

NFL

Bennett brothers reunite when Seahawks, Packers meet

By GENARO C. ARMAS
Associated Press



• Sunday, 1:25 p.m.
• at Lambeau Field
• TV: FOX

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Packers tight end Martellus Bennett plans to give his older brother, Seattle Seahawks defensive end Michael Bennett, a hug when he sees him this weekend.

Recent events off the field make the high-profile season opener Sunday between Green Bay and Seattle seem trivial by comparison.

Martellus Bennett, who went to high school in Taylor, Texas, has been working to raise money and supplies for residents of flood-ravaged parts of that state. And this week, Michael Bennett released a statement alleging racially motivated excessive force by the Las Vegas police.

"Sometimes, a hug is the best thing you can give," Martellus Bennett said as his

voice started cracking. He talks to his brother several times a week.

"Two seconds this way, two seconds that way, the whole thing is different," he added. "So for me, I'll just be happy to see my brother."

Once the game kicks off, the Bennett brothers probably won't have to face each other on the field. But the matchup between Seattle's tough-as-nails defense and Green Bay's potent offense should be intriguing.

The Seahawks have added tackle Sheldon Richardson in a trade from

the New York Jets to a star-studded defense that also has All-Pro linebacker Bobby Wagner, safety Earl Thomas and cornerback Richard Sherman.

Bennett is making his debut for the Packers, the latest inviting target for two-time NFL MVP quarterback Aaron Rodgers. The game could be much more competitive than the teams' last meeting in December, when Thomas missed the 38-10 loss to Green Bay in December because of a broken leg.

"You remember the score? Because I don't," defensive end Cliff Avril said. "I just think watching the film you've got to make the corrections, understand what worked for them, and you've got to understand they might try and do that again."

Other notes and things

to watch ahead of Sunday's game:

EARL IS BACK: Thomas appears to be fully recovered from the injury that sidelined him late last season. The free safety is such a key cog in Seattle because of an ability to cover so much ground in the defensive backfield. The 66-yard touchdown pass that Packers receiver Davante Adams had last year against Seattle might not have occurred if Thomas was on the field.

"Absolutely, that's a big difference," Packers wideout Jordy Nelson said. "He's smart the way he can read things. The ground that he can cover makes a big difference for what they do in the back end."

READING RODGERS: Few quarterbacks are better than Rodgers at sensing pressure in the pocket. Throw in the solid protection Rodgers

receives from his starting offensive line, along with his knack for maneuvering out of trouble, and the Seahawks will be hard-pressed to get to the quarterback, even with all their talent on defense.

"He might even laugh at you after he throws a bomb after you miss a sack. He's definitely pretty calm back there. Those are the guys you get frustrated with," Avril said.

SPLITTING CARRIES: Seattle would like to see Thomas Rawls be the primary ball carrier and Eddie Lacy as a complement. But Rawls is still trying to get fully healthy after being slowed late in the preseason by a high-ankle injury, meaning Lacy could be the No. 1 back in his return to Green Bay. Seahawks coach Pete Carroll said he would be fine with that scenario and said Lacy can handle 20

to 25 carries in a game.

"He's had a great run with us getting to this point. He's done everything we have asked of him, for weeks and weeks now," Carroll said.

REPLACING LACY: Taking Lacy's place in the Packers' backfield is Ty Montgomery, the converted receiver going into his first full season as a running back. The running game got off to a slow start in the preseason, but picked up toward the end of August. The Packers also like the potential Montgomery's rookie backups, Jamaal Williams and Aaron Jones, showed in the preseason.

Montgomery's pass-catching ability presents a matchup problem for defenses.

"Ty Montgomery is our starting running back, so his development is over. It's time to go win games," coach Mike McCarthy said.

Auto Racing

Top drivers facing win or else scenario in regular season finale at Richmond

By HANK KURZ JR.
Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Dale Earnhardt Jr. says he hasn't imagined a fairy tale finish to his last NASCAR regular season.

Retiring at the end of the season, the sport's most popular driver is one of several racers whose only hope for getting into the 10-race playoffs that begin next weekend is by winning Saturday night at Richmond Raceway.

But even Earnhardt seems to realize the likelihood of his 27th career victory — and fourth on the

0.75-mile oval — isn't high. It has been 62 races since his last victory, at Phoenix in November 2015, and he said Friday after practice that he has what feels like "a sixth- to 12th-place car."

He added: "If we could come out of here with a win, it would be quite the surprise, not only for all you guys, but us included."

Earnhardt's laid-back attitude contrasts greatly with those of other drivers in his same shoes.

Joey Logano, for example, won the Cup race here in April, but then became the first driver to have a race "encumbered," NASCAR



Earnhardt Jr.



Logano

parlance for being allowed to keep the victory, but without the playoff points or the automatic berth in the postseason because of an infraction discovered after the race.

He has struggled ever since. "We are in a do-or-die situation,"

Logano said. "Anytime you can win a race in that situation, there is no better feeling than that. Also returning here after our win in the spring and obviously the drama that followed, it would be very nice to be able to get back in victory lane and prove a point. I don't see any reason why we can't."

Logano, who was second to Jimmie Johnson in the final standings last season, also likes the way his team is approaching the challenge.

"This is a time that shows your true character," he said. "You can be either down on yourself and

be beat before you show up to the race track or show up here ready to go and have the right attitude and confidence that we are going to win. That is where the team feels like they are at. I am proud I am with a team like that."

Other drivers needing to win to qualify for the playoffs include Clint Bowyer and rookies Erik Jones and Daniel Suarez. The three non-winners ahead of them, and thus most vulnerable to being knocked out of the postseason by a first-time winner, are rookie Chase Elliott, Jamie McMurray and 2003 series champion Matt Kenseth.

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