

SUPER BOWL XXXI

Packers take spotlight; Patriots seek recognition

■ **SUPER BOWL:** Green Bay claims it's not overly confident

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — One team has seized the spotlight and enjoyed the glare. The other is seeking both as an affirmation of its status.

How come it's the team from that small town in middle America that gets nearly all the attention, and the guys from a northeastern hub who can't get noticed?

The Green Bay Packers, staking a strong claim for replacing the Dallas Cowboys as America's Team, have the stars and the stories, the heroes and the history.

Brett Favre is a two-time MVP who has overcome an addiction to pain-killers and a painful offseason of personal tragedies. Reggie White is the career sacks leader and an ordained minister whose church in Tennessee was torched a year ago. They have led the famed franchise to its first Super Bowl in 29 years, reviving tales of Lombardi and Lambeau, of the Ice Bowl and 11 NFL titles.

They clearly have arrived at the center of the sports stage.

"It seems like the whole world is watching," defensive tackle Santana Dotson said. "The whole world would like to hear your views on different situations and what you're thinking about the game. I think there are several million people that would love to trade places with me on Sunday."

Of course, those millions couldn't do the job the Packers have done to earn the acclaim they are receiving.

Or deal with it so well, offensive coordinator Fritz Shurmur said Thursday.

"Because of everybody anointing us as the Super Bowl team — everybody but us — I'm impressed with how we've handled

it," Shurmur admitted. "We'd hardly been around the block, and all these people were saying we would be here."

"This team has done a marvelous job of handling every situation and all the predictions. You talk about character and dignity and doing their job with all these things going on around them, it all applies to this team."

It's all been written and broadcast, dissected and analyzed. Yet, the Packers claim, no one is getting a big head or being carried away on the stream of adulation. Instead, they are sharing the praise.

"We have had an unselfish group for the last two years, and I'm sure it has helped us win games," coach Mike Holmgren said.

While the New England Patriots seem to get along just as well together, they do it in relative anonymity. Except for coach Bill Parcells, 2-0 in Super Bowls with the New York Giants, and perhaps quarterback Drew Bledsoe — for being the top overall draft pick in 1993 and not for the kind of things Favre has achieved as a pro — the Patriots

are a somewhat fearless bunch.

Bledsoe sees positives and negatives in the situation.

"No. 1, we don't have the same amount of demands on us as the Packers do," Bledsoe said, "and No. 2, we are using it as motivation. If you're a regular guy, all you see and hear is Packers."

The Patriots sure would like to get some of that recognition, and they understand the best way to do so is to win Sunday. That, of course, is a king-sized challenge because they are 14-point underdogs and the AFC has lost 12 straight Super Bowls.

"It's kind of frustrating that we're not getting the respect that they are," Patriots cornerback Ty Law said, "because we are a good football team, too. I don't think anybody has recognized that. I think a lot of guys are going to take that personally and, hopefully, that will help them fuel the fire and make them drive to want to win this thing."

And win away the spotlight.

Don't touch that dial; halftime is half the fun

■ **CELEBRATION:** The NFL is spending \$1.2 million on "The Blues Brothers Bash"

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — If you think a halftime show is a bunch of people tooting trombones and marching in precise cadence, you probably think football is just a game.

The NFL wants you to believe that neither of the above is true.

"Some time ago the NFL decided that the Super Bowl is one of the great entertainment spectacles," said Dennis Despie, president of Select Productions International, producers of the Super Bowl halftime show for the sixth time. "The halftime show is just an extension of the total extravaganza."

This year the NFL is spending \$1.2 million on "The Blues Brothers Bash" featuring James Brown, ZZ Top, Dan Aykroyd, James Belushi and John Goodman, the latest incarnation of the singing group that started on "Saturday Night Live."

In these days of superstars being delivered by helicopter, booming fireworks, dancers by the hundreds and sets that put Broadway musicals to shame, it's hard to believe the Super Bowl halftime show was pretty standard stuff for the first 24 years.

Until 1990, the Super Bowl halftime consisted of college marching bands and maybe the singing group "Up With Peo-

ple" for a couple of uplifting numbers for the folks in the stands. Then Despie decided the game, which also was in the Superdome that year, needed a little something extra to compete with the massive building.

Despie used a giant riverboat as a stage and put entertainers Pete Fountain and Doug Kershaw on board for halftime. Since then, things have been getting bigger and glitzier every year.

The NFL got serious about the halftime show after Fox Network aired a live segment of "In Living Color" in 1992. Fox's effort got some viewers to flip channels and made league officials anxious to stop any future encroachments.

"It raised awareness that more emphasis needed to be put on the halftime show," Despie said. "Michael Jackson was the headliner for the show the next year, so you can see a certain determination not to lose the rating war."

In the past six years, the halftime show has had higher ratings than the game twice, and it has been within 0.5 of the game ratings four times, Despie said.

This year's showcase of soul, blues and rock & roll was conceived by Radio City Productions. The 10-minute show will have 1,000 performers and more than 500 crew members. It will be seen by almost 80,000 people in the Superdome and an estimated 800 million television viewers worldwide.

Favre's hometown celebrates

■ **PLAYER:** The small town is now famous for producing the Packers' quarterback

The Associated Press

KILN, Miss. — The first time Brett Favre brought his Southern Mississippi roommate home for a visit, Chris Ryals thought he had stepped into a scene from "Deliverance."

"There was one flashing light and a sign," Ryals recalled. "I said, 'This is it?' I thought I was from nowhere. He's from nowhere."

Compared to Kiln — pronounced Kill, and called The Kill — Ryals' hometown of Purvis, Miss., population 2,000, is a metropolis. Kiln has about 1,200 residents, not counting the creepy crawly ones. "There are snakes and mosquitoes that can carry you away," Ryals said.

So what's there to do in Kiln? "The VFW had slot machines," he said. "There was not a whole lot else to show off. There's not a lot of scenery there."

Favre directed his buddy up a side road through some brush and pines to the family homestead. When Mark McHale, the Southern Miss coach who recruited the quarterback, visited the house, one thought crossed his mind. "I said to myself, 'Why do they live back in here?'"

Because it's home for Bonita and Irvin Favre, that's why.

"It's kind of laid back here, nothing flashy," Irvin Favre said. "There's good hunting and good eating places. If you live here, you don't want to leave."

To get to Kiln, travel east of New Orleans about 50 miles. Past Slidell, where Wild Bill's Fireworks is offering a buy-one-get-one-free sale, turn north on state highway 603. When the road goes

from four lanes to two and you see Rooster's Restaurant and Deli, you're there.

The town library looks like a one-room schoolhouse. The gas station sells regular for \$1.21 a gallon and premium for \$1.37. Rooster's specializes in seafood, crawfish etoufee and shrimp creole. If you're looking for a little down-and-dirty setting, head for The Broke Spoke, decorated in alligator and rattlesnake skins.

See? Ryals wasn't kidding. Irvin and Bonita raised

three boys in this sleepy town. All of them played quarterback for Irwin, who coached football at Hancock North Central High School. "That's because I got tired of being the quarterback myself," Irwin said. "I'd go out there and say 'Where's so-and-so today?' and they'd say, 'Oh, he's not here.' So I got to be the quarterback. I decided to make my boys quarterbacks."

All three Favre quarterbacks were also baseball pitchers. Brett had three important things going for him, according to his father. "He has a strong arm. He's smart with good football sense, and he's a big kid."

That was what McHale heard while recruiting for Southern Miss a decade ago. So he moseyed over to Kiln for a look-see.

"What I saw was an average, slow, white boy, who kept handing the ball off to the tailback," he said. "I think he threw two passes."

Hardly enough to judge him by. "I told Irwin. He told me to come back the next week and he'd open it up," McHale said. "I think he threw four passes the next time."

Irwin scratched his '50s crew-cut when he was asked about Hancock North Central's offense.

"That's how we got by in high school," he said. "We ran a misdirection offense at those big, sloppy kids. We're not good enough to win throwing the football every time. I was out to win games, not showcase Brett Favre."

McHale arrived early enough to watch warmups and decided the kid from Kiln had a major league arm. There wasn't much recruiting competition for him, though.

"Not a lot of Division IA schools look at our kids," Irwin Favre said. Brett Favre spent his time at Southern Miss much the way he did at The Kill. He'd go on road trips carrying nothing more than his toothbrush, figuring he could borrow the other necessities like toothpaste and a hairbrush from Ryals.

There were frequent battles for the TV remote. "He liked the Discovery channel," Ryals said. "I guess those animals reminded him of home."

Favre is a T-shirt, shorts and flip-flops sort of guy. "That's Brett," his father said. "He doesn't want to be anyone but Brett."

The big money he earns as an NFL quarterback has not changed his buddy, Ryals said. One time, they were attending a wedding of a friend in Birmingham, Ala. Favre said he needed some money and went to an automatic teller machine.

"He came back with a \$5 bill," Ryals said. "He had \$67,000 in the account and he comes back with a \$5 bill. He had to pay \$2 to get that \$5. That's Brett Favre."

It's unclear whether Favre ever had any experience with ATMs in Kiln. It's unclear whether there are any ATMs in Kiln.

"Hope you enjoy your visit," Irwin Favre said.

Then he turned to one of the locals and said, "Let's go fishin'."

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