

Favre wins in likely Lambeau finale

NFL STANDINGS

The Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis.

If Sunday's game was the final of Brett Favre's career, at least he went down slinging. And, in his first losing season with the Green Bay Packers, at least he went out a winner as they beat the playoff-bound Seattle Seahawks 23-17 Sunday.

"If this were to be his last game, then I'm really glad I was here," said Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren, Favre's former coach in Green Bay. "He has nothing to prove to anybody."

Favre threw his first touchdown pass in the past five games, but the game still featured a few more reminders of why Favre is considering retirement. He threw another interception, his career-worst 29th of the season, and played the end of the game with a shoulder injury.

The 36-year-old said in recent weeks he is unsure whether he will play next year. He did not speak to the media after Sunday's game, an unusual move for him. Favre left the field waving to the crowd, surrounded by a swarm of photographers and others.

"I'm going to take some time and get away from the season for a bit and then talk to people here in Green Bay and then we'll see," Favre said in comments distributed by the Packers public relations staff.



Green Bay quarterback Brett Favre waves to the Lambeau Field crowd after what could be his final game with the Packers. Analysts suspect that he will retire after 14 seasons with Green Bay.

In other action

Redskins 31

Eagles 20
PHILADELPHIA — Joe Gibbs and the Washington Redskins are back in the playoffs.

Clinton Portis ran for 112 yards and two touchdowns, leading the Redskins to a hard-fought victory against Philadelphia.

Washington (10-6) clinched the NFL's final playoff spot and its first postseason berth since 1999 with its fifth straight win. The victory also eliminated Dallas from contention.

Panthers 44

Falcons 11
ATLANTA (AP) — DeShaun Foster rushed for 165 yards, and Jake Delhomme threw for two touchdowns.

Carolina (11-5) clinched one of the two NFC playoff spots still available, settling for a wild card when Tampa Bay clinched the South title with a win against New Orleans. Carolina will play at the New York Giants next week.

The Panthers didn't have to work very hard against Atlanta, which completed its second-half collapse and extended one of the most inglorious streaks in pro sports. With only two victories in their final eight games, the Falcons (8-8) not only missed the playoffs after going to the AFC championship game last season, they also kept alive the franchise's failure to post back-to-back winning seasons throughout its 40-year history.

Carolina, which reached the Super Bowl two seasons ago, got off a 1-7 start last year, came back, but was eliminated with a 21-18 home loss to the Saints. No such worries against the banged-up, listless Falcons, who were knocked out of the playoffs the previous week with an overtime loss at Tampa Bay.

Steelers 35

Lions 21

PITTSBURGH — Jerome Bettis, playing what is likely his final game in Pittsburgh, matched his career high with three touchdown runs, none longer than 5 yards, as the Steelers overcame some sloppy defensive play to secure their 10th playoff appearance in 14 seasons under coach Bill Cowher.

Bettis, the fifth-leading rusher in NFL history, ran for just 41 yards as Willie Parker got most of the carries and gained 135. But Bettis scored on runs of 1, 5 and 4 yards to help the Steelers (11-5) overcome an early 14-7 deficit against the Lions (5-11), who finished another dismal season with six losses in their final seven games.

Bucs 27

Saints 13

TAMPA, Fla. — Joey Galloway caught two touchdown passes from Chris Simms as the Bucs clinched their first NFC South title in three years and guaranteed themselves a home playoff game.

Tampa Bay (11-5) was assured a playoff berth when the Giants beat the Raiders on Saturday night, but needed to beat the Saints (3-13) to finish a worst-to-first turnaround few people envisioned when the season began.

The Bucs lost 20 of 32 games and missed the playoffs the past two seasons, becoming the first team in NFL history to win the Super Bowl and then post losing records the following two years. Tampa Bay will host Washington on Saturday.

Vikings 34

Bears 10

MINNEAPOLIS — Mike Tice left the Metrodome a winner, then lost his job when he was fired as Vikings coach.

Brad Johnson passed for 247 yards and two touchdowns to lead the Vikings past the NFC North cham-

pion Bears, who sat many regulars.

Minnesota (9-7) finished with a winning record, but it was not enough to save Tice after another up-and-down season marred by a scandalous bot party during the team's bye week.

Thomas Jones ran 12 times for 62 yards in the first half to finish with 1,335 yards for Chicago (11-5), which used a dominant defense and an eight-game winning streak to take control of the division. Jones' rushing total was the highest for a Bears player other than Walter Payton and the most since Payton's 1,551 yards in 1985.

Chiefs 37

Bengals 3

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Dick Vermeil went out with a win on his home field and a loss on another field hundreds of miles away.

Larry Johnson ran for 201 yards and a career-high three scores on 21 carries, his ninth straight 100-yard game, and broke Kansas City's single-season rushing record. However, Pittsburgh's 35-21 victory against Detroit kept the Chiefs (10-6) from reaching the AFC playoffs, meaning Vermeil's decision to retire at the end of the season takes effect immediately.

Cincinnati will host Pittsburgh in a wild-card game.

49ers 20

Texans 17, OT

SAN FRANCISCO — The Houston Texans had so much to lose if they won their season finale. They nearly did it anyway.

Instead, the San Francisco 49ers salvaged some pride in their own miserable season, and the Texans got on the clock for the NFL draft in April.

Mike Adams lateraled his second interception to Ben Emanuel for a 35-yard return in overtime. Joe Nedney kicked a 33-yard field goal with 3:52 left and the 49ers earned consecutive victories for the first

time in more than two years.

But after one last loss, fans of the Texans (2-14) might have felt like the real winners. Their franchise clinched the top pick and now has the chance to choose Reggie Bush, the Heisman Trophy-winning tailback from USC who's widely expected to enter the draft.

Dolphins 28

Patriots 26

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Miami (9-7) won its sixth straight game, its longest winning streak in 13 seasons against a Patriots team which will host Jacksonville in a wild-card game Saturday night.

The Patriots staged a late comeback in which Doug Flutie converted the NFL's first successful drop kick in 64 years, according to the Web site for the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Then backup quarterback Matt Cassel cut the lead to 28-26 with a 4-yard pass to Benjamin Watson with no time left. But Cassel's pass for a 2-point conversion fell incomplete.

The 43-year-old Flutie made the NFL's first successful drop kick since Ray McLean for the Chicago Bears on Dec. 21, 1941.

Jaguars 40

Titans 13

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Jacksonville avoided another slow start and gained some much-needed momentum for the postseason. The Jaguars did it in surprising fashion, too, not needing a comeback thanks to the early work of David Garrard.

The Jaguars scored 27 points in the first half for their eighth win in the past nine games. Although all eight victories came against teams with losing records, this one felt much different than others in recent weeks.

After trailing in the second half in each of the past four games, Jacksonville (12-4) scored touchdowns on its first two possessions, took advantage of two turnovers and essentially sealed the victory on Derrick Wimbush's 6-yard TD run with 4:11 remaining in the second quarter.

Browns 20

Ravens 16

CLEVELAND — Dennis Northcutt's 62-yard punt return helped the Browns win their sixth game under first-year coach Romeo Crennel.

Earlier this season, Northcutt twice brought back punts for TDs that were nullified by penalties. After his third-quarter jaunt, he checked to be certain there were no penalty flags and waved his arms like an official.

It was the first win in the AFC North for the Browns (6-10), who were embarrassed 41-0 by Pittsburgh a week ago. They finished with two more victories under Crennel than they had in 2004. The Ravens (6-10) had won their two previous games, leading owner Steve Bisciotti to say coach Brian Billick would be back next season.

Jets 30

Bills 26

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Justin Miller returned a kickoff 95 yards for a touchdown with 5:58 remaining, and Ty Law had three interceptions.

After Buffalo went ahead on Rian Lindell's 36-yard field goal, Miller took the ensuing kickoff and tiptoed down the sideline, finally providing the special teams score the Jets (4-12) lacked all season. Buffalo (5-11) had one final shot with 47 seconds left, but Law intercepted Kelly Holcomb's deep heave.

Standings

AMERICAN CONFERENCE												
East												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
New England	10	6	0	.625	379	338						
Miami	9	7	0	.563	318	317						
Buffalo	5	11	0	.313	271	367						
N.Y. Jets	4	12	0	.250	240	355						
South												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
x-Indianapolis	14	2	0	.875	439	247						
z-Jacksonville	12	4	0	.750	361	269						
Tennessee	4	12	0	.250	299	421						
Houston	2	14	0	.125	260	431						
North												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
y-Cincinnati	11	5	0	.688	421	350						
z-Pittsburgh	11	5	0	.688	389	258						
Baltimore	6	10	0	.375	265	299						
Cleveland	6	10	0	.375	232	301						
West												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
y-Denver	13	3	0	.813	395	258						
Kansas City	10	6	0	.625	403	325						
San Diego	9	7	0	.563	418	312						
Oakland	4	13	0	.250	290	383						
NATIONAL CONFERENCE												
East												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
y-N.Y. Giants	11	5	0	.688	422	314						
z-Washington	10	6	0	.625	359	293						
Dallas	9	6	0	.600	315	288						
Philadelphia	6	10	0	.375	310	388						
South												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
y-Tampa Bay	11	5	0	.688	300	274						
z-Carolina	11	5	0	.688	391	259						
Dallas	8	8	0	.500	351	341						
New Orleans	3	13	0	.188	235	398						
North												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
y-Chicago	11	5	0	.688	260	202						
Minnesota	9	7	0	.563	306	344						
Detroit	5	11	0	.313	254	345						
Green Bay	4	12	0	.250	298	344						
West												
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA							
x-Seattle	13	3	0	.813	452	271						
St. Louis	5	10	0	.333	343	419						
Arizona	5	11	0	.313	311	387						
San Francisco	4	12	0	.250	239	428						
x-clinched conference												
y-clinched division												
z-clinched wild card												
Saturday's games												
Denver 23, San Diego 7												
N.Y. Jets 30, Buffalo 26												
Carolina 44, Atlanta 11												
Pittsburgh 35, Detroit 21												
Indianapolis 17, Arizona 13												
Green Bay 23, Seattle 17												
Miami 28, New England 26												
Kansas City 37, Cincinnati 3												
Cleveland 20, Baltimore 16												
Tampa Bay 27, New Orleans 13												
San Francisco 20, Houston 17, OT												
Jacksonville 40, Tennessee 13												
Minnesota 34, Chicago 10												
Washington 31, Philadelphia 20												
St. Louis at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.												
Sunday's games												
Washington at Tampa Bay, 4:30 p.m. (WRTV-Channel 6)												
Jacksonville at New England, 8 p.m. (WRTV-Channel 6)												
Carolina at New York Giants, 1 p.m. (WXIN-Channel 59)												
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati, 4:30 p.m. (WISH-Channel 8)												
Divisional playoffs												
Times TBA												
Saturday, Jan. 14												
AFC game at Denver or Indianapolis (WISH-Channel 8)												
NFC game at Chicago or Seattle (WXIN-Channel 59)												
Sunday, Jan. 15												
AFC game at Denver or Indianapolis (WISH-Channel 8)												
NFC game at Chicago or Seattle (WXIN-Channel 59)												
Conference Championships												
Times TBA												
Sunday, Jan. 22												
AFC game (WISH-Channel 8)												
NFC game (WXIN-Channel 59)												
Super Bowl												
Sunday, Feb. 5												
Detroit												
AFC champion vs. NFC champion, 6:30 p.m. (WRTV-Channel 6)												
Pro Bowl												
Sunday, Feb. 12												
At Honolulu												
AFC vs. NFC, 6 p.m. (ESPN)												

• Winning

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

"It was huge," said Sorgi, Manning's understudy the past two seasons. "It was huge for me, it was huge for the team, it was a confidence-builder, (and) coach was coming back.

"We couldn't win when he was away, but we won when he's here."

The win halted a two-game losing streak and gives the top-seeded Colts a boost heading into the playoffs. Their last win was Dec. 11 at Jacksonville. They had lost their previous home game, Dec. 18, against San Diego.

With home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs already sewn up, the Colts rested most of their starters during last week's 28-13 loss at Seattle. Dungy didn't make the trip because of the death of his 18-year-old son, James on Dec. 22.

But Dungy returned to the team on Thursday, and winning on Sunday became a priority. The Colts did not want to take a three-game slide into the playoffs but they also did not want to risk injury to key starters.

So for the second straight

COLTS' GRADE CARD

OFFENSE

C Second unit pass protection wasn't the best; neither was run support. But backup quarterback Jim Sorgi was poised enough to get the job done.

DEFENSE

A Two key goal-line stands by second unit, one at the end of the first half and one at the end of the game, were arguably the difference.

SPECIAL TEAMS

B A solid effort in all phases but an especially effective performance on kickoff returns and coverage.

COACHING

A+ A Herculean effort in light of circumstances; offensive game plan was tailored to strengths of those who carried the load.

week, the second unit got the bulk of the work. But this time, it came through with an inspiring victory.

Indianapolis (14-2) led the entire way but didn't seal the win until the closing seconds. Arizona (5-11) marched to its 1-yard line with 22 seconds to play. But defensive tackle Larry Tripplett stopped quarterback Josh McCown on a rush up the middle just short of the goal line.

The play initially was ruled a touchdown but was reversed after an instant replay review. McCown's feet crossed the goal line but ball did not. The ball actually popped free and was

recovered by Colts linebacker Rob Morris in the end zone for a touchback.

Arizona coach Dennis Green did not dispute the result.

"Now, (McCown) didn't get in," Green said. "I don't know what took the officials so long, but the ball did not cross the plane on the first replay I saw. The ball was in his right arm, and it never crossed the plane."

"I thought he was in until I saw the replay."

Few on the Colts' sideline shared Green's initial opinion.

Manning's reaction was captured on the two giant video screens at either end of the



Colts backup quarterback Jim Sorgi waves to the RCA Dome crowd after helping lead the Colts to a win Sunday against Arizona.

dome. Wearing a Colts baseball cap, he could clearly be seen mouthing, "No way, no way."

"I'm glad that's all they got (on video)," Manning joked. "I had a few more adjectives before that. So I'm glad on TV, that's all they caught, was the, 'No way,'

It's hard to believe it was called a touchdown in the first place.

"It was a crazy, exciting finish for our team. It's a nice way to finish the regular season."

Dungy applauded the effort of the second unit, especially the defense. It not only kept the Cardinals out of the end zone on the final drive, it stopped a drive in the red zone early in the second quarter that yielded a field goal instead of a touchdown.

As a result, the Colts led 10-3 at halftime and never trailed.

"We knew we were going to use a lot of players, and to go out and get our 14th win and do it in that fashion, it was just tremendous," Dungy said. "Our second group went in there and played really well and held the fort."

Dungy also lauded Sorgi, who threw a 14-yard touchdown to tight end Ben Utecht in the first quarter and an 18-yard strike to wide receiver Troy Walters early in the third.

"I thought Jim Sorgi did an outstanding job," Dungy said. "They threw a lot of blitzes at us and basically forced us to throw, and he got the lead for us, and then our defense held it."

Sorgi played without the benefit of the Colts' top offensive weapons.

Running back Edgerrin James

was inactive, and receivers Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne played only two series.

In addition, most of Sorgi's pass protection was provided by backups. But the second-year pro from Wisconsin was unfrustrated and thoroughly delighted in the afterglow of his first NFL win, which happened to be a franchise-record 14th for the Colts.

"For me, it was huge," Sorgi said. "I played last year against Denver and last week against Seattle and played well, but just couldn't seal it, couldn't put up enough points to win."

"This week, putting up 17 points is not a lot of points, but the way they were coming after us blitzing everybody, you've got to take what you can get. Today, it was good enough."

For the Cardinals, McCown completed 31 of 42 for 297 yards, including a 25-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald in the third quarter. Kicker Neil Rackers added field goals of 28 and 42, yards breaking the NFL single-season record for field goals, in the process.

Rackers missed only two field goals attempts all season and finished with 40. The previous record was 39, shared by Jeff Wilkins (St. Louis) and Olindo Mare (Miami).

live. play. prosper.

Auto Loans
Recreational Vehicle Loans
Home Equity Loans

LINCOLN BANK: A New Year. A New Perspective.
FDIC Insured