

# Packers QB Favre not ready to retire

By CHRIS JENKINS  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## GREEN BAY, Wis.

With subzero temperatures descending and a hated division rival playing in the Super Bowl, Green Bay Packers fans received an unexpected jolt of good news Friday.

Brett Favre is back.

Packers general manager Ted Thompson said the three-time MVP called him to say he was "going to give it another shot" and return for his 17th NFL season, thus bringing his now-annual flirtation with retirement to an end far earlier than he had in the previous two offseasons.

"I am so excited about coming back," the quarterback said Friday on the Web site of the Sun Herald in Biloxi, Miss. "We have a good nucleus of young players. We were 8-8 last year, and that's encouraging."

Thompson said Favre, 37, knew it was better for the team to make a decision earlier than later.

"There were fewer uncertainties going into this offseason," Thomp-

"I am so excited about coming back. We have a good nucleus of young players."

Brett Favre

Packers quarterback on announcing he will return for a 17th season

son said. "Last year there was a coaching change and other things that I think they had to work through, but you'll have to ask him specifically about that."

"But all along, I mean, he's a football guy, he's a coach's son, so he understands a football team."

Thompson said Favre didn't give him a specific reason why he was returning, but Thompson figured it was a sign that he is happy with the direction the team is headed.

"In our conversations prior to the end of the season, I knew he was having a good time and he liked the team," Thompson said.

Favre seemed to echo those comments to the Biloxi newspaper.

"My offensive line looks good; the defense played good down the stretch," Favre said. "I'm excited about playing for a talented young football team."

Thompson said he was in a meeting Friday morning when Favre called. Thompson said Favre did not give him a commitment beyond 2007 and might still have the offseason ankle surgery he skipped out on the day after the season ended.

It had been shaping up as a rough offseason for Packers fans. Favre led many to believe he intended to retire when he became emotional during a television interview after the Packers beat the Chicago Bears in the regular-season finale. And then the rival Bears marched through the playoffs to earn a spot in the Super Bowl.

Packers chairman and CEO Bob Harlan said he already is receiving faxes from delighted Packers fans around the country.

"I think this helps our fans a great deal," Harlan said. "They could see the direction the team was going in

last year, and with Brett coming back, it's even better."

Messages left with Favre's agent, Bus Cook, were not immediately returned.

Packers coach Mike McCarthy was on vacation and would not be available for comment, the team said.

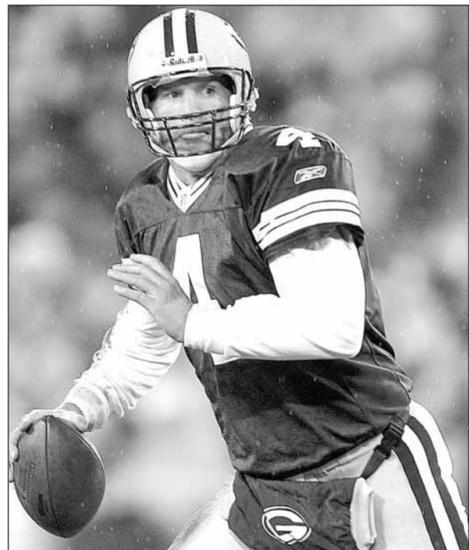
Commissioner Roger Goodell said the news was great for the league.

"He's obviously been an incredible performer for the NFL," said Goodell, in Miami for the Super Bowl.

Favre has started 257 consecutive games including the playoffs, an NFL record for quarterbacks. Favre broke Dan Marino's record for career completions (4,967) in 2006 and is closing in on Marino's marks for career touchdown passes (420) and yards passing (61,361).

As he has done in the past several offseasons, Favre returned to his home in Mississippi after the season to deliberate about his future.

Favre's accomplishments include three league MVP awards and throwing two touchdown passes in a 35-21 victory against New England in the 1997 Super Bowl.



AP PHOTO  
Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre said Friday that he plans to return for a 17th NFL season.

# Commissioner concerned about off-field incidents

By BARRY WILNER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## MIAMI

Saying one incident is too many, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell wants players to stay out of trouble and will meet with them to figure out how to do that.

Though the league's black eye this season was the main topic of Goodell's first Super Bowl news conference, he also talked about concussions, insisting a player's health takes precedence over football issues.

Referring to a spate of player arrests and the shooting death of Broncos cornerback Darrent Williams, Goodell said, "We have to do something about it. It's a mutually important issue."



AP PHOTO  
Roger Goodell gave the commissioner's annual state-of-the-NFL address in Miami on Friday.

"We have to educate our players to the issues out there," he said Friday. "We are raised to a higher standard in the NFL. We must make sure the players are more accountable and our clubs are more accountable."

Goodell and NFL players' union chief Gene Upshaw will meet with players to gauge their perspective on what is happening, Goodell said.

In the past few months, nine Cincinnati Bengals players have been arrested. One player in Sunday's Super Bowl, Chicago Bears defensive tackle Tank Johnson, still faces weapons-related charges and needed permission from an Illinois judge just to travel to the title game against the Indianapolis Colts.

"I don't see it happening in droves. I think it's just a few, but that's a few too many," said Goodell, who replaced Paul Tagliabue as commissioner in September. "We recognize some players don't do what we want them to do, and

when that happens, we have the means to deal with it."

Responding to reports that former Patriots linebacker Ted Johnson was forced to practice with a concussion, Goodell praised team trainers and league doctors who deal with concussions and said, "I certainly hope that our coaches always are looking out for the medical well-being of the players."

He said he needed more information on the Patriots' situation before commenting about it.

He commended the players for taking an active role in trying to eliminate use of illegal substances. Goodell also said not allowing players who are suspended under the drug policy to garner postseason awards is "a huge priority for us."

San Diego linebacker Shawn Merriman made the All-Pro team, will play in the Pro Bowl and was considered a front-runner for Defensive Player of the Year despite sitting out four games for violating the substance policy. Several players, including Miami end Jason Taylor, who was voted the top defensive player, criticized Merriman receiving such honors.

"Our players are the ones who stood up and said they don't want this in our game and that somebody who violates this doesn't deserve a Pro Bowl spot," Goodell said.

On other issues, Goodell:

- Expressed confidence that the league and union will continue to have labor peace; the col-

lective bargaining agreement runs through 2010. Owners have an option of voiding the CBA in 2008 to possibly restructure the way they and the union do business in the salary-cap era.

• Said the league is conducting its own investigation of urine or blood testing for human growth hormone.

• Addressed complaints from retired players about their pensions, saying, "We're very concerned to see one of our former players who made this game great have medical issues. We have to sit down and be creative. We need to address that directly with them."

• Reiterated the league's opposition to gambling and keeping a strong line between the NFL and sports betting.

# James enjoys watching friends succeed

By DANA OPPEDISANO  
SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

## MIAMI

Edgerrin James heard the prognosticators, the ones who were quick to slam the Indianapolis Colts' championship window shut the morning he signed his \$30 million contract with Arizona in March.



JAMES

Peyton and Tony couldn't win the big one, they said; Marvin wasn't getting any younger; and now the best quarterback in football was relying on a career backup and a rookie to keep defenses honest?

James, like the rest of the

world, knows how that turned out, and the four-time Pro Bowler is reminded with every turn he takes in the city he adopted after leaving the tomato fields of Immokalee, Fla., a decade ago.

"It's all part of the game," said James, who learned to view the NFL as a business when the Colts slapped him with a franchise tag, one that essentially prevented him from going to another team, before his final season in Indianapolis.

"You still have to feel happy for all your friends being in the big game," he said. "You still want them to finish the job."

James, the 28-year-old who ran for 1,159 yards and six scores for the disappointing Cardinals (5-11) this season, is maintaining a strong public front, even as he professionally toils in the desert

while his former team plays for the Lombardi Trophy on Sunday.

"You're happy because you know all the hard work they put into it," he said. "As far as me, I never worry about me. I'm cool. I'm Edge. I never worry about that stuff."

"I'm a person who's more happy for others, you know, because everything that happens or goes on with me, it takes care of itself. I never, ever worry about me."

Some of his longtime teammates aren't so sure, even if Edge is rightfully acting like he helped them scale the NFL mountain.

"I'm sure he's a little disappointed in his heart, but we know he's very proud and he's very happy," said Dwight Freeney, a teammate for four seasons. "It's like he's still one of us, though."

"When we made it, he made it.

Obviously he's not on the team anymore, but we're all going to celebrate with him like he is."

In the meantime, James is helping with the pre-celebration all week.

He met with Freeney and fellow University of Miami alum Reggie Wayne shortly after the Colts made their late arrival into Fort Lauderdale on Monday.

Then, like most high-profile NFL personalities, James has been busy running the hype machine, appearing on camera for NFL Network, plus smiling and waving for everyone else who stops him on South Beach.

"He's just Edge being Edge," said Wayne, who played with James for seven years dating back to the pair's days in the Orange Bowl. "EJ helped pave this way."

# Player says concussion got worse during practice

The Associated Press

## NEW YORK

Former Patriots linebacker Ted Johnson said coach Bill Belichick subjected him to hard hits in practice while he was recovering from a concussion, against the advice of a trainer.

Johnson, who helped the Patriots win three Super Bowl titles before retiring two years ago, told The New York Times that a collision with another player during that 2002 practice led to another concussion.

And, after sustaining additional concussions during the next three seasons, he now forgets people's names, misses appointments and suffers from depression and an addiction to amphetamines.

"There's something wrong with me," the 34-year-old Johnson said in Friday's Times. "There's something wrong with my brain. And I know when it started."

The Boston Globe, which is owned by the Times, ran a similar story.

Johnson, who played 10 years in the NFL, said he began to

deteriorate in 2002 with a concussion during an exhibition game against the New York Giants.

He sustained another concussion four days later after Belichick prodded him to participate in a full-contact practice, even though he was supposed to be avoiding hits, Johnson said.

The next month, with their relationship already strained, Johnson confronted Belichick about the practice after the coach asked him to meet in his office.

"I told him, 'You played God with my health. You knew I

shouldn't have been cleared to play,'" Johnson told the Globe.

Belichick told the Globe he got no cue from Johnson in practice that day that he was hesitant about participating in the full-contact drill.

"If Ted felt so strongly that he didn't feel he was ready to practice with us, he should have told me," Belichick said.

Patriots owner Robert Kraft, in Miami for the Super Bowl, said he wasn't qualified to speak on concussions, adding that Johnson is one of his favorite players.

# Lineman among Hall hopefuls

The Associated Press

## MIAMI

Not often is an offensive lineman best described as versatile. For Bruce Matthews, it's the perfect description.

Matthews spent 19 seasons with the Oilers/Titans franchise, playing more games than any positional player in NFL history when he retired in 2001. He did it as a guard, tackle and center.

He did it so well that he is the only first-time eligible player to make the final cut in this year's Pro Football Hall of Fame voting.

He is one of 16 former players who are finalists. From that group at least three but no more than six candidates will be picked today by a panel of 40 voters.

Other finalists are tackle Gary Zimmerman; guards Bob Kuechenberg, Russ Grimm and Gene Hickerson, running back Thurman Thomas; wide receiver Andre Reed; defensive ends Fred Dean and Richard Dent; linebackers Andre Tippett and Derrick Thomas; punter Ray Guy; receivers Michael Irvin and Art Monk; cornerback Roger Wehrli; and tight end Charlie Sanders.

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**White River Twp. Government Building, 4800 W. Stones Crossing Road**

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