	7	19
Green Bay	0	0	21	7	28

Attendance: 53,184

Milwaukee County Stadium

After the preseason was marred by more rowdy behavior, increased security was hired for home games. "We received many letters and phone calls from them (fans) concerning the unsportsmanlike language and drinking. Some fans were saying they wouldn't attend the game anymore if it continued, People are getting fed up with the rowdiness. We feel people pay good money to be entertained, and we want to assure them that there will be some order."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 9/12, Wheatley, p. 1



TAMPA BAY

BUCCANEERS
PACKERS

21
10

9.16.1979

Injuries continued to mount, and 11 Packers players either left this game injured or were visibly slowed from the battle.

The Buccaneers beat the Packers for the first time in its four-year history. The backfield of Ricky Bell and Jerry Eckwood pounded Green Bay for 235 yards and two touchdowns. Tampa's defense sacked David Whitehurst three times, and they forced three turnovers.

After Green Bay took a 3-0 lead, Terdell Middleton's fumble led to Jerry Eckwood's 40-yard sprint to the end zone. It gave Tampa a 7-3 halftime lead. The Bucs took control in the second half with two touchdowns by Ricky Bell. James Lofton's touchdown catch for Green Bay with eight minutes left finished the scoring.

Tampa Bay	0	7	14	0	21
Green Bay	3	0	0	7	10

Attendance: 55,498



PACKERS

MINNESOTA

VIKINGS

21

9.23.1979

27 (OT)

Viking quarterback Tommy Kramer and wide receiver Ahmad Rashard hooked up twice for touchdowns. The first started the scoring, and the second won it in overtime.

For Green Bay, touchdowns by James Lofton and Barty Smith gave them a 14-7 edge at halftime. In the second half, Minnesota tied it on a Robert Miller touchdown run. The Packers took back the lead on Terdell Middleton's touchdown.

Midway through the fourth quarter, after Barty Smith's fumble, the Vikings capitalized with a touchdown for a 21-21 game. As the clock wound down, Green Bay's final series began at their 25 with 1:41 left. Rather than aggressively trying to move downfield for a winning field goal, the Packers called three straight running plays to run out the clock.

The overtime lasted 3: 18. Ahmad Rashard caught a 50-yard touchdown pass from Tommy Kramer for the winner. After the game, an angry Lofton threw his helmet and had words with Starr. He questioned publically the conservative playing calling at the end of regulation.

Green Bay	0	14	7	0	0	21
Minnesota	7	0	7	7	6	27
Attendance:	46,524					



NEW ENGLAND
PATRIOTS
PACKERS

14
27 10.1.1979

Monday Night Football visits Lambeau Field for the first time! It was an exciting night as Green Bay defeated a contending team and the defending AFC East champions.

New England outgained Green Bay 401-317, but five interceptions of quarterback Steve Grogan fueled the upset. Green Bay's blitz surprised the Patriots, and it rattled Grogan. The Packers capitalized on the interceptions by Johnnie Gray, Steve Luke, and Mike McCoy for 21 points! Barty Smith, Terdell Middleton and David Whitehurst scored the touchdowns. Unfortunately, this early win became the high point of a disappointing the season.

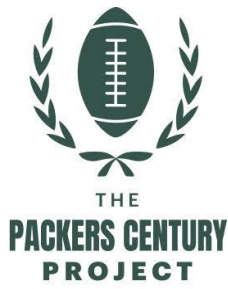
New England	7	7	0	0	14
Green Bay	7	13	7	0	27

Attendance: 52,842

GB had 5 sacks.

Russ Francis, Patriot Tight End: "We were out there on the grass field before the game and I made the comment that it was like going back 20 years in time. The whole town is behind the team and all that, and all the stuff about Lombardi. It was like playing against a legend. These are good people here in Green Bay. They didn't get us down, but they really got the Packers up."¹

1 Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/2/79, Walter, p. 23



1919-2019

PACKERS

ATLANTA

FALCONS

7

10.7.1979

25

Going nowhere

The Packers were hammered by the Falcons. Atlanta grabbed a 15-0 lead, and they had a little help from Green Bay. A poor punt by David Beverly set up Steve Bartkowski's touchdown pass for a 7-0 lead. An interception led to a field goal, and a safety topped it all off.

The Falcons sacked David Whitehurst eight times, and the Packers turned the ball over three times. Chester Marcol missed three field goals, and he was brought down in the end zone by Mike Lewis for a safety. "It wasn't Marcol's day, nor any of the other Packers'. One was as bad as the next."¹

Green Bay	0	7	0	0	7
Atlanta	10	5	3	7	25
Attendance:	56,184				

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/8, Christl, p. 17



DETROIT
LIONS
PACKERS

16
24 10.14.1979

Turnovers continued to hurt as the Lions got out to a 9-0 lead following a Packer fumble and a pick-six of David Whitehurst.

After Starr lambasted the team for falling behind, the Packers snapped back into shape in the final minutes of the first half to take a 10-9 lead. Quarterback David Whitehurst responded with a first-half touchdown run. He threw touchdowns in the second half to Paul Coffman and Walt Landers. Back-up running back Nate Simpson also pitched in with 121 yards.

It was a mistake-filled game with 22 penalties totaling 154 yards. Regarding Starr's frustration boiling over about the teams' play, assistant coach Bill Curry said, "I have known Bart for 15 years. I have only seen him that mad three or four times."²

Detroit	0	9	7	0	16
Green Bay	0	10	7	7	24

Attendance: 53,950
Milwaukee County Stadium

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/15/79, p. 22



PACKERS

TAMPA BAY

3

10.21.1979

BUCCANEERS 21

Green Bay's trouble on the road continued (0-3). A month after their last encounter with Tampa Bay, the Packers still couldn't run the ball (38 yards). They had to rely on the arm of David Whitehurst who threw for 261 yards and three interceptions.

Tampa Bay fullback Ricky Bell had a great game. He set a franchise record with 167 yards on the ground, and he caught one touchdown pass. Quarterback Doug Williams threw two touchdown passes, and he also scored on the ground! His touchdown pass to Ricky Bell closed out a 14-0 first half.

Green Bay moved the ball easily, but once they got inside the 30-yard line they had trouble. At the midway point of a season, the Packers stood 3-5.

Green Bay	0	0	3	0	3
Tampa Bay	7	7	0	7	21
Attendance:	67,186				



PACKERS

MIAMI

DOLPHINS

7

10.28.1979

27

After a scoreless 15 minutes, Duriel Harris opened the scoring with a 37-yard touchdown pass from Bob Griese. The Dolphins dominated Green Bay on the ground (195 yards) and through the air (304 yards). Wide receivers Duriel Harris and Nat Moore racked up 243 receiving yards between them. Larry Czonka and Norm Bulaich also scored on the ground.

Miami led 20-0 before Green Bay scored. Near the end of the game, Lynn Dickey saw his first action since November 1977!

Green Bay	0	0	7	0	7
Miami	0	13	14	0	27
Attendance;	47,741				



NEW YORK
JETS
PACKERS

27 11.4.1979
22

3-7

The Jets had the NFL's most potent ground game, and they had no trouble running against Green Bay. Their 246 yards easily eclipsed the Packer ground game, and fullback Clark Gaines led the way with 125.

New York quarterback Richard Todd threw two touchdown passes. The first came after a James Lofton fumble as Todd and Jerome Barkum hooked up for a 14-9 lead. On the ensuing kickoff, a 100-yard return by Aundra Thompson put Green Bay back on top 15-14 with 1:22 left in the half. But the Jets weren't done, and with nine seconds left, Todd hit Bruce Harper for a 21-15 lead.

In the second half, the Packers got as close as 24-22, but that was it. James Lofton, who caught six passes for 114 yards, heard it from the boo-birds because of his two big drops that forced punts. After the game, when asked about the booing, Lofton replied angrily, "They (the fans) can shove it as far as I'm concerned."¹

New York	0	21	3	3	27
Green Bay	6	9	7	0	22
Attendance:	54,201				

Parking Lot Wedding! "We were going to the game anyway so we thought we might as well have the wedding there," said the groom, James Leverty. The parking lot "wasn't their first choice; the 50-yard line was."² That wasn't possible, so this couple from New Richmond, Wisconsin – the home of the great NFL Hall of Famer Johnny Blood McNally – tied the knot in the Lambeau Field Parking Lot!

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/5/79, Walter, p. 25
² Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/5/79, Langenkamp, p. 3



MINNESOTA
VIKINGS
PACKERS

7
19 11.11.1979

With Fran Tarkenton retired, the Vikings were no longer the dominant team in the division. Green Bay took advantage and snapped its three-game losing streak.

This was Bart Starr's his first coaching win over Minnesota, and David Whitehurst showed the way with touchdown passes to Aundra Thompson and Terdell Middleton. Just before halftime, defensive end Mike Bulter picked up a Minnesota fumble and rumbled 70 yards downfield for six more. "I didn't recuperate until maybe five minutes into the third quarter,"¹ he said.

Green Bay led 19-0 when Minnesota scored its only points midway through the fourth quarter. This loss ended Minnesota's streak of seven straight division titles.

Minnesota	0	0	0	7	7
Green Bay	7	6	0	6	19
Attendance:	52,706				

"Dave Roller had his first starting assignment for the Vikings Sunday. Following the Packers 19-7 victory, Roller dressed hurriedly and headed directly to the team bus, where a cluster of 50 or so familiar faces were waving banners and awaiting his arrival. They were the last survivors of the Dave Roller fan club, a group from Port Washington. Roller pumped hands, kissed cheeks and cracked jokes for several minutes, all while wearing a grin from ear to ear."²

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/12/79, p. 17
² Green Bay Peess-Gazette, 11/12/79, p. 17



1919-2019

PACKERS

BUFFALO

BILLS

12

11.18.1979

19

Green Bay turned the ball over five times. With the Packers leading 12-9 at the end of the third quarter, a fumble by Paul Coffman led to Nick Meyer's fourth field goal that tied the game.

In the final 15 minutes, two interceptions of David Whitehurst ended Green Bay drives. Buffalo went 81-yards in 16 plays for the winner. During the drive, an interception by cornerback Mike McCoy was overturned on a holding penalty. Mike Collier's one-yard touchdown run came with 3:04 left.

Green Bay	3	9	0	0	12
Buffalo	3	3	6	7	19

Attendance: 39,679



1919-2019

PHILADELPHIA
EAGLES
PACKERS

21 11.25.1979
10

Eric Torkelson's fumble led to the Eagles' first touchdown. Quarterback Ron Jaworski hit Wilbert Montgomery for a 7-0 lead. Leading 7-3 at halftime, the Eagles scored on their first possession of the second half to extend the lead to 14-3. After a goal-line stand by Philly at the one-yard line, the Eagles drove 99 yards in six plays to clinch it 21-3 with 7:22 left.

Ron Jaworski of the Eagles threw three touchdown passes. Lynn Dickey, who relieved David Whitehurst to start the second half, threw his first touchdown pass since 1977 to James Lofton with 51 seconds left. After the game, with losses mounting, Starr refused to answer questions from sports reporter Dave Begel of the Milwaukee Journal.

Philadelphia	7	0	7	7	21
Green Bay	3	0	0	7	10

Attendance: 50,023

"Cliff Van Beek attended the Packer game at Lambeau Field Sunday. So what, you say? The 76-year-old lifelong resident of Green Bay just may hold the record for attending the most Packer games here – over 500 – since the team was formed. He saw the first game, against Minneapolis in 1919, and he's seen every home game since, except one. 'The game I missed was in the 1920s when I had to take my two cousins to a convent in Milwaukee.' Asked which Packer game was his favorite, Van Beek chose the 1967 title game against Dallas. He also expressed a preference for the first game Don Hutson played in 1935."



1919-2019

PACKERS

WASHINGTON

REDSKINS

21

12.2.1979

38

Lynn Dickey played the entire game (13-33-212-2-0) for Green Bay, and he led a 21-point second quarter with touchdowns to Walter Tullis and Aundra Thompson. After halftime, the Packers collapsed. The offense didn't score again, and the defense couldn't protect the lead giving up 31 points. Redskin quarterback Joe Theisman threw three of his four touchdown passes in the second half to lead the comeback.

This collapse was a low-point for Starr and the Packers. Sensing this, Washington's coach Jack Pardee said after the game, "This is the best Packer team I've seen in five years. Anyone who plays them is in for an intense 60 minutes."¹ Some Packer fans felt very differently.

Green Bay	0	21	0	0	21
Washington	7	0	7	24	38

Attendance: 51,682

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/3/79, Levenson, p. 26



CHICAGO
BEARS
PACKERS

15 12.9.1979
14

Going, going...

Green Bay committed five of the game's eight turnovers. Four of them came in the fourth quarter to give the game away.

With a 7-6 lead with 11 minutes left, linebacker Tom Hicks stepped in front of a Lynn Dickey pass and bolted 66 yards for the end zone. Minutes later, the Bears cashed-in on a fumble by Mike McCoy on the kickoff with a Bob Thomas field goal for a 15-7 lead. In the final minutes, the Packers scored again on Lynn Dickey's second touchdown pass to Paul Coffman with 1:33 left. After a successful onside kick, the Packers' Tom Birney missed a 52-yard field goal try.

Chicago	3	3	0	9	15
Green Bay	0	7	0	7	14

Attendance: 54,207

Lynn Dickey was sacked 4 times.



PACKERS

DETROIT

LIONS

18

12.15.1979

13

The Packers avoided another four-win season by defeating the 2-13 Lions. Tom Birney's four field goals and Eric Torkelson's touchdown run led Green Bay. The Packer defense sacked Detroit's quarterbacks – Jeff Komlo and Scott Hunter – seven times.

Green Bay	6	3	9	0	18
Detroit	7	0	0	6	13
Attendance:	57,376				

Press-Gazette Editorial: "A young Packer player speaking through the hurt and frustration of a losing season, has said he doesn't like fans voicing their displeasure with his team in this newspaper. He doesn't like outsiders tampering with the Packer family, he said. We don't think he undertands the relationship between this town and our team. Fans who criticize do not tamper with the Packer family. The fan is part of that family. That closeness is an essential part of the Packer legacy."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 12/16/79, p. 4



1979 Team Statistics

FINAL STANDINGS – NFC Central

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>I</u>
Tampa Bay	10	6	0
Chicago	10	6	0
Minnesota	7	9	0
Green Bay	5	11	0
Detroit	2	14	0

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Whitehurst
Rushing	Middleton
Receiving	Coffman
Scoring	Birney
Interceptions	Gray

ALL-PRO

NOTEABLE DRAFT PICKS (Round, Position)

Eddie Lee Ivery (1, RB)

Steve Atkins (2, RB)

Charles Johnson (3, DT)

Rich Wingo (7b, LB)



1919 - 2019

PACKERS CENTURY

with Jim Rice

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