



1954



THE
PACKERS CENTURY

P R O J E C T

ALL THE GAMES. ALL THE STORIES.

1919-2019

BY JIM RICE

packerscentury.com



1954

Record: 4-8-0 (5th Place)

Coach: Lisle Blackburn

- Lisle Blackburn of Marquette University succeeded Gene Ronzani as coach of the Packers. Blackburn was a disciplinarian with a list of 20 rules ready for training camp.
- Former Packer great Verne Lewellen was named the team's new general manager.
- Early in the year, initial discussions began about a new stadium.
- The team was more competitive than 1953 as the defense improved. The team got off to a shaky start with three losses, and it also lost its last four games.
- Tobin Rote broke the NFL record at the time with 382 pass attempts. Billy Howton was , my father wor top target. Rookie Max McGee led the team with nine touchdowns.

Fran Dowling, Packers Fan: "In 1954, my father worked as an orderly at St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay. One of his patients was Jerry Jorgenson, son of then Packers' trainer Bud Jorgenson, who had broken his back in a car accident. After recovering, he wanted to show his appreciation to my dad. He and his wife took my parents and me to Stevens Point, where the Packers were training to watch a scrimmage. (The Packers trained in Stevens Point from 1954-1957) While the women went shopping, I got to stay with Jerry and my dad. Tobin Rote came over to say hello. He was already in uniform, shoulder pads and all, and I was afraid of him. Later at the scrimmage, we were on the sideline. Dad and Jerry were not paying much attention to me, and here I was a small child, watching as many large creatures came running toward where I was. I now think it was the famous Green Bay Sweep! I felt no fear, only curiosity. All of a sudden a complete stranger picked me up and whisked me out of the way as the play ended at the sideline. Had he not done so, I might not have lived to share this anecdote with you!"*

* 8/26/2019



PITTSBURGH
STEELERS
PACKERS

21
20
 9.26.1954

In the first half, the Packers struck twice from long distance. Floyd "Breezy" Reid's 69-yard touchdown run and Tobin Rote's 44 yard touchdown pass to Billy Howton gave Green Bay 17-14 halftime lead. Despite turning the ball over four times, they held onto the lead until the fourth quarter.

Steeler quarterback Jim Finks completed 27 of 40 passes for 327 yards and three touchdowns. After Green Bay built a 17-14 lead, Fred Cone drilled home a second field goal to make it 20-13. It stayed that way until Finks led the game winning drive and connected with Ray Matthews from 37-yards out for the win.

"One of the happiest eyewitnesses was Gene Ronzani, former Packer head coach who sat on the Steelers bench in the role of key assistant to head man Walt Kiesling."¹

Pittsburgh	7	7	0	7	21
Green Bay	7	10	3	0	20
Attendance: 20,675					
GB was outgained 455-262					

¹ packershistory.net/1954Packers



CHICAGO
BEARS
PACKERS

10 10.3.1954
3

A rain-drenched field played havoc with the football and led to 10 turnovers. George Halas wasn't pleased with the condition of the field, and he scolded Green Bay after the game.

The Packers held a 3-0 lead into the fourth quarter when Tobin Rote fumbled. Chicago recovered, and quarterback George Blanda went to work. Three plays later, he found Billy Stone in the back end zone for the winner. Blanda also kicked a field goal a short time later.

Chicago	0	0	0	10	10
Green Bay	0	0	3	0	3
Attendance:	24,414				

"The Green Bay Community Chest's 1954 campaign was officially inaugurated with a gridiron kickoff between halves. Cast in an unfamiliar role was Packer great Tony Canadeo who put his toe to the ball held by Mayor Dominic Olejniczak to launch the drive."¹

1 Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/4/1954, Rempel, p. 18



SAN FRANCISCO
49ers
PACKERS

23 10.10.1954
17

On another wet field, this time in Milwaukee, the Packers got off to a slow start and trailed 10-0 at halftime. But Green Bay rallied behind Tobin Rote's two touchdowns in the third quarter to pull ahead 17-10. The first went to Veryl Switzer, and Max McGee caught his after a critical fumble by Joe Perry.

San Francisco responded by putting starting quarterback Y.A Tittle in the game for the first time with a cast on his non-throwing hand. Tittle sparked the Niners with two impressive touchdowns drives. Joe Perry scored on an eight-yard run, but the extra point was missed. Trailing 17-16 with seven minutes left, Tittle uncorked a 66-yard completion to Hugh McElhenny to set up the 49ers on the Green Bay 17. Tittle took it in on a quarterback sneak, and the 49ers held off Green Bay.

San Francisco	10	0	0	13	23
Green Bay	0	0	17	0	17

Attendance: 15,571

Milwaukee County Stadium

"When I was going to college, I worked for the Green Bay Board of Education Maintenance Department. One of the jobs we had each summer was to shore up the Old City Stadium so it would pass building inspection in the fall. I had fun hoisting 16-foot 6x6's into position to prop up the old wooden City Stadium. We used to say it at the time, that Green Bay East High School had the largest high school stadium in the country."¹

¹ Fro Packer Fans Only!, Wolfe, p. 84



LOS ANGELES

RAMS

PACKERS

17

10.17.1954

35

Packers Win!

After spending the week practicing in Wisconsin, the Rams were upset in an exciting contest in Milwaukee.

The teams put up over 900 yards of offense! They threw 58 passes for 593 of the yards. Tobin Rote had the best game of his career to date with three touchdown passes and a touchdown run. Alone, Rote generated 361 yards of Green Bay's 461 – 286 yards passing, 75 yards rushing.

Rote's rushing touchdown gave the Packers a 21-10 lead early in the final quarter. After the Rams struck back with a 71-yard touchdown bomb from Norm Van Brocklin to Bob Boyd, Rote connected with Billy Howton, and the Packers pulled away with two more touchdowns late in the game.

Coach Blackbourn enjoyed his first win. "This was our best game. Our boys did it playing good football."¹

Los Angeles 0 7 3 7 17

Green Bay 0 7 7 21 35

Attendance: 17,455

Milwaukee County Stadium

GB's first win over the Rams since 1948!

¹ packershistory.net/1954 Packers



PACKERS
BALTIMORE
COLTS

7
10.24.1954
6

Second Chance Pays Off

Though the teams had identical records (1-3), the Packers were favored on the road. After two field goals by Gary Kerkorian, the Colts led 6-0 in the second half.

The Packers got on the scoreboard in the third quarter with a drive that stayed mostly on the ground. After forgoing the field goal try on fourth down to try another shot at the end zone, Rote's pass was incomplete. Baltimore took over on their seven-yard line and fumbled the ball right back to the Packers on the next play! Breezy Reid scored for Green Bay, and Fred Cone's extra point was the difference.

Green Bay	0	0	7	0	7
Baltimore	3	0	3	0	6

Attendance: 25,119

Billy Howton caught 11 passes for 147 yards.

Welcome Home: "A crowd estimated of more than 3,000 gave the Packers a rousing reception at Austin Straubel Field."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 10/25/54, Rummel, p. 19



PACKERS
PHILADELPHIA
EAGLES

37
10.30.1954
14

Back to Even!

The 11-point underdog Packers climbed back to 3-3 with this blowout of the Eagles, and they shined brightly on the road on national television.

Four turnovers haunted the Eagles. Bobby Dillon's 59-yard pick-six started the touchdown parade for the Packers. Quarterback Tobin Rote fueled the upset with three touchdowns passes to Max McGee. The first followed an interception by Val Joe Walker. Rote also scored on a quarterback sneak to finish the scoring late in the game.

Former Packers, quarterback Bobby Thomason and running back Dom Moselle, scored both of Philadelphia's touchdowns. Despite the loss, the Eagles outgained the Packers 203-155.

Green Bay	10	7	13	7	37
Philadelphia	0	7	0	7	14

Attendance: 25,378

*A crowd estimated by traffic officers at upwards to 10,000 persons jammed Austin-Straubel Air Field to greet the chartered plane carrying the Packers. It was believed to be the largest crowd ever to greet the Packers. 'If we win another game like that one, probably all Wisconsin will be here,' Coach Lisle Blackbourn told the crowd."*²

¹ packershistory.net/1954 Packers



PACKERS
CHICAGO
BEARS

23
28

11.7.1954

After George Blanda and the Bears grabbed an early 14-0 lead, Green Bay scored 23 unanswered points! Rookie Max McGee caught two more touchdown passes from Tobin Rote, and Veryl Switzer's spectacular 93-yard punt return for a touchdown set a Packer record.

A 23-14 Packer lead slipped away in the final ten minutes. Switzer fumbled a punt that Wayne Hansen of the Bears returned for a touchdown with four minutes left. A two-point conversion cut the lead to 23-21. After the Packers missed a field goal, George Blanda took over. Blanda went 5-for-5 on an 80-yard drive with the winner coming on a seven-yard toss to Jack Hoffman with 2:05 left. The game ended when Tobin Rote, who had broken his nose earlier, was sacked on the Chicago's 16-yard line.

Green Bay	0	13	3	7	23
Chicago	7	7	0	14	28

Attendance: 47,038



BALTIMORE
COLTS
PACKERS

13 11.13.1954
24

A Saturday night win on national television did not look very promising early. The Colts (1-6) scored the first 13 points before Green Bay came back with the next 24. Tobin Rote's three one-yard touchdown runs in the second, third, and fourth quarters led the way.

Howie Ferguson bulled his way through the Colts' defense all game to help set up Rote's three scores. Ferguson ran for 112 yards and caught five passes for another 44. Green Bay's defense picked off three passes, and they shutout the Colts in the second half.

Baltimore	10	3	0	0	13
Green Bay	0	10	7	7	24
Attendance: 19,786					
Milwaukee County Stadium					

"Two enthusiastic young fans attempted to carry Billy Howton off the field after the game. Bill graciously permitted them to tote him a few steps, then completed the journey to the dressing room under his own power."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/15/54, Rimmel, p. 27



1919-2018

DETROIT
LIONS
PACKERS

21
17
11.21.1954

This is the first of back-to-back games against the defending champions. Detroit quarterback Bobby Lane threw two touchdowns passes in both games, and each game was decided by four points.

In the first meeting, Detroit's cornerback Jim David grabbed two interceptions and recovered a fumble. His first interception in Packer territory set up Layne's quarterback sneak that tied the game at seven. Layne's first touchdown pass to former Packer Jug Girard gave Detroit a 14-7 lead. At halftime, they led 14-10.

Detroit took the second half kickoff and marched 66 yards for Layne's second touchdown pass. Now trailing 21-10, Green Bay rallied with a 92-yard touchdown drive that brought the lead back down to four 21-17. The Packers held the upper hand for the rest of the game, but they could not score. Max McGee's dropped pass in the end zone, and a fumble by fullback Howie Ferguson allowed the Lions to hold on.

Green Bay	0	14	7	0	21
Detroit	7	3	7	0	17

Attendance: 20,767

Tobin Rote becomes GB's all-time leader in passing yards.

For the annual Homecoming, the fans and the Lumberjack Band welcomed back over 50 former players from 1919-1953. "The Packerettes, a corp of 30 drum majorettes, formed a giant letter "P" in their honor as the band, under the baton of Wilner Burker, struck up the Packer song."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/22/54, Daley, p. 36



1919-2018

PACKERS
DETROIT
LIONS

24
11.25.1954
28

The Packers were 16-point underdogs for this Thanksgiving Day rematch, and two more touchdown passes from Bobby Layne, ended any hopes of a holiday upset for Green Bay.

In a 14-14 first half, a big play by each team put up points. A 48-yard touchdown run by Breezy Reid of Green Bay started the scoring. A 30-yard pick-six by Jack Christiansen of the Lions made it 14-14 before the half.

In an explosive third quarter, Detroit held Green Bay to an early field goal. Three plays later, the Lions scored on a Layne to Lew Carpenter touchdown pass for a 21-17 edge. A 61-yard punt return by Jack Christiansen extended Detroit's advantage to 28-17. But on the last play of the quarter, Tobin Rote and Max McGee hooked up for an 82-yard touchdown! Trailing again by four, Green Bay came up empty on three fourth-quarter drives, and the defending champs prevailed.

Green Bay	7	7	10	0	24
Detroit	0	14	14	0	28

Attendance: 55,532

Thirty million Americans watched this game on Thanksgiving.

In the last two games vs. Detroit > Points - DET 49 GB 41

Total Yards - DET 717 GB 708

The Men's Quarterback Club "will meet Tuesday night, starting at 7:45pm. Head coach Liz Blackburn will be present along with the player of the week."¹

¹ Green Bay Press-Gazette, 11/22/54, p. 35



1919-2018

PACKERS

SAN FRANCISCO

49ers

0

12.5.1954

35

The Packers couldn't run the ball (55 yards). They also couldn't stop the 49ers who grabbed a quick lead on the second play of the game. San Francisco racked up 449 yards of offense riding the arm and the legs of quarterback Y.A. Tittle. A young Y. A. finished the game 15-18-243-2-0, and he scored on a bootleg around left end. Green Bay was outgained 459-271.

Green Bay	0	0	0	0	0
San Francisco	21	7	0	7	35
Attendance:	33,175				



PACKERS

LOS ANGELES

RAMS

27

12.12.1954

35

The Packers hoped to finish the season with a win. In the 90-degree heat, they almost pulled it off.

In the first half, Tobin Rote threw two touchdown passes and scored on a quarterback sneak. "Deacon" Dan Towler of the Rams also chalked up three first-half touchdowns to give L. A. a 21-20 lead at intermission. In the second half, the difference was Rams' quarterback Norm Van Brocklin. "The Dutchman" tossed two touchdown passes. The first came off a faked punt. Van Brocklin threw a 49-yard touchdown pass to Andy Robustelli for a 28-20 lead and the eventual winning points.



1954 Team Statistics

FINAL STANDINGS - Western Conference

	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>
Detroit	9	2	1
Chicago	8	4	0
San Francisco	7	4	1
Los Angeles	6	5	1
Green Bay	4	8	0
New York	3	9	0

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Rote
Receiving	Howton
Rushing	Reid
Scoring	Cone
Interceptions	Dillon

ALL-PRO

Dillon	Defensive Back
John Martinkovic	Defensive End
Clay Tonnemaker	Linebacker
Val Joe Walker	Defensive Back
Roger Zatkoff	Linebacker

NOTEABLE DRAFT PICKS (Round, Position)

Veryl Switzer (1, HB)
 Max McGee (5, WR)



1919 - 2019

PACKERS CENTURY

with Jim Rice

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