

1972

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Meet also Steve Schumer of Gillette, New Jersey, a member of the Packers FAN Hall of Fame, a passionate advocate for that 1972 team.

“This is my all-time favorite team,” said Schumer, who was 15 in 1972. “I thought if there was going to be a 50-year celebration of this team, I would do everything I could to climb the fence and be there.”

There will be no need for fence climbing because the Packers haven’t planned anything special for that team.

The team was one of 17 in club history, including the last three, that won a division or conference title but not a league championship.

“I don’t think they’ve been overlooked any more than the 1938 or 1960 or 1995 or 2003 or 2011 or any of the (11) other Packers teams that matched their accomplishments,” team historian Cliff Christl wrote in a Packers.com article about the team.

That may be true, but Schumer and some players from that team think that maybe they accomplished more than the others because of the circumstances under which they played.

Schumer believes that had pretty much anyone but Dan Devine coached the Packers, they would have met and maybe defeated the unbeaten Miami Dolphins in the Super Bowl. His might be a minority opinion, but it’s not as outlandish as it sounds. The Packers did beat the Dolphins in preseason, when starters on both teams played into the third quarter.

“We just kicked their butts,” said quarterback Scott Hunter. “Their defensive front just wasn’t as big and strong as our offensive front was, and taking on our offensive front and (running backs) MacArthur Lane and John Brockington, it was just a chore for them. I felt like physically, with our running game, we’d have an edge over them.”

Following on the heels of the Lombardi years was not easy

Vince Lombardi retired as Packers coach after Super Bowl II and, as could be expected, following in his footsteps was not easy. Phil Bengtson coached three years and had a 20-21-1 record.

Bengtson was followed by Devine, who led the Packers to a 4-8-2 record in 1971. Key additions to the 1972 team helped turn that record around, including Buchanon, Jim Hill and Chester Marcol.

But there were two key subtractions, too: Gale Gillingham, considered by many to be the best lineman on the team, if not in the NFL, and tight end Rich McGeorge, whose absence was a blow to the passing game, were both injured in the second game of the season.

Pro Football Hall of Famer Dave Robinson, a key player for the Lombardi-led Packers who played his last season in Green Bay in 1972, said that year’s squad might have been the best team in the league.

“It was a good team,” Robinson said. “In fact, I’ll tell you something. I’ll go to my grave saying if we hadn’t blown the (playoff) game in Washington, we would have won the Super Bowl.”

Defenses win championships — and the Packers had one of the best

The ’72 Packers ranked in the top five in numerous defensive categories, including second to the Dolphins in yards allowed, by a difference of 177 yards, second against the run, and first in fewest touchdown passes allowed, seven. The defense held opposing teams to two touchdowns or less in six of 14 games.

“That ’72 team was a terrific defense. We go back to that old adage, offense sells tickets, defense wins championships,” Hunter said.

Middle linebacker Jim Carter and Hunter give coach Don Doll credit for developing an outstanding defensive backfield, which included cornerbacks Ken Ellis and rookie Buchanon, and safeties Al Matthews and Hill.

The defensive line included Bob Brown, Mike McCoy, Alden Roche and Clarence Williams. The chief linebackers were Robinson, Carter and Fred Carr. Ray Nitschke was there, too, playing his final season.

Christl said Brown, in his best moments, could toss blockers aside like Reggie White would years later. Both men made the Pro Bowl that year.

Devine made plenty of inexplicable decisions that year (indeed, every year), including moving Gillingham from the offensive line to the defensive line, where he was injured in the second game and knocked out for the year.

’72 offense had the rushing power of Lombardi teams, but with better kicking

The Packers offense in 1972 was running backs Brockington and Lane and kicker Marcol. But that was a ton.

Brockington ran for 1,072 yards, Lane gained 821 and Marcol set a team record for field goals as a rookie.

“I had (Brockington) and (Lane) behind me, had an excellent offensive line, great field goal kicker, so there wasn’t really a reason to throw that much,” Hunter said.

With the loss of tight end McGeorge, Hunter was limited to Carroll Dale, in his last year with the Packers, and rookie Leland Glass and his two running backs to throw to. He had a 43.3% completion average, completing 86 passes for six touchdowns and nine interceptions. By comparison, Aaron Rodgers completed 80 passes for eight touchdowns in the first four games of 2021.

“There was no replacing (McGeorge),” Hunter said. “He was just a big part of the passing game. His injury sure cost us and me a terrific receiver.

Quarterbacks coach Bart Starr and Hunter had an excellent relationship. Both had played for Bear Bryant at Alabama, so they had common experiences and spoke a common language with the same accent.

“(Starr coaching) was a great scenario for me. That was a fairly veteran team and I was the weak link as a second-year quarterback, if you want to look for a weak link in the whole thing,” Hunter said. “But having (Starr) on the sidelines, calling plays and doing what he did with me, ... I was kind of an extension of (Starr).”

The Packers were 25th in the 26-team league in passing in 1972, but it can be said that, with Brockington and Lane and few receivers, it wasn’t all Hunter’s fault. He brought something else to the field though: leadership.

“Hunter was a very strong leader. Very strong. That counts for something,” Brockington said.

Carter agreed, in words that could have described an earlier Packers quarterback who now was Hunter’s QB coach.

“Hunter wasn’t a bullshitter and he wasn’t somebody trying to run the show. He was one of the guys. And it helped to be a quarterback like that,” Carter said. “Those offensive linemen, that was a tough group. You had to win their respect, and I think Hunter did.”

Chester Marcol brought a new dimension to kicking game, setting team record for field goals

A rookie, Marcol changed the calculus for the Packers, whose kicking game in previous years was worse than awful. In 1972, he set a team record with 33 field goals. The record has since been tied by Ryan Longwell and Mason Crosby, but Marcol got there first, 28 years before Longwell.

The goal post was 10 yards closer for Marcol, being on the goal line, but he was often kicking off hardpacked dirt or slippery mud on baseball infields.

“Chester, as goofy as he was, he could kick. He really had a great year. He had a great career in Green Bay, but that year he was really good,” Carter said.

Hunter, modest about his own role, gave Starr credit for being an excellent play-caller and the defense for keeping them in games, but he also knew what they had in Marcol.

“Anytime we got within the 35-yard-line, I wasn’t going to do anything stupid throwing the football and cost a possession,” he said. “The field goal was almost a sure thing with Chester being the kicker and the goal post being on the goal line.”

Three games, two wins and a loss, that defined the Packers’ season

The Packers’ season can be encapsulated by three road games against three



Green Bay Packers quarterback Scott Hunter (16) hands the ball to John Brockington (42) as MacArthur Lane (36) blocks. The Packers defeated the San Francisco 49ers 34-24 on Nov. 5, 1972, at Milwaukee County Stadium in Milwaukee. GREEN BAY PRESS-GAZETTE

teams they played twice that year — Detroit, Minnesota and Washington.

On Oct. 16, in a Monday night game in Detroit, the Packers fell behind 17-0 in the second quarter and trailed 17-7 at the half. The defense held the Lions to two field goals in the second half as touchdowns by Ellis on a punt return and Glass on a pass from Hunter sparked the Packers’ 24-23 victory.

“We just kept chipping away at it,” Hunter said. “Kenny Ellis had probably the turnaround play of the entire season. His punt return, about an 80-yard punt return ... that was the play that the whole season pivoted around.”

The Packers started the year 4-1, including a 16-13 victory over the Super Bowl champion Dallas Cowboys in week three at County Stadium in Milwaukee, which was an early clue as to how good they were. The comeback victory over Detroit cemented that confidence.

“That was the catalyst of knowing we had a good team,” Buchanon said.

On Dec. 10, in the next-to-last regular-season game, the Packers traveled to Minneapolis to play the formidable Vikings, who won at Lambeau Field 27-13 in October. The 8-4 Packers led the Vikings by one game at the top of the division with two games left.

“We knew what was at stake and we knew the caliber team that we had,” Ellis said. “We had a good game plan defensively and offensively that we were able to execute to perfection almost.”

The Packers trailed 7-0 at the half, but dominated the final two quarters, winning 23-7. Hunter and Lane scored touchdowns and Marcol kicked three field goals on one of the most frigid days since the Ice Bowl five years earlier. It was the fifth-coldest game in NFL history.

“As cold as it was, something like 4 below zero at kickoff and went down from there, I knew what we had to do, and that was run the football well, play field position and kick it,” Hunter said.

The Packers were thrilled to learn that Vikings coach Bud Grant wouldn’t allow heaters on the Minnesota sideline. Even with heaters, though, the Packers weren’t comfortable.

Brockington said getting tackled on the frozen field was jarring.

“It was so cold out there, I thought I didn’t even want to make a first down,” Brockington said. “The ground was so hard, you couldn’t dig a hole for your cleat. Then I said, ‘John, clear your head.’”

Brockington did clear his head, gaining 114 yards to Lane’s 99. The Packers controlled the ball for 13 of the game’s final 15 minutes.

Then, finally, there was the playoff game in Washington.

Washington stacked the defensive line, which you had to go over, because you weren’t going through.

Starr and Hunter were prepared to take on Washington, which they had lost to 20-16 earlier in the year, when Jerry Tagge replaced an injured Hunter midway through the game. Following their game plan, which included short passes over the crowded defensive line, the Packers moved the ball and kicked a field goal in the second quarter for the first score. At some point, Devine, who coached college football before joining the Packers, took over the play-calling and, in the best college coaching fashion of the time, insisted on running the ball into that stacked Washington line.

“All the stories you read are all true. Devine, for some reason, decided not to have Bart call the plays,” Carter said. “The offense would come off the field and keep telling him, ‘Quit running that same play, trying to pound the ball.’ Washington had all of those guys up on the line of scrimmage. All we had to do was start to throw, but Devine decided otherwise, and that’s how we got beat.”

Hunter, who was getting the plays from the sideline, wasn’t sure what was happening when the whole game plan changed.

“(Washington) came out in a five-man line and Bart had already prepared me for that situation,” he said. “I did a couple of audibles and we moved the ball right down the field. We go down and kick a field goal and I’m thinking to myself, ‘If they stay in this five-man line, we’re going to win this game going away.’”

“Well ... next couple of series, some different type plays came in and then I went to the sideline to say something to Bart about what was going on and I noticed Bart and Coach Devine had split up. They were always together and now were 10 or 15 yards apart and I thought, ‘Uh oh, something’s going on here,’ and sure enough, we found out later on things had happened between them during the game.”

Robinson told Hunter that if the offense would get three touchdowns, they’d win. “There’s no way that Washington team can get 21 points against us,” Robinson said.

And it didn’t. Washington defeated the Packers 16-3 on one touchdown and three field goals.

“We were very disappointed, the way we lost,” Ellis said. “Had we lost using our best arsenal that we had available to us, we wouldn’t have felt as bad as we did.”

Carter, who gets to the point, said he didn’t know if the Packers could have defeated the Dolphins, but he has no doubt they could have beaten Washington.

Robinson refuses to say Dan Devine’s name, especially if it’s paired with ‘coach’

The NFL highlight film of that year gives more credit to Devine than did his players, some of his coaches and most fans, and that was before Devine traded away several years of the Packers’ future for used-up quarterback John Hadl in 1974.

One of Devine’s worst moves (Hadl notwithstanding) was taking over play-calling from Starr.

Brockington, who was named Offensive Rookie of the Year in 1971, and was the first back to gain more than 1,000 yards in each of his first three seasons, gained nine yards on 13 carries against Washington.

“It was embarrassing,” Brockington said. “We’d seen that defense earlier and that schmuck (Devine) took over. He was going to be the guy to win that game.”

For his part, Robinson refuses to say Devine’s name, especially if it’s paired with “coach.” “He gave us a real bad game plan,” Robinson said.

Schumer argues that it’s a measure of the team’s accomplishments that it won in spite of Devine, who he calls the worst coach the Packers have had in the last 50-plus years, and arguably ever.

The success of the 1972 season proved an anomaly for the Packers for years to come

With nearly the same cast back in 1973 — including Devine — the Packers fell to 5-7-2, and would have only two winning seasons (one of them strike-shortened) in the next 16 years, and no division championships for 23 years.

Because of its accomplishments against significant obstacles, Schumer thinks that team is unique among other division winners who haven’t been recognized.

“Does the ’72 get overlooked? Yes,” Schumer said. “They get washed over because the ’70s get washed over. The teams were worse in the ’70s and ’80s. The Packers were terrible in general. I think they want to forget the ’70s in total.”

Lee Rummel, a longtime Green Bay Press-Gazette sportswriter and then team media relations director and historian who spent more than 60 years observing the Packers, can have the last word on the 1972 team.

As he told Christl in 2002: “I’ll say this, I think the Packer team in the last four, five, six weeks of that ’72 season played as well as any Packer team I’ve ever seen.”

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Convicted

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According to the criminal complaint:

About 7:30 p.m. March 15, 2021, Brice attacked and wounded a bartender who had been working at Rockabilly’s, 709 S. Broadway. The bartender escaped and went to RumRunners bar, 715 S. Broadway, where the owner went outside and called 911. He then saw Brice drive his car toward him and crash into the building.

Brice eventually ran south on South Broadway, where he encountered a line of cars waiting for a train to pass at Fifth Street and South Broadway. He banged on the window of a vehicle waiting for the train.

When the driver, a 70-year-old man, opened the door, Brice started stabbing him. Others came to his aid and were able to pull Brice off the victim. The 70-year-old man was taken to St. Vincent Hospital, where he died early the next day.

When police arrested Brice they said he was incoherent, saying things like “I

am God” and repeating his name.

Defense attorneys had argued that Brice was not fit to stand trial. But Zakowski ruled in 2021 that Brice could assist in his own defense, allowing the case to go forward.

Brice was convicted of:

- First-degree intentional homicide.
- Two counts of first-degree recklessly endangering safety, both felonies.
- False imprisonment, a felony.
- Felony substantial battery involving bodily harm, and
- Felony criminal damage to proper-

ty.

These charges were dismissed but read in:

- Intimidating a victim by use of force, as a repeater.
- Substantial battery involving the use of a dangerous weapon.
- Resisting or obstructing an officer as a repeater offender.
- Disorderly conduct.

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