

1. Green Bay Packers

Week	Day	Date	Time (ET)		Opponent	Score	W/L/T	Stories
1	Thursday	Sep. 8	7:30 PM		Saints	42-34	W	Recap Box
2	Sunday	Sep. 18	1:00 PM	at	Panthers	30-23	W	Recap Box
3	Sunday	Sep. 25	3:15 PM	at	Bears	27-17	W	Recap Box
4	Sunday	Oct. 2	3:15 PM		Broncos	49-23	W	Recap Box
5	Sunday	Oct. 9	8:20 PM	at	Falcons	25-14	W	Recap Box
6	Sunday	Oct. 16	12:00 PM		Rams	24-3	W	Recap Box
7	Sunday	Oct. 23	3:15 PM	at	Vikings	33-27	W	Recap Box
8								Bye Week
9	Sunday	Nov. 6	1:15 PM	at	Chargers	45-38	W	Recap Box
10	Monday	Nov. 14	7:30 PM		Vikings	45-7	W	Recap Box
11	Sunday	Nov. 20	12:00 PM		Buccaneers	35-26	W	Recap Box
12	Thursday	Nov. 24	12:30 PM	at	Lions	27-15	W	Recap Box
13	Sunday	Dec. 4	4:15 PM	at	Giants	38-35	W	Recap Box
14	Sunday	Dec. 11	3:15 PM		Raiders	46-16	W	Recap Box
15	Sunday	Dec. 18	12:00 PM	at	Chiefs	14-19	L	Recap Box
16	Sunday	Dec. 25	7:20 PM		Bears	35-21	W	Recap Box
17	Sunday	Jan. 1	12:00 PM		Lions	45-41	W	Recap Box
19	Sunday	Jan. 15	3:30 PM		Giants	20-37	L	Recap Box

Rodgers throws 3 TDs, Packers outlast Saints 42-34 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- As far as Aaron Rodgers is concerned, that should just about silence any further questions about why the Green Bay Packers didn't work out as a team during the lockout. If Thursday's season opener at Lambeau Field could be considered a referendum on the importance of those player-led team workouts, the results are in after the Packers' wild 42-34 victory over the New Orleans Saints : The sessions Drew Brees led over the summer weren't enough to help the Saints take down the reigning champions, and the Packers' decision not to get together as a team certainly didn't seem to hurt them. "That was a good start for us," Rodgers joked afterward. "But I've just got to ask myself, 'What would have happened if we had had offseason workouts?' Could we have started any faster and scored more points tonight?" Rodgers came out on top in a memorable opening-night duel with Brees. And after allowing 477 total net yards to the Saints, the Packers defense made a goal-line stand on the final play of the game. "We had some problems defensively, but that's a very good offense and he's a great quarterback," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said of Brees. "Sean (Payton) does a great job on offense. This will be a great experience we can learn from." With the Saints on the 1-yard line for one last play, Clay Matthews and safety Morgan Burnett led a swarm of Packers defenders who stopped Saints rookie running back Mark Ingram short of the goal line. "You've got to get a yard," Ingram said. "It's goal line to win the game, got to get a yard." Matthews was hoping for a more dominant performance, but he'll take the win. "Obviously, you'd love to have a blowout, but I think it represents everything that we preach, which is finishing games," Matthews said. "And it comes down to the very last play - we win, or they have an opportunity to tie it up. I think it's fantastic to overcome that adversity." Brees threw for 419 yards and three touchdowns, including a late score to Jimmy Graham that cut the lead to 8 with 2:15 left. "I was proud of the way we hung in there and fought back," Payton said. "There will be a lot of things on tape that we've got to clean up with this first game. Credit Green Bay. They did a very good job and did all the things they needed to do to win a home game like that." For all their yards, Brees said the Saints weren't good enough in the red zone. "We were one of five, so we scored touchdowns just one out of five times in the red zone," Brees said. "That's not going to win you a lot of games, especially on the road in this type of environment against this kind of team." Rodgers and Brees had big games, but Packers rookie Randall Cobb stole the show. Cobb, a second-round draft pick out of Kentucky, caught a touchdown from Rodgers and ran a kickoff back 108 yards for a score in the third quarter - tying an NFL record for the longest kickoff return in history, set by New England's Ellis Hobbs in September 2007. It also was the Packers' first kickoff return for a touchdown since Allen Rossum in 2000. "It was amazing," Cobb said. "The feeling of being in Lambeau Field and just having all of the guys around me coming off of the Super Bowl and just trying to do anything I can to contribute, and I certainly tried to make the most of my opportunities." Cobb admitted he made mistakes on both touchdowns; he shouldn't have brought the kickoff out of the end zone, and he ran the wrong route on the touchdown catch. Rodgers said he was able to adjust to Cobb's mistake on the route, again bringing up the offseason workouts - a line of questioning Rodgers clearly grew tired of during training camp. "Surprisingly, we didn't have offseason workouts," Rodgers said. "Surprisingly, I was able to read his body language there and he made a nice catch and run for a touchdown." Rodgers threw for 312 yards and three touchdowns. It was a big night for Donald Driver , who tied James Lofton's Packers franchise mark for career yards receiving with 9,656. Rodgers wanted to get him the record at home. "We tried to get him the ball again, we just didn't have an opportunity," Rodgers said. NOTES: Packers DB Charles Woodson earned a 15-yard penalty in the third quarter, and admitted he threw a punch at a Saints player. Woodson wasn't ejected. "Yeah, I threw a punch," Woodson said. "Just got frustrated, the guy was holding me a little longer than I wanted. Nothing was said about it, referee-wise, quick enough, and I reacted. It is what it is, I guess." ... Packers S Nick Collins appeared to hurt his left arm but stayed in the game. ... Packers CB Tramon Williams went down after taking a hard hit on the right shoulder in the fourth quarter. ... Saints WR Lance Moore sat out because of a groin injury. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers, Packers beat Newton, Panthers 30-23 CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) -- For the second straight week, Cam Newton threw for more than 400 yards, sidestepped pass rushers and moved the Carolina Panthers up and down the field. Leave it to Aaron Rodgers and the Super Bowl champion Green Bay Packers to spoil Newton's home debut. Rodgers threw for 308 yards and two scores, while the Packers withstood a 432-yard passing day from the No. 1 overall draft pick to beat the Panthers 30-23 on Sunday. A week after throwing for 422 yards - most in league history by a rookie in his professional debut - Newton topped himself by setting an NFL rookie record for passing yardage in a game. He passed for one touchdown and also ran for a 4-yard score with 37 seconds left to bring Carolina

(0-2) within seven, but the Packers (2-0) recovered the onside kick to seal the victory. Newton briefly held the NFL record for most passing yards in the first two games of the season by any quarterback (854), before New England's Tom Brady broke it a few hours later. Newton still set a league record for most yards passing in the first two games of a career. "I knew he would be good, but if I told you I knew he'd be this good this early, I'd be lying to you," said Packers nose tackle B.J. Raji, who had one of four sacks of Newton. "He doesn't get frustrated. We threw a lot of stuff at him today and he was able to sit back there and make some of the plays they needed." While Newton racked up the big yards, Rodgers was the one to direct his team to a victory. He found Greg Jennings for a 49-yard touchdown pass early in the third quarter, the go-ahead score in a run of 23 straight points to erase an early 13-0 deficit. Then, after Clay Matthews stopped Newton a yard shy of the marker on a fourth-down run inside the 5, Rodgers found Jordy Nelson for an 84-yard touchdown that made it a two-possession game and helped the Packers hang on. "It wasn't clean by any means," Green Bay coach Mike McCarthy said. "We can sit here and pick apart all the things that didn't go right, but most importantly, we finished it as a football team." While Newton had another big yardage day, the Packers' defense came up big by forcing the rookie into three interceptions - two by Charles Woodson. Matthews' stop came as Newton and the Panthers were closing in on a tying touchdown. Two plays later, Rodgers found Nelson on the left side, and the receiver sprinted down the sideline and all the way to the end zone to push the lead to 30-16 with 2:14 left. Newton went on to crack the 400-yard mark on the ensuing possession, finding Steve Smith deep over the middle for a 62-yard pass before capping the drive with his scoring run. He completed 28 of 46 passes and showed plenty of mobility - he made Matthews miss on tackles at least three times - and finished as Carolina's top rusher with 53 yards. Rodgers said he told Newton afterward that he was impressed by the rookie's play. "I think someone said in the locker room that I'm kind of glad we played him early in the season," Rodgers said, "because when he figures it out fully, he's going to be even tougher to stop." Just as with last week, Newton wasn't in the mood to celebrate after a loss. "We've just got to get it right. We're going to get it right," Newton said. "But I'm not the person to just sit up here and say, 'Well, we have next time.' I'm not that type of person. I want it right now and I want to get it right now." Newton couldn't have asked for a better start in his home debut in front of a crowd loudly cheering his every move and hoping he'll reverse the franchise's sagging fortunes. He threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Brandon LaFell on his first drive. Then, after a fumbled kickoff return by Randall Cobb, Newton directed the first of two field-goal drives to take the 13-0 lead. But Rodgers and the Packers offense - which spent most of the first quarter on the sideline - finally got in rhythm while Newton started making mistakes. His first came late in the second quarter by throwing to Smith in double coverage, with Woodson diving in front of Smith near the sideline for the interception. His second interception came when he tried to throw against pressure from Matthews, with Woodson jumping in front of Smith for a second pick. On the third, Newton simply overthrew an open Legedu Naanee and the ball ended up in the arms of safety Morgan Burnett near midfield late in the third quarter. "This is a rookie quarterback that's learning and growing and getting better each opportunity he gets," Panthers coach Ron Rivera said. "When we go back and really get to watch the tape, we'll see he missed a read here, he missed a throw here, but for the most part, he handled himself with the type of poise and composure you would not expect." Meanwhile, Rodgers played a mistake-free game and completed 19 of 30 throws. John Kuhn added a goal-line plunge for the Packers' first touchdown, while Mason Crosby kicked three field goals. Notes: Packers safety Nick Collins was carried off the field on a stretcher after he injured his neck while trying to tackle Jonathan Stewart in the fourth quarter. The team said Collins had "normal feeling and complete movement" in his extremities but would be kept overnight in a hospital for observation. ... Packers receiver Donald Driver had a 10-yard catch to become the Packers' all-time leader with 9,666 receiving yards. ... Stewart and De' Angelo Williams combined for 18 yards rushing, though Stewart had eight catches for 100 yards. ... Smith had 156 yards receiving, but lost a fumble in the third quarter on a 25-yard catch. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers, Finley lead Packers past Bears 27-17 CHICAGO (AP) -- It's not hard to see why Aaron Rodgers is feeling a little more confident these days.

Between a championship run last season and strong start this year, these certainly are good times for the Green Bay Packers and their star quarterback. He came through again on Sunday, and the result was another win at Soldier Field. Rodgers threw for 297 yards, including three touchdown passes to Jermichael Finley, and the Packers shut down Jay Cutler and the Chicago Bears in a 27-17 victory Sunday. The stakes weren't as high as the previous meeting, when Green Bay left Chicago's home field celebrating the NFC title. The Packers still managed to give the Bears (1-2) more headaches in the NFL's longest-running series. Rodgers led the charge, completing 28 of 38 passes in another sharp performance from a quarterback who sees a difference in himself this season. "More comfortable, definitely," he said. "Going through the postseason like that and feeling good about the way I played, other than maybe the second half here, it gives you a lot of confidence going into the season." The way coach Mike McCarthy sees it, Rodgers should feel that way. "He had a lot of success as a player, he won a world championship last year," he said. "I think that would give everybody more confidence once they are involved in that. He has a very good handle week in week out of the plan, how the defense is playing. He is a very good player, he definitely is on path to be recognized as a great player when his career finishes." Rodgers threw his first interception of the season, when Brian Urlacher picked him off with the Packers leading 27-17 in the fourth quarter. The Bears took over at their 45, but two penalties - holding by Chris Spencer and unnecessary roughness on Devin Hester for a confrontation with Sam Shields - ended any shot at a comeback. Rodgers hit Finley with a 6-yard TD on the game's opening drive, a 7-yarder early in the second quarter that made it 14-0, and a 10-yarder that gave the Packers (3-0) a commanding 27-10 lead early in the fourth. Greg Jennings caught nine passes for 119 yards, while Finley finished with seven receptions and 85 yards. Ryan Grant ran for 92, and Morgan Burnett intercepted Cutler twice on passes intended for Roy Williams. Even so, Rodgers said they're still not quite "clicking." He acknowledged there is more balance between the run and pass, but he still sees room to improve in all phases. "I think we have the potential to get better, and I don't know how many wins that means or the playoffs or whatever, but I just think we can play better football," he said. "The standard we've set around Green Bay is excellence, so until we're at that point, there's going to be a lot of hard work during the week." For the Bears, it was simply a brutal performance. Their quarterback struggled in a big way and the running game was again nonexistent as Chicago dropped its second straight after an impressive win over Atlanta. The Bears managed just 13 yards rushing - and with only 12 attempts, they matched their second-fewest for the second straight game. Against New Orleans last week, they called 52 pass plays and handed off 11 times, with a scramble by Cutler bringing the run total to 12. Coach Lovie Smith credited Green Bay's defense and said, "If you don't get your running game going, you have to look at what the other side of the ball did." Clearly, though, the Bears have some work to do. "That means they probably have to work on that for next week because it didn't work today," Green Bay's B.J. Raji said. "But on a more serious note, we've played good backs this whole season, I know there is emphasis in the media on (Matt) Forte getting the ball, but we knew if we took care of business he wouldn't be a factor." Forte had just 2 yards on nine runs - or less than a quarter of a yard per attempt. Things were so bad against Green Bay that fans cheered sarcastically when he gained 3 yards early in the third period. But it wasn't as if the quarterback was lighting things up, either. Cutler was 21 of 37 for 302 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions and threw six straight incompletions to start the second half against a defense that allowed Drew Brees and Cam Newton to throw for more than 400. Worse, the Packers were without Pro Bowl safety Nick Collins, who suffered a season-ending neck injury the previous week. It wasn't enough to slow the Packers. © 2011 STATS LLC

Woodson's big play helps Packers top Broncos 49-23 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Charles Woodson plucked Kyle Orton 's pass out of the air, managed not to bobble the ball, and took it straight to the end zone. Woodson's 30-yard interception for a touchdown set the tone early in the Green Bay Packers ' 49-23 rout of the Denver Broncos at Lambeau Field on Sunday. It also moved Woodson one step away from a record. Sunday's score was Woodson's 11th interception return for a touchdown, tying him with Darren Sharper for second on the NFL career list - and putting him one behind the leader, Rod Woodson. "I'm almost there," Charles Woodson said. "I plan on getting it this year. We'll see." Woodson's big play was the worst part of an up-and-down day for Orton, one of three interceptions by the Packers. The Packers already were leading 7-3 when Woodson read Orton's attempted throw to Eric Decker . "I feel like I bobbled it a little bit briefly, and for a second thought I was going to drop it," Woodson said. "Once I got it and I looked back and (saw) the receiver kind of stumbling, I knew I could get in." The Broncos still had a rally in them, with Orton throwing a pair of touchdowns to Decker in the second quarter to cut the deficit to four. In the end, though, the Broncos just couldn't stop Aaron Rodgers . Rodgers threw for a career-high 408 yards and tied a career best with four touchdown passes, but perhaps was most pleased with his two rushing touchdowns. "I enjoy those times, to try to make it look semi-athletic," Rodgers said. Green Bay (4-0) and resurgent NFC North rival Detroit are the only undefeated teams left in the NFL. The Packers are rolling right now, but coach Mike McCarthy says there's always room for improvement. "Trust me, we don't have it all figured out as a football team," McCarthy said. "We're 4-0, but we're very in tune with what we need to improve as a team." Perhaps, but things are looking more dire in Denver. Backup Tim Tebow made a brief and uneventful appearance at quarterback for the Broncos early, but coach John Fox chose not to give Tebow more work when the game got out of control in the fourth quarter. "I thought our offense was very impressive, other than the turnovers," Fox said. "It wasn't all the quarterback (Kyle Orton). It was all of us." Rodgers' 408 yards passing were a regular-season career high; he threw for 423 yards in the Packers' playoff loss to Arizona in January 2010. Rodgers was replaced by backup Matt Flynn late in the fourth quarter. " Aaron Rodgers obviously is playing extremely well," McCarthy said. "I can't say enough. He is a special player." Packers veteran wide receiver Donald Driver left in the second quarter because of an apparent left knee injury, but returned in the second half - then caught a touchdown from Rodgers in the fourth quarter. "I just wanted to play," Driver said. "I felt like if it wasn't something that was broken, I feel like I could still play. Doc decided he wanted to sit me down, but he knows I'm hardheaded. I told him that I was going to play, and he gave me the OK." When Driver went down, Greg Jennings feared the worst. "Let me tell you, he's the ultimate gladiator," Jennings said. "He almost had us in tears because you see a guy who pours in everything week in, week out, every practice, doesn't miss a practice, and then you see him take a hit like that and you see him grabbing his knee and it's like, 'Oh, my gosh, please God, let this not be it.' Fortunately for us and for him, he was able to bounce back." Notes: With new security measures in place, fans had trouble getting into Lambeau Field in time for kickoff. With 10 minutes left before the start, several lines of fans waiting to get in stretched deep into the parking lot. The lines had dissipated early in the first quarter. ... Von Miller had two sacks for the Broncos. ... Woodson's interception was the 50th of his career. © 2011 STATS LLC

Pack bounces back from slow start to beat Falcons ATLANTA (AP) -- Early on, the Super Bowl champs were down by two touchdowns. Think they were worried? Not a chance. Aaron Rodgers had another huge game in Atlanta, throwing for 396 yards and a pair of touchdowns, while the Green Bay defense totally stifled the Falcons after giving up those two quick scores. The unbeaten Packers rallied for a 25-14 victory Sunday night, the momentum from the championship season carrying over to their best start since 1965. That, of course, was the Vince Lombardi Pack in its heyday. This group isn't too bad, either. The Packers certainly have the Falcons' number, following up a 48-21 rout in last season's playoffs with another big win at the Georgia Dome. "We're just a better team than they are. Honestly," Packers nose tackle B.J. Raji said. "Those guys talk a lot. But we're the champions. And that won't change anytime soon." Rodgers has turned the Georgia Dome into Lambeau Field South, throwing for 762 yards and five touchdowns in his last two games against the Falcons. Thrown a softball of a question - so, do you like playing in the A-T-L? - the quarterback broke into a big smile. "I do," he said, a playful tone in his voice. The high-scoring Packers (5-0) were held without a touchdown in the first half by the Falcons (2-3), who had the place rockin' when they scored on their first two possessions. After that, the home fans had little to cheer about. Rodgers saw to that. "It was a choppy game but we persevered," he said. "We have a different team than years past. We expect to win when we take the field." Green Bay settled for three field goals by Mason Crosby , closing to 14-9 before Rodgers really got rolling. He connected with James Jones on a 70-yard touchdown that gave Green Bay its first lead late in the third quarter. Then, on the first play of the fourth, Rodgers connected with Greg Jennings on a 29-yard scoring play that stretched the lead to 22-14. Crosby clinched it for the Packers with his fourth field goal, a 30-yarder with 1:10 remaining after Rodgers guided the Packers on another long drive, hitting every pass he needed until Green Bay was safely in range to wrap it up. "We just stayed patient," Rodgers said. "The rhythm wasn't there all the time, but we just stayed with it." The Falcons looked as good as they have all season at the start. They took the opening kickoff and drove 80 yards, capped by Matt Ryan 's 5-yard touchdown pass to Roddy White . After a Green Bay fumble, Ryan guided Atlanta 60 yards for another score, a 1-yard plunge by Michael Turner . Then, nothing. Atlanta managed only 106 yards the rest of the way and didn't crack 200 total yards until late in the game. Ryan had another tough night against the Packers, held to 167 yards passing and picked off twice in the fourth quarter. Matty Ice had three turnovers last January in that playoff debacle, again coming up far short when going head-to-head against Rodgers. Clearly, these are two franchises headed in opposite directions. The Packers have now won 11 straight dating to last season, including their march to the Super Bowl title. The Falcons, coming off an NFC South championship, already have as many regular-season losses as they had all of last year. "We're certainly not where we would have liked to have been," Ryan said. "What we did last year doesn't make a difference as to what we're going to do this year." Playing behind a makeshift line - the Packers were without one starting tackle, and lost another to an injury in the first half - Rodgers was sacked four times and faced plenty of pressure. No problem. The Super Bowl MVP still completed 26 of 39 attempts, even with a couple of drops, and kept converting big third downs. Astonishingly, he completed passes to a dozen receivers, with Jones hauling in five throws for 140 yards. "It was a tough game," Rodgers said. "I took a lot of shots, had to move around a little bit." Crosby connected from 32 and 35 yards to make it 14-6 at halftime, then boomed through a 56-yarder that matched the longest field goal in franchise history. An uneasy feeling settled over the raucous crowd, with good reason. After another three-and-out for an Atlanta offense that suddenly couldn't do anything right, the Packers finally took it to the end zone. In one play. Rodgers dropped back and fired one deep down the middle to Jones, who got a step on Thomas DeCoud , took the throw without breaking stride and easily outran James Sanders to the end zone. Just like that, the Packers had the lead for the first time. Even after failing on the 2-point try, they were up 15-14. The Falcons never recovered. The lead grew on the first play of the fourth quarter. Rodgers threw over the middle to Jennings, who turned on a burst of speed to get around the corner, then stretched out with one hand to get the ball past the pylon. "You can tell by the tone of the crowd when Aaron gets the ball in his hands," Green Bay linebacker Clay Matthews said. "It's nice to take the crowd out of it." Notes: Green Bay LT Chad Clifton went out with a hamstring injury to his right leg after being bowled over by Atlanta DE Ray Edwards in the second quarter. The Packers already were missing RT Bryan Bulaga , who sat out his second straight game with an ailing knee. ... The Falcons lost two defensive backs to injuries: S William Moore (shoulder) and nickel back Christopher Owens (head). ... Charlie Peprah and Jarrett Bush had interceptions for the Packers. ... Falcons rookie WR Julio Jones (hamstring) went out early in fourth quarter with a hamstring injury after running a deep route down the sideline. ... Turner has gone three straight games without reaching 100 yards. He was held to 56 on 16

Packers top Rams to remain NFL's only unbeaten GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Don't expect Charles Woodson and the Green Bay Packers' defense to beat themselves up for letting the winless St. Louis Rams pile up yards. Woodson worries first about points and wins - and the Packers were just about perfect on both counts Sunday. Despite giving up 424 yards of offense, Green Bay's defense shut St. Louis out of the end zone in a 24-3 victory that kept the Packers perfect at 6-0. "Does anybody want to give up a lot of yards? No. But the goal is to win," Woodson said. "We held them to three points today, kept them out of the end zone, which is a goal of ours. There's places where we can get better, we feel like we'll get better, and we'll enjoy this win today." With Sunday's loss by NFC North rival Detroit, the Packers are the last unbeaten team left in the NFL this season. But the Packers' defense hasn't been flawless. Green Bay has been tough in the red zone and made plenty of big plays. But the Packers are having a hard time stopping teams between the 20s. It happened again Sunday. Sam Bradford was 28 of 44 for 321 yards with an interception for the Rams (0-5). Bradford said moving the ball but failing to score was becoming an unsettling trend for St. Louis. "It is something that we struggle with all year," Bradford said. "There have been several games that we have been able to move the ball up and down and we get to the red zone, we have silly mistakes that don't allow us to put the ball in the end zone. In this league, if you want to win, you got to score touchdowns." Bradford's ankle was sore after the game, but he said he wasn't hurt badly. Rams running back Steven Jackson had 18 carries for 96 yards. "For whatever reason, we get into the red zone, we keep shooting ourselves in the foot," Jackson said. The Packers held the Rams to 3 for 13 on third down and 1 for 4 when they went for it on fourth - more indications that the Packers' defense tightens up when it needs to. "You give some things, but you buckle down in the times when you're supposed to and get yourself off the field," Woodson said. "I think we had a couple of fourth downs today where we got off the field. Those are the type of things that we're going to have to do during the season. When games are tougher than they are today, you're going to have to make plays and get off the field in crucial situations. And today we did." Bradford said the Rams have to find ways to avoid getting backed into third-and-long situations. "It is not easy to pick first downs up when you get yourself into that situation," Bradford said. "When you do it with penalties, it becomes very frustrating. We got to figure out a way, whether it is my communications skills or whether it is guys just tuning in, we've got to figure out a way on first and second down not put ourselves in such a bad situation." The Packers' offense took control in the second quarter, as Aaron Rodgers threw touchdowns to James Jones, Jordy Nelson and Donald Driver. But Green Bay's offense hit a lull and didn't score in the second half. "It's a feeling of minor disappointment, I think, in that locker room," Rodgers said. "We just, in the second half, offensively just struggled. The second quarter was great, we put up a lot of points. I think it's encouraging at the same time. It's tough to win in this league, we're 6-0, and have a lot of room for improvement." Packers coach Mike McCarthy had a mixed reaction to the victory. He bristled at questions about the offense being shut out in the second half, saying, "the last time I checked, when you win by three touchdowns, that's a pretty significant win." But McCarthy also said the team isn't anywhere near where it wants to be. "You have to be running on all cylinders, and we're not there yet," McCarthy said. "So fortunately, we're 6-0. We'll continue to work to get there." Notes: Wide receiver Mike Sims-Walker and linebacker Ben Leber were inactive for St. Louis. Neither was listed on the team's injury report this week. "We weren't trying to send any messages," Rams coach Steve Spagnuolo said. "We just put our the guys out there that we thought would help us win the game." ... It was the Packers' last home game for nearly a month. ... Packers cornerback Sam Shields sustained a head injury after he picked off a Bradford pass in the end zone and was hit hard. McCarthy said Shields was still being evaluated after the game. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers helps Pack stay unbeaten, top Vikes 33-27 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- Despite the disparate records, Aaron Rodgers and the Packers found plenty of competition from Christian Ponder in the fearless rookie's first start for the Vikings. Rodgers was up for the challenge again, and the defending Super Bowl champions still didn't flinch. Rodgers kept Green Bay unbeaten with three touchdowns and 335 yards passing, holding off Minnesota 33-27 on Sunday. "There's not a lot of panic in this team. We've been down a couple times at halftime. Just a lot of focus," said Rodgers, who completed his first 13 passes and finished 24 for 30 on another near-unstoppable afternoon against a depleted secondary. "We expect nothing less," said Greg Jennings, who had seven catches for 147 yards. He jogged in for a 79-yard score on the second play of the second half after an egregiously blown coverage, giving the Packers their first lead at 20-17. Ponder was picked off twice in the third quarter by Charles Woodson, who almost grabbed a couple more interceptions, but he kept the Vikings in it from start to finish after completing a 71-yard pass play on his first snap. Adrian Peterson helped him out by rushing 24 times for 175 yards and a touchdown for the Vikings (1-6), but James Starks put the game away with two big gains for first downs before the 2-minute warning and another one right after. He had 75 yards on 13 carries for the Packers (7-0). "It's frustrating to come out against the defending champs and be that close and not to come up with the win," Peterson said. "Give credit to those guys. They made plays when they needed to, and we ended up on the wrong side of it." Mason Crosby had four field goals for the Packers, including a franchise record 58-yarder, one of many delights among some anxious moments for the thousands of Packers fans in attendance who made the trip across the border. "We're not going to swing from a rope around here as far as extremes, one way or another," coach Mike McCarthy said. "We're very happy being 7-0, stating the obvious, but to a man we know we can play better. That's what's exciting." This rivalry is still fierce, as evidenced by a couple of early skirmishes. Vikings defensive end Brian Robison, frustrated by some unwelcome contact from Packers guard T.J. Lang during one second-quarter play, gave Lang a swift kick to the groin area, a caught-on-camera personal foul that drew a penalty and is likely to bring Robison a fine. Ponder's first foray against the Packers, despite the mistakes, showed flash and promise. "They could be 0-14, 0-15. It doesn't matter," Jennings said. "When they play in this building, you're going to get their best shot." Ponder went 13 for 32, but he never looked rattled and finished with 219 yards and two touchdowns. Ponder also ran four times for 31 yards. He found Michael Jenkins for a score with 7:49 left, after a rare three-and-out by the Packers, to cut the lead to six points. He had the ball back with plenty of time to win it before a couple of errant heaves effectively ended the comeback. Green Bay has quite the grip on the NFL right now, with Rodgers and his rocket right arm leading the way. "He's putting together an unbelievable year, and he's playing extremely well," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said. "You have to give him a lot of credit. He's really developed over the last few years into a topflight quarterback." The Vikings have struggled in the secondary at full strength, and they weren't even close to that. Safety Jamarca Sanford was recovering from a concussion. Antoine Winfield was still on the sideline with a stiff neck, and fellow cornerback Chris Cook - their best player in pass coverage - was not even at the stadium. He was in the county jail, for an alleged domestic assault. The rest of the Vikings were in the building, but they're just not in Green Bay's league this year. This usually tight rivalry has been this one-sided in decades. The Packers won for the eighth time in 11 meetings, and the common denominator is Rodgers. He's connecting on roughly seven of every 10 passes, and many of those rare incompletions have been drops by his otherwise-stellar receivers. Rookie Randall Cobb was wide open on a drag route across the middle on third-and-16 at the 20, but the pass from Rodgers glanced off his hands and the Packers settled for three points. Yes, Jared Allen tacked two sacks on his NFL-leading total to give him 11 1/2, but Rodgers spread the ball around to just about every receiver and made a perfect throw to just about every spot on the field. He went 6 for 6 on his first drive, firing passes to six players during a ho-hum 91-yard march for the tying score. The only three incompletions he threw in the first half? Two drops and a spike to stop the clock. To keep this game competitive, the Vikings needed a timely turnover or two, and the rookie Cobb gave them one at the end of the first quarter when he

fumbled a fair catch with teammate M.D. Jennings getting in his way. The Vikings recovered at midfield and scored a few minutes later to make it 14-7. "Coach said in the first quarter, 'They're going to shoot their wad, and we've just got to come out and play our type of ball,' and we did," said tight end Jermichael Finley, who caught a third-quarter touchdown pass. "We're the only team in the league that's got that goose egg behind us. We've just got to stay humble and don't get complacent." NOTES: The Vikings added former DE Chris Doleman to their Ring of Honor during a halftime ceremony. ... Packers RB Alex Green hobbled off with a knee injury following a first-quarter kickoff return. ... Allen set a franchise record with a sack in his ninth straight game. He has 11 1/2 sacks in his last six games against the Packers. ... This was the first 100-yard game for Jenkins in eight NFL seasons. ... Ryan Longwell had three touchbacks and two field goals, including a 52-yarder, for the Vikings against his former team. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers throws 4 TDs, Packers hold off Chargers SAN DIEGO (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers was at his best, throwing lasers where only his receivers could catch them and finding four different teammates in the end zone. Yes, Rodgers had a lot to do with the Green Bay Packers remaining undefeated with a crazy 45-38 win over the staggering San Diego Chargers on Sunday. So did Philip Rivers, whose miserable run of turnovers continued with three critical interceptions, two by Charlie Peprah. Peprah and Tramon Williams returned pickoffs for touchdowns in a span of six plays in the first quarter, and Peprah's second pick in the closing seconds sealed the win for the Packers (8-0). Rodgers completed 21 of 26 passes for 247 yards and ran his NFL-leading total to 24 TD throws. He had scoring passes of 5 yards to Jermichael Finley, 16 to Jordy Nelson, 21 to James Jones and 4 to Greg Jennings. "I think Aaron has a lot of strengths. His decision-making is clearly the highest level that I have personally been a part of," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said of his Super Bowl MVP quarterback. Rodgers, who lives in the upscale San Diego suburb of Del Mar in the offseason, seemed more impressed with the high percentage of cheeseheads in the sellout crowd than being the NFL's only perfect team. "The crowd was incredible," Rodgers said. "When you're on the road and up by seven and it's late in the game and they have to go on a silent count, that's pretty impressive. I have to give a lot of credit to our fans the way they travel. It says a lot about the kind of fans we have." Jennings couldn't emphasize enough how much Rodgers means to the Packers. "He is a special, special, special, special player," Jennings said. The Chargers (4-4) have lost three straight games, including road collapses at the New York Jets and on Monday night at Kansas City, when Rivers inexplicably fumbled a snap in the final minute of regulation. Rivers also threw four touchdown passes Sunday to tie his career high, three of them to Vincent Jackson. "We're fighting through a rough time right now," said Rivers, whose 14 interceptions and 17 total turnovers lead the NFL. "These tough times, you find out a lot about guys, a lot about yourself." Rivers was 26 of 46 for 385 yards. It was the first time in his career that he threw three interceptions in a game. The Packers led by 21 points early in the fourth quarter before Rivers threw touchdown passes of 5 and 29 yards to Jackson in the span of 1:07 midway through the quarter. San Diego had a final chance to tie it, starting a drive at its 32 with 1:05 remaining and no timeouts left. Aided by a pass interference call against Charles Woodson, Rivers moved the Chargers to the Packers 41 before putting up a deep ball that Peprah easily picked off and returned 76 yards to the San Diego 6. The Packers took a knee to end the game. Rivers threw two pick-6s that gave the Packers a 21-7 lead. Desmond Bishop tipped a pass intended for tight end Antonio Gates and Peprah intercepted. He broke four tackles during his 40-yard return and got a big block by Clay Matthews. On the next Chargers possession, Williams jumped a route for an interception and 40-yard TD return. "On the first one, the guy made a great play," Rivers said. "The other one, they just fooled me." Peprah said the Packers still have a lot of work to do on defense. "We're a pressure defense, so we're going to give up some big plays. But we feel we're going to make some, too," he said. "I wouldn't trade a perfect defense for a win, so I'll take the W and we'll clean up that stuff later." Rivers and Mike Tolbert kept the Chargers in the game. Tolbert scored on an 8-yard run and, after the Chargers held the Packers on fourth-and-2 at the San Diego 36, Nick Novak kicked a career-best 52-yard field goal to pull to 21-17. Amazingly, the Packers' next drive was just their third of the first half. Although he was sacked twice, Rodgers moved the Packers to the San Diego 16 before throwing a TD pass to Nelson, who hauled it in at the 1 and then rolled into the end zone for a 28-17 halftime lead. After Rivers hit Gates with an 11-yard TD pass in the third quarter, Rodgers threw a perfect 21-yarder to Jones and then a 4-yarder to Jennings early in the fourth quarter to seemingly put away the game. NOTES: The Chargers played without injured running back Ryan Mathews, wide receiver Malcom Floyd and linebacker Shaun Phillips. San Diego guard Kris Dielman missed his second straight game with a concussion. ... The Chargers turn around and host the rival Oakland Raiders on Thursday night. ... Packers LB Frank Zombo left with a hamstring injury in the fourth. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers throws 4 TDs, Packers beat Vikings 45-7 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers was just fine sharing the spotlight with the Green Bay Packers defense. Thrilled, actually. If the Packers now can field a dependable defense along with their trademark high-octane offense, they just might be unstoppable. The Packers (9-0) remain the NFL's lone undefeated team - not that Rodgers is quite ready to ponder the possibility of a perfect season. "I'm sure there will be, obviously, more pressure, more scrutiny from the outside of this locker room," Rodgers said. "But we've got a good locker room." Rodgers threw four touchdown passes against a fierce Vikings pass rush, Randall Cobb returned a punt 80 yards for a touchdown and the Packers defense contained Adrian Peterson and the Minnesota Vikings in a 45-7 victory on Monday night. "It's (our) best game, because of the margin of victory," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. "And at the end of the day, it's about points." Green Bay's defense came into the game giving up nearly 300 yards passing per game, second-most in the NFL. Their last time out, the Packers nearly blew a big lead in the fourth quarter at San Diego, holding on for a 45-38 victory. The Packers finally played to their potential against the division rival Vikings (2-7), holding rookie quarterback Christian Ponder to 190 yards passing with an interception and limiting Peterson to 51 yards and a touchdown. "I felt as a defense we owed it to ourselves to play a game like that," cornerback Charles Woodson said. "Owed it to our fans, our team, especially our offense who's been playing out of their minds this year. We needed a game like that. It feels good, but it's still one game." Worse yet for the Vikings, they may be without cornerback Antoine Winfield because of a broken clavicle, according to coach Leslie Frazier. Monday's game was Winfield's first since sustaining a neck injury. The Vikings' defense did its best to rough up Rodgers, sacking him three times and hitting him hard virtually every time he took off running. Defensive end Jared Allen harassed Rodgers at every turn. The pressure didn't force any uncharacteristic mistakes from Rodgers, who was 23 of 30 for 250 yards without an interception. Rodgers threw a pair of touchdown passes to Jordy Nelson, and also found Greg Jennings and John Kuhn for scores. "Our performance tonight was very disappointing," Frazier said. Allen didn't need anybody to recite Rodgers' gaudy stats. "I don't even know what that means," Allen said. "All I know is he crushed us tonight." McCarthy put backup quarterback Matt Flynn in the game with 10:30 left in the fourth quarter - and the Vikings couldn't keep him out of the end zone, either, as he scrambled 3 yards for a touchdown with 4:27 left. But it was Cobb, a second-round rookie out of Kentucky, who got it all started for the Packers. After the Packers' defense forced the Vikings to go three-and-out on their first possession, Cobb fielded a punt from Chris Kluwe and squeezed through a seam in the middle of the field. Cobb accelerated down the left sideline and danced the final few steps into the end zone, tossing the ball in the air as if he was shooting a basketball before doing a "Lambeau leap" into the stands. Cobb also had a 108-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the Packers' season opener against the New Orleans Saints. "I guess when the lights come on my tempo and my game speed goes up," Cobb said. "But I've got to get to where I'm doing it every game." Rodgers finally got the ball and directed an 11-play, 70-yard drive that included conversions on third-and-8, to Donald Driver, and third-

and-7, to running back James Starks . Rodgers then finished the drive with a perfect pass to Jennings in the middle of the field for a touchdown, and the Packers led 14-0. With the Vikings driving near the end of the first quarter, Woodson wrestled a ball away from Visanthe Shiancoe for what initially was ruled an interception. Frazier challenged the call and it was overturned, giving Ryan Longwell a shot at a 47-yard field goal. But the Vikings committed a penalty, and Longwell came up just short on a 52-yard attempt. Rodgers then put together another drive, and Rodgers hit tight end Jermichael Finley for 25 yards on a fourth-and-5 conversion attempt at the Vikings 34-yard line. Allen sacked Rodgers on first-and-goal, and the Packers ended up settling for a 25-yard field goal by Mason Crosby to take a 17-0 lead with 12:04 left before halftime. Ponder then threw an interception to Packers cornerback Tramon Williams , misfiring on a deep ball after a flea-flicker toss back from Peterson. Rodgers was sharp on the first possession of the second half, leading an eight-play, 69-yard drive that included a fourth-down conversion to Nelson. Rodgers found Nelson on the right sideline two plays later, Nelson threw a stiff arm at Vikings cornerback Cedric Griffin and broke free for a touchdown, giving the Packers a commanding 24-0 lead with 10:45 left in the third quarter. The Packers forced another punt but Cobb fumbled, and the Vikings recovered deep in Packers territory. Ponder threw to Percy Harvin , then handed to Peterson for a 3-yard touchdown up the middle. The Vikings cut the Packers' lead to 24-7 with 8:41 left in the third quarter. Cobb then made up for his mistake with a long kickoff return to give the ball to the Packers at midfield. Rodgers led yet another precision drive, finishing it off with a 9-yard touchdown pass to Kuhn for a 31-7 lead. Notes: Cobb's return was the Packers' first punt return for a touchdown since November 2008. ... Including the playoffs, the Packers have won 15 straight games dating back to last season, the longest such streak in team history. ... Monday's attendance was 70,519. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers' late TD helps Packers beat Bucs 35-26 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers missed a few more throws than he usually does, and even threw an interception with the game still in doubt. He just wasn't at his best against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sunday - until he absolutely had to be. With the Packers clinging to a two-point lead and trying to fend off a late rally, Rodgers threw a 40-yard touchdown to Jordy Nelson with 2:55 left and the Packers survived a scare from the Buccaneers for a 35-26 victory. With a 10-0 record going into a Thanksgiving Day game at Detroit, the Packers remain perfect, even if their quarterback walked away expecting much more from himself. Rodgers threw for 299 yards with three touchdowns, including a pair to Nelson, but wasn't happy with the way he played. "I'm just frustrated," Rodgers said. "I didn't throw the ball very well. I'm not trying to be ridiculously humble right now, I'm just frustrated. The ball wasn't coming out the way I wanted it to today." The Packers' defense also had trouble stopping quarterback Josh Freeman and tackling running back LeGarrette Blount , giving Packers coach Mike McCarthy plenty of mistakes to point out going into what will be a much-hyped matchup with the Lions. "I think it was great for us," McCarthy said. "Adversity is awesome. We're getting ready to play a big game on national TV on Thanksgiving, and adversity (offers) healthy situations to learn from. Especially when you overcome it." Freeman threw for 342 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions for the Buccaneers (4-6), who have lost four straight but didn't back down against the reigning Super Bowl champions. Blount had 107 yards rushing for Tampa Bay, including a rambling 54-yard touchdown run in the second quarter where he broke at least six tackles. Tampa Bay was penalized nine times for 55 yards, but Buccaneers coach Raheem Morris wasn't using it as an excuse. "Penalties are what they are, they are judgment calls and the judgment went against us a lot of times," Morris said. "It is what it is." Tight end Tom Crabtree caught a touchdown from Rodgers and John Kuhn added a touchdown rushing from Green Bay. The Packers got their first score of the afternoon on a run by 337-pound defensive lineman B.J. Raji. "He's low to the ground," McCarthy said. "I wouldn't want to tackle him." The Buccaneers trailed by only four points and seemed to have some momentum when they tried a surprise onside kick before halftime. After a replay review gave the ball to Green Bay at the Tampa Bay 38-yard line, Rodgers drove for a 5-yard touchdown to Nelson that gave the Packers a 21-10 lead. Tampa Bay then had a touchdown taken off the board in the third quarter when Kellen Winslow was called for offensive pass interference. The Buccaneers settled for a 32-yard field goal by Connor Barth . "I really felt we made enough to plays to beat those guys," Winslow said. "It is hard to win when you put the game in the refs' hands." The Buccaneers' defense got a stop, and Freeman directed an eight-play, 91-yard scoring drive that ended with a 9-yard touchdown pass to Mike Williams . Tampa Bay tried to tie it with a 2-point conversion, but Winslow - who had a pair of big gains on the drive - dropped a catchable ball in the end zone. Packers running back James Starks did the majority of the work in an eight-play, 85-yard scoring drive that ended with a 2-yard touchdown run by Kuhn. But the Buccaneers got another chance when Rodgers threw an interception to Elbert Mack - only Rodgers' fourth pick this season - and Freeman threw a 37-yard pass to Arrelious Benn to set up first-and-goal at the 2. Freeman then threw a touchdown to Dezmon Briscoe and the Buccaneers kicked the extra point to cut the Packers' lead to 28-26 with 4:25 left. Tampa Bay tried another onside kick, but the Packers recovered and Rodgers found Nelson to put the game away. Morris knew he might get second-guessed for the onside kicks but wasn't apologizing. "We wanted to get the ball and win," Morris said. "We are not going to apologize for being aggressive. When you play the Green Bay Packers , you got to play aggressive, you got to go out and make plays. (You've) got to steal possessions." Notes: McCarthy said Starks sprained his knee during Sunday's game, and his availability this week is unclear. ... A late interception gave the Packers' Mason Crosby a shot at a 29-yard field goal, but Crosby hit the right upright, his first miss of the season. ... Packers punter Tim Masthay turned a broken play into a first down in the first quarter, despite fumbling twice on the play. "Tim's got to hold onto that football," Rodgers said, smiling. "That was pretty funny." © 2011 STATS LLC

Packers still perfect, Suh under scrutiny again DETROIT (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers shrugged off Detroit's powerful pass rush and helped the Green Bay Packers stay perfect. This year, it was Ndamukong Suh who didn't finish the game. Rodgers threw two touchdown passes, and Green Bay took advantage of Suh's third-quarter ejection, pulling away for a 27-15 victory over the Lions on Thursday. It was a much better day for the Packers than their previous visit to Ford Field, when Rodgers was knocked out of the game with a concussion in a 7-3 loss last December. "I felt it was an excellent character win for our football team, something we talked about at halftime," Green Bay coach Mike McCarthy said. "I'm very proud of our football team to fight through adversity." Detroit is now facing serious adversity of its own. The Lions (7-4) have lost four of six since a 5-0 start, and three defensive backs were hurt Thursday. Detroit will also have to wait and see what kind of discipline could await Suh, who was dismissed after tangling with Packers offensive lineman Evan Dietrich-Smith. After being pushed off Dietrich-Smith, Suh stepped down hard with his right foot, appearing to make contact with Dietrich-Smith's right arm. Suh said he was trying to keep his balance while freeing himself from the brief scuffle. "My intention was not to kick anybody, as I did not, removing myself," he said. "I was on top of a guy, being pulled down, and trying to get up off the ground - and why you see me pushing his helmet down, because I'm trying to remove myself from the situation, and as I'm getting up, I'm getting pushed, so I'm getting myself on balance." In less than two seasons as a pro, Suh has established himself as one of the game's strongest and most athletic defensive linemen, but he's also received his share of fines. Suh requested and received a meeting earlier this season with Commissioner Roger Goodell to discuss his play. He said that dialogue was helpful, but now the league will have to decide whether more punishment - be it a fine, a suspension or both - is merited in this case. "I can't speak on that," Suh said. "I don't have a decision in that." In 2006, Albert Haynesworth , who was then with the Tennessee Titans , was suspended five games after swiping his cleats across the head of a helmetless Dallas player. Suh's stomp wasn't toward Dietrich-Smith's head, and the Green

Bay player didn't seem too much worse for wear. Suh's penalty helped turn a close game into a rout. It came on third down when the Lions appeared to have forced Green Bay to settle for a short field goal. Instead, the Packers scored a touchdown moments later, taking a 14-0 lead on John Kuhn's 1-yard run. "We kept things between the whistles," Rodgers said. "That's how we've been coached, and we stayed disciplined." The Packers now lead San Francisco by two games in the race for home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. The defending Super Bowl champions are 11-0 for the first time in franchise history and have won 17 straight games, including the playoffs. "We're at 11 wins," McCarthy said. "Once you get to 11 or 12, you start focusing on winning your division. After that comes home-field advantage, and after that comes winning the Super Bowl. Those are always the three goals in Green Bay. If a bonus goal comes up along the way, we'll deal with it, but those are the three we care about." Rodgers was 22 of 32 for 307 yards. He threw a 3-yard TD pass to Greg Jennings with 4:51 left in the first half to break a scoreless tie, and a 65-yarder to James Jones in the third for a 21-0 lead. Detroit dropped its eighth straight Thanksgiving game. The Lions lost two starting defensive backs early on, when cornerback Chris Houston and safety Louis Delmas left with knee injuries. Cornerback Brandon McDonald was also helped off in the second half. Kevin Smith, who had given the Detroit running game a much-needed boost last weekend when he ran for 140 yards against Carolina, went down with a right ankle injury. He said an X-ray was negative. Green Bay also had its share of injuries, to players like running back James Starks (ankle) and linebackers A.J. Hawk and Desmond Bishop (calves). But the situation became so dire for the Lions that wide receiver Rashied Davis was playing in the defensive backfield toward the end. The Lions committed 11 penalties for 82 yards, including three important ones when they were in Green Bay territory early on. Matthew Stafford threw for 276 yards and a touchdown, but he was also intercepted three times. Detroit's Keiland Williams scored on a 16-yard run, and Stafford threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Calvin Johnson with 11 seconds left in the game. NOTES: Packers OL Josh Sitton (knee) was also injured. ... Green Bay's next game is on the road against the New York Giants, and Detroit plays at New Orleans. © 2011 STATS LLC

Last-play FG gives Packers 38-35 win over Giants EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) -- Tied with less than a minute to play and 80 yards from the end zone, Aaron Rodgers wasn't going to wait until overtime. It was the perfect choice for a team pushing perfection. Rodgers completed passes of 24, 27 and 18 yards in a lightning-quick five-play drive to set up a 31-yard field goal by Mason Crosby on the final play, and the Green Bay Packers remained undefeated and clinched a playoff berth with a 38-35 victory over the New York Giants on Sunday. "Those are the fun ones when they end up like that," Rodgers said. "We've had a number of games we won by a couple scores," Rodgers said. "You get the ball on the 20, under a minute, and we get it down there for a chip-shot field goal, it's very rewarding. It probably (ranks) right at the top." The defending Super Bowl champions (12-0) won their 18th straight game. Coupled with the Detroit Lions loss to New Orleans Sunday, the Packers captured the NFC North. Rodgers hit all four of his passes in the 58-second drive that sent the Giants (6-6) to their fourth straight loss, starting with a 24-yard laser to tight end Jermichael Finley just over the hands of rookie linebacker Jacquian Williams. "I thought it was mine. I thought it was mine," Williams said after the game. "Like I said, it's a good throw and catch. He made some good throws." The second one covered 24 yards to Jordy Nelson down the left sideline and moved the ball to the New York 29. An 18-yard pass to Greg Jennings two plays later moved the ball to the 12. The third toss was a 1-yard loss. Green Bay called time out with 3 seconds to go, and then Crosby delivered his winning kick. "It was a huge drive," said Jennings, who also caught a 20-yard touchdown. "We haven't had one like that at the end in a while. It was very quiet in the huddle, actually. You could see everybody was focused. It's great to see what we could do at the end like that." Coach Mike McCarthy said the Packers practice the two-minute drive all the time. Having Rodgers at the helm is just a bonus. "I'm running out things to say about him," McCarthy said. "He's a great quarterback. Playing against the pass rush they had tonight, he hung in there and made the plays." Rodgers, harassed by the Giants' front four and sacked three times, finished 28 of 46 for 369 yards. He threw touchdown passes of 7 and 13 yards to Donald Driver and 12 to Finley in addition to the one to Jennings. The loss was another heartbreaker for New York, which played exceptionally well after being blown out by New Orleans on Monday night. The Giants tied it on a 2-yard touchdown pass from Eli Manning to Hakeem Nicks, and a 2-point conversion run by D.J. Ware on a Manning audible with just under a minute to play. However, Rodgers wasn't going to settle for overtime after a touchback on the ensuing kickoff. "He's a great quarterback, but I expect more out of us on defense," Giants defensive end Dave Tollefson said. "You know, it's not like Jesus in cleats. He's Aaron Rodgers. He's a great quarterback, but we have to do a better job of finishing on defense." The three-point victory was the Packers' smallest winning margin this season. "We're 12-0 and we're focused on that," said linebacker Clay Matthews who scored on a 38-yard second-quarter interception. "It's been something we've been talking about since we were 7-0 or 8-0. So we'll keep going from that." For the Giants, everything wasn't terrible. Dallas also lost, leaving New York a game behind the Cowboys with four games to go. The teams will play twice over that span. "It gives us relief to know we're still right in the mix," said Manning, who was 23 of 40 for 347 yards and three touchdowns. "If we handle our business and win out, we'll be in the playoffs. It's a playoff atmosphere now." Manning's touchdowns covered 67-yards to Travis Beckum and 4 and 2 yards to Nicks. Brandon Jacobs scored on a 1-yard run after a rare interception of Rodgers and Lawrence Tynes kicked two field goals with a 50-yarder in the fourth quarter getting New York within 28-27. Rodgers hooked up with Driver on a 7-yard TD with 3:34 to go to push the lead to 35-27. However, Manning hit tight end Jake Ballard on two 15-yard passes and connected with Victor Cruz for 22 yards to set up the tying score that New York thought would send the game to OT. Rodgers had other ideas, though, and the Packers continued their run at trying to match Miami's perfect season in 1972. It's not surprising New York gave them a game. The Giants ended the Denver Broncos perfect season at 11 games in 1998 and they knocked off the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl in February 2008 when Tom Brady and company were a game from perfection. New York seemed to be in control until Manning made a mistake on a play-action pass on the first play of the second quarter. With his primary receiver covered, Manning threw a sideline pass to Ahmad Bradshaw in front of the Packers bench and Matthews jumped the route and returned it 38 yards for a touchdown and a 14-10 lead. Rodgers had only been intercepted four times all season but linebacker Chase Blackburn, signed Wednesday, picked him off at the Green Bay 21 and returned the ball to the 12. Two plays later, Brandon Jacobs plowed in from the 1 to give New York a 17-14 edge. Rodgers atoned for the error on the next series, driving the Packers 80 yards in 11 plays with the biggest play being an 11-yard scramble on a third-and-10 from New York 43. Rodgers capped the march with a 13-yard, third-down touchdown pass to a wide-open Donald Driver on a play in which the Giants secondary blew the coverage. Notes: Giants C David Baas was a late scratch because of headaches. Kevin Boothe moved from center to guard and second-year pro Mitch Petrus made his first start. ... Packers CB Charles Woodson suffered a concussion. ... Giants S Kenny Phillips sprained his left knee. ... Cruz had seven catches for a game-high 119 yards. ... Rodgers had a 106.2 passer rating, extending his NFL record to 12 straight games of 100 or better. He also has thrown at least two touchdowns in every game this season. ... The Giants inducted Carl Banks, Mark Bavaro, Alex Webster, Dave Jennings and the late Brad Van Pelt into their ring of honor at halftime. © 2011 STATS LLC

Packers perfect 13-0 after 46-16 win over Raiders GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers should have been feeling satisfied. With Sunday's 46-16 rout of the Oakland Raiders, the Packers brushed aside a playoff contender by halftime to win their 19th straight, clinched a first-round bye and moved a game away from clinching home-field advantage throughout the playoffs - and at 13-0, they kept the possibility of a perfect season squarely in sight.

Instead, Rodgers seemed concerned about the health of star wide receiver Greg Jennings , who left the game with an apparent left knee injury in the third quarter. "Well, it didn't look very good," Rodgers said. "So we'll see what the MRI says tomorrow. And hopefully, we've got a bye wrapped up, so he really has close to five weeks before our (playoff) game." Packers coach Mike McCarthy was more guarded, classifying the injury as a sprain and saying that it warranted further evaluation. Jennings' injury put a damper on what was otherwise one of the Packers' most complete performances of the season. Rodgers threw for 281 yards with two touchdowns and an interception in less than three quarters' worth of work, Ryan Grant had two touchdowns rushing and Charles Woodson picked off a pass against his former team. McCarthy still isn't interested in talking about the possibility of the Packers going 16-0, but his level of confidence is clear. "(If we're) taking care of things and keeping our focus on improving the quality of play, I don't think we can be beat," McCarthy said. "You could have asked me that six years ago, I would have said the same damn thing. That's the way we think around here." Rodgers got an early rest in the blowout, as backup Matt Flynn took over late in the third. "This is the kind of game you want to play going into the playoffs," Rodgers said. Carson Palmer threw for 245 yards with a touchdown and four interceptions for the Raiders (7-6), who looked like anything but legitimate contenders in the AFC West. "I'm not going to let this team keep going backwards," coach Hue Jackson said. "The last two weeks, we haven't come close to playing or looking like the football team we've been." Oakland was without injured running back Darren McFadden , along with wide receivers Jacoby Ford and Denarius Moore . And the Raiders made plenty of mistakes to help an opponent that doesn't really need it. "You are not going to beat a high school team with the penalties and mistakes (like) the ones that we made," linebacker Aaron Curry said. "You make a lot of mistakes, you lose." Palmer threw an interception on the Raiders' first possession, and Oakland committed eight penalties in the first half alone. And while the Packers' play has been far from perfect for most of the season, especially on defense, this one was total domination. Things got out of hand so quickly that the Raiders tried a fake punt in the second quarter. As was the case for most things the Raiders attempted Sunday, it didn't work. Grant rediscovered his big-play ability for the Packers, breaking a 47-yard run two plays after Palmer threw an interception to rookie linebacker D.J. Smith on the Raiders' first possession. The Packers were without injured running back James Starks , who had surpassed Grant in the Packers' rotation. Until that play, Grant hadn't looked like his explosive old self for most of the season. After a defensive stop, Rodgers directed a 10-play, 80-yard drive that ended with a 4-yard scoring pass to Ryan Taylor - the rookie's first career touchdown. Trailing 31-0 with about six minutes left in the half, the Raiders tried the fake punt. But Shane Lechler threw high to Rock Cartwright for an incompleteness, and the Packers took over at the Oakland 28-yard line. The Raiders finally got on the scoreboard in the third quarter when Michael Bush ran for a 2-yard touchdown to cut the lead to 34-7. Packers outside linebacker Erik Walden scored on a fumble return late in the third quarter. Walden has been in trouble off the field and was charged Wednesday with misdemeanor disorderly conduct-domestic abuse following an altercation with his girlfriend. Rodgers - who took three sacks and was hit hard several other times as the Packers rotated offensive linemen - figured his day was done after that. "I'm sure tomorrow I'll be a little sore, and Tuesday as well, but nothing that I'm worried about," Rodgers said. Now the Packers are looking forward to the chance to clinch home-field advantage at Kansas City next Sunday. "Obviously, there's no other team that can say they're 13-0 right now and on the precipice of doing something great," Clay Matthews said. "But there's still a lot left that we need to accomplish. If you really want to look into it, the regular season does mean a whole lot if you get to the playoffs. So we're setting ourselves up nicely." Notes: McCarthy said defensive lineman Ryan Pickett and running back Brandon Saine both sustained concussions. ... The Packers set a franchise record with 466 points, topping the previous record of 461 points in 2009. ... The Raiders ran into an odd spell of bad luck on the second-half kickoff, when Green Bay's Randall Cobb appeared to step out of bounds during a 50-yard return. Officials said the replay system was malfunctioning, and the Raiders couldn't challenge. © 2011 STATS LLC

Packers' perfect season ends with 19-14 loss to KC KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) -- Mike McCarthy never put a whole lot of stock in a perfect season, except as a means of gaining home-field advantage and setting the Green Bay Packers up for another Super Bowl run. Well, they still have a chance to earn home-field advantage. The perfect season? That's history. Kyle Orton threw for 299 yards to outduel Aaron Rodgers , and the Kansas City Chiefs rallied behind interim coach Romeo Crennel for a shocking 19-14 victory on Sunday that ended the Packers' 19-game winning streak. It was their first loss since Dec. 19, 2010, at New England. "I personally always viewed the undefeated season as, really, just gravy," McCarthy said. "The goal was to get home-field advantage and win the Super Bowl. That's what we discussed. "We were fortunate enough to be in the position to possibly achieve the undefeated season," he added, "but we still have the primary goal in front of us, and that's to get home-field advantage." Green Bay, playing without leading receiver Greg Jennings and top rusher James Starks because of injuries, can wrap up the No. 1 seed in their final two games against Chicago and Detroit. But the Packers no longer have the pressure of becoming the second team in NFL history to win a Super Bowl with a perfect record, or extending the second-longest winning streak in league history. "I think our goal ultimate goal is to win a Super Bowl. The next step is getting that number one seed in the playoffs," Rodgers said. "We've got a home playoff game - we've got a bye secured." Rodgers was 17 of 35 for 235 yards and a touchdown, and he also scampered 8 yards for another touchdown with 2:12 left in the game. But the Packers (13-1) were unable to recover the onside kick, and Kansas City picked up a couple of first downs to secure the victory. "They had a good game plan," Rodgers said. "You have to give them credit." Ryan Succop kicked four field goals for Kansas City (6-8), which had lost five of its last six games and fired coach Todd Haley last Monday. Jackie Battle added a short touchdown plunge with 4:53 left in the game, points that came in handy when Rodgers led one last scoring drive. "Everybody had marked it off as a win for the Packers, but those guys in the locker room, they're football players," Crennel said. "They decided they were not going to lay down, they were not going to give up, so they went out and played a tremendous game." Neither team looked all that tremendous in the first half. Packers wide receiver Jordy Nelson was hit twice with offensive pass interference, Rodgers was harassed by the Chiefs' weak pass rush, and Green Bay wound up making five first downs. One of them came when Kansas City's Jeremy Horne ran into Packers punter Tim Masthay , giving them 15 free yards. The Chiefs tried to give Green Bay another gift later on the drive when Mason Crosby missed a 59-yard field goal attempt but Kansas City had 12 men on the field. With another chance from 54 yards, the normally reliable Crosby still pushed the kick right. Rodgers finished the half 6 of 17 for 59 yards, with a handful of drops between wide receiver Donald Driver and tight end Jermichael Finley . In fact, things were going so badly for Green Bay that at one point it ran out of the wildcat despite having one of the best quarterbacks in the game. The Chiefs were still clinging to a 6-0 lead when Rodgers finally hit down field, finding Finley over top the coverage for a 41-yard gain. Three plays later, the Packers' star quarterback hit Driver in the corner of the end zone for a 7-6 lead with 8:04 left in the third quarter. Kansas City answered when Orton hit his own tight end, Leonard Pope , for a career-long 38-yard catch. Jon Baldwin added a 17-yard grab to set up Succop's 46-yard, go-ahead field goal. The Packers moved into field-goal range on their ensuing drive, but rather than have Crosby attempt a 56-yard kick in the same direction he had already missed, McCarthy elected to go for it on fourth-and-9. Rodgers' pass fell incomplete and the Chiefs took over. They needed seven plays to cover 59 yards, but had to settle for another field goal and a 12-7 lead. It was the third time the Chiefs drove inside the 5 and had six total points to show for it. They got seven on their next trip, though. With first-and-goal at the 5, Thomas Jones managed to gain a yard and Le'Ron McClain bulled ahead for three more, setting up third down from just outside the goal line. Battle took the carry over the right side and powered into the end zone, giving the woeful Kansas City offense its highest-scoring game since the Chiefs beat San Diego in overtime in late October. The Packers marched down field in the closing minutes, and Rodgers

showed his moxie by scampering around the end for a touchdown that made it 19-14, but that was as close as they got. Green Bay came into the game averaging nearly 36 points, but was held to its lowest total since beating the Chicago Bears 10-3 in Week 17 last year. The Packers needed to win that game to make the playoffs, and wound up riding the momentum to a Super Bowl victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers. All that momentum finally came to an end against the most unlikely of scenarios. "We set the tone on both sides of the ball," Chiefs linebacker Derrick Johnson said. "This is the great thing about football. You can't always look at the records, because you've got grown men out there who are all getting paid. You don't have to be better on paper. "If you're better on that given Sunday, you'll get the win." Notes: Succop has made 21 consecutive field goals. ... Palko was inactive for Kansas City. ... The Chiefs wound up having the ball for 36:11, while Green Bay had it for 23:49. ... Kansas City won despite going 1 for 5 in the red zone. ... Packers OL Derek Sherrod broke his leg in the fourth quarter. He was playing in place of Bryan Bulaga, who went down with a knee strain. © 2011 STATS LLC

Packers beat Bears 35-21, clinch No. 1 seed GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- With the first five-touchdown game of his NFL career, Aaron Rodgers ensured that the Green Bay Packers' playoff road will go through Lambeau Field. He also made sure the rival Chicago Bears will be spending the playoffs at home. Rodgers broke a close game wide open by leading three quick scoring drives in the second half, and the Packers beat the Bears 35-21 on Sunday night. Rodgers noted that he once threw six touchdowns in junior college - also in a rivalry game - but acknowledged this one was a little bit bigger. "Yeah, this one's pretty special," Rodgers said. With the win, the Packers (14-1) nailed down the No. 1 seed in the NFC and claimed another round of bragging rights in the NFL's most storied rivalry by knocking the Bears out of the playoff chase. "We wanted the path to go through Lambeau," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. Rodgers threw a pair of touchdown passes to Jordy Nelson, another two to James Jones, and found tight end Jermichael Finley for a score. Rodgers was 21 of 29 for 283 yards and five touchdowns with no interceptions when backup Matt Flynn took over for Rodgers with 7:54 left in the game. Rodgers surpassed Lynn Dickey's single-season franchise record of 4,458 yards passing with one game left, although it's unclear how much Rodgers will play in the Packers' finale against Detroit. The loss eliminated the Bears (7-8) from playoff contention and put the Atlanta Falcons in the playoffs. Third-string running back Kahlil Bell rushed for 121 yards for the Bears, who trailed by only four early in the third quarter. But Rodgers drove the Packers for touchdowns on their next three possessions to put the game out of reach. "When you play the Super Bowl champions, you have to be on top of your game," Bears coach Lovie Smith said. "Offensively, we did enough things to keep us in the game and have a chance to win the game at the end. But defensively we just didn't have it." McCarthy said the team's run defense will be examined after the big performance by Bell, but added that the final score told the story. "We won big," McCarthy said. "That's the bottom line." Chicago came into Sunday on a four-game losing streak and beset by injuries. But the Bears were able to stay in the game with solid defense and tough running by Bell, who started because of injuries to Matt Forte and Marion Barber. Rodgers' second-half fireworks proved to be too much for Chicago. "Thirty-five points on that defense, that's a good night," McCarthy said. The victory was the Packers' fourth over the Bears in 2011. Green Bay also beat Chicago in the 2010 regular-season finale, the NFC Championship game, and at Soldier Field on Sept. 25. With the Bears trailing 14-3 at halftime, quarterback Josh McCown found Earl Bennett wide open for a 49-yard gain to set up first-and-goal on the 1. Bell fumbled just short of the goal line on the next play but offensive lineman Edwin Williams recovered the ball for a touchdown. With the Packers nursing a four-point lead, and the Lambeau Field crowd nervously quiet early in the third quarter, Rodgers answered by dropping deep and throwing a rainbow pass to Nelson, who blew through the Chicago secondary and hauled in the ball for a 55-yard touchdown. Rodgers then showed his running ability on the Packers' next possession, juking his way between Bears linebackers Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs on a scramble. Rodgers finished the drive with a 7-yard touchdown toss to Jones, giving the Packers a commanding 28-10 lead. Packers safety Charlie Peprah came up with an interception, and Rodgers found Nelson for another score to give Green Bay a 35-10 lead. "It just hasn't gone the way we wanted to," Bears linebacker Brian Urlacher said. "If we play like this, that's what's going to happen. The last five weeks, we haven't played well enough to win, and we've lost all five games. We're not real happy where we're at. Our coaches aren't happy, but that's what we get." McCown finally answered with a 1-yard touchdown pass to tight end Kellen Davis - then drew the ire of the Lambeau crowd by scrambling for a two-point conversion and spiking the ball over the goalpost with his team trailing 35-18. Rodgers' offensive feats came behind a patchwork offensive line, as the Packers were without three of their top four tackles. Chad Clifton returned to practice this week after sitting out since October because of hamstring and back injuries, but isn't ready to play. Bryan Bulaga was inactive Sunday because of a left knee sprain, and backup Derek Sherrod is out for the season with a broken right leg. Green Bay also was missing wide receiver Greg Jennings, because of a sprained left knee, and defensive lineman Ryan Pickett because of a concussion. The Bears have lost five straight games since losing quarterback Jay Cutler to a broken right thumb in a Nov. 20 victory over San Diego. Chicago was 7-3 after that win, but came into Sunday's game barely alive in the playoff chase. The Bears started McCown on Sunday after backup Caleb Hanie struggled to fill in for Cutler. McCown's most recent start came with the Oakland Raiders in 2007, and he was out of the NFL last season. "It's a tough assignment, but you've got to find a way to pull it off," McCown said. To make matters worse for the Bears' offense, Barber was inactive because of a calf injury. Chicago already was without Forte, who missed his third straight game because of a sprained medial collateral ligament in his right knee. Notes: Sunday's attendance was 70,574, the team's 300th consecutive sellout, including the playoffs. ... Bears offensive lineman Lance Louis left the game in the first half because of an illness. ... Packers RB James Starks bruised an ankle. © 2011 STATS LLC

Flynn throws 6 TDs, Packers beat Lions 45-41 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- With Aaron Rodgers resting up for the playoffs, Matt Flynn had to be ready to run the Green Bay Packers offense. Was he ever. With Rodgers bundled up on the sideline in cold and windy conditions at Lambeau Field, Flynn set franchise records with 480 yards passing and six touchdowns - the final one to Jermichael Finley with 1:10 left, giving the Packers a 45-41 victory over the Detroit Lions in a wild regular-season finale Sunday. "Just think of all of the great quarterbacks that have come through here," Flynn said. "It's very humbling. I just thank everybody around me and everything. I couldn't have done it, obviously, by myself. There's weapons all around me, and the line did a great job. It's one of those games where it got to a shootout, and we just kept having to match each other." It was an ideal afternoon for the Packers (15-1), who got to rest Rodgers and several other big-name players without losing momentum going into the playoffs. Flynn barely got the Packers past Matthew Stafford, who threw for 520 yards with five touchdowns and two interceptions for the Lions (10-6). Detroit has lost 21 straight road games to the Packers, including the postseason. "We're going to use this as motivation," Stafford said. "We had a chance and didn't get it done, so we've got to get out there and start making it happen. We've got to get on a run here. That's what it's all about in the playoffs, (getting) hot and hopefully we can get that going." The Lions head to the playoffs for the first time since 1999 as a wild card, but could have clinched the No. 5 seed with a win. Instead, they'll be the No. 6 seed and face New Orleans in the first round. "This certainly wasn't a throwaway game for us," Lions coach Jim Schwartz said. According to STATS LLC, it was the first time in NFL history opposing quarterbacks each threw for 400-plus yards and five-plus touchdowns in a game. The teams' combined 971 net yards passing broke the record of 906 set earlier this season in a Week 1 game between New England and Miami. "Flynn played a great game," Stafford said. "Their guys were making plays all over the field and scoring points." For Flynn, it was a huge day that could eventually lead to a significant payday. A seventh-round pick out of LSU in 2008, Flynn already had the attention of general managers

around the league after he nearly beat New England last season while Rodgers was recovering from a concussion. Now he has a huge performance and a victory under his belt, and he'll become a free agent in the offseason. "We're going to miss him," guard Josh Sitton said, adding that he thought Flynn should sign with an AFC team. For now, though, Flynn is ready to get back to his main role in Green Bay: Helping Rodgers get ready to lead the Packers back to the Super Bowl. "We've got the best quarterback in the NFL as a starter here, so it's not hard at all," Flynn said. "He's the heart and soul of this team and the leader of this team. So, it's pretty easy to take a back seat and watch him play, and I'm excited to see what he does in the playoffs." Jordy Nelson had nine catches for 162 yards and three touchdowns for the Packers. Calvin Johnson had 11 catches for 244 yards and a touchdown, and Titus Young had a pair of touchdowns for the Lions. With the afternoon off, Rodgers' season quarterback rating of 122.5 coming into the game broke Peyton Manning's single-season mark of 121.1 set in 2004. With NFC home-field advantage for the playoffs secured, the Packers also rested several key players with nagging injuries: cornerback Charles Woodson, linebacker Clay Matthews, wide receiver Greg Jennings, right tackle Bryan Bulaga, running back James Starks and wide receiver Randall Cobb. Packers coach Mike McCarthy said it was an "easy call" to rest Rodgers, but the coach found ways to keep Rodgers' head in the game; McCarthy said he handed over play-calling duties to his quarterback in the first half. And McCarthy was thrilled with Flynn's day. "It was clearly one of the best performances I've been a part of," McCarthy said. "No doubt about it. I can't say enough about Matt Flynn. The whole world got to see what we see every day." For a while, it looked like the Lions would take advantage of the Packers' resting starters. With the Packers leading 38-34, Johnson drew a pass interference penalty on Tramon Williams to give the Lions the ball at the Green Bay 28. Scheffler hauled in a one-handed catch to set up first-and-goal on the 2. Johnson then was called for offensive pass interference in the end zone, but Stafford threw a 12-yard touchdown pass to Scheffler in the back of the end zone and the Lions took a 41-38 lead with 2:39 left. Flynn wasn't finished, finding James Jones for a 40-yard completion to set up first-and-goal at the 6 with 1:19 left. Flynn found Finley to win it. With the Lions threatening again in the final minute, Sam Shields' interception put the game away. Jones said he and the rest of the Packers weren't surprised by Flynn's performance. "He's a great player, great quarterback," Jones said. "He just showed the world what he can do." Notes: Ndamukong Suh mocked Rodgers' "title belt" celebration after sacking Flynn near the end of the third quarter. Suh was suspended for two games after he stomped on Packers guard Evan Dietrich-Smith in Green Bay's win on Thanksgiving. ... Packers veteran left tackle Chad Clifton played for the first time since injuring his hamstring Oct. 9. He played the first quarter. ... Defensive tackle Corey Williams and safety Louis Delmas were inactive for Detroit. © 2011 STATS LLC

Manning throws 3 TDs, Giants stun Packers 37-20 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- With their own star quarterback and a dominating defense, the New York Giants exposed the Green Bay Packers for what they now are - former Super Bowl champions. The Packers dropped passes, fumbled the ball and simply couldn't stop Eli Manning and his receivers in the Giants' shocking 37-20 divisional playoff victory Sunday. To the Giants' delight, a Green Bay team that had a real shot at an undefeated season less than a month ago is heading home. And that the win came at Lambeau Field, well, that was just as sweet. The site has become a familiar launching pad for the New Yorkers. After beating the Packers (15-2) at home for the second time in four years, they only hope this trip ends the same way - in the NFL title game. The Giants will play the 49ers in San Francisco for the NFC championship next Sunday. "I think we're a dangerous team," Giants coach Tom Coughlin said. "I like where we are and how we're playing." The Giants (11-7) have been on a roll ever since beating the rival Jets on Dec. 24, beating the Dallas Cowboys to get in the playoffs and then blowing out Atlanta in the wild card round last week. They took down the Packers on Sunday, as Manning threw for 330 yards and three touchdowns. The Giants are 3-4 against the 49ers in the playoffs, including their memorable collapse in a wild card game at San Francisco on Jan. 5, 2003. New York led 38-14 in the third quarter but fell apart and lost 39-38. That probably won't be much of a worry for this year's Giants, who were oozing confidence even before they beat the Packers. "This team knows how to win on the road," defensive end Justin Tuck said. "It seems like right now it's our time." The Giants stunned the Packers with a touchdown off a long heave from Manning to Hakeem Nicks just before halftime, then knocked them out with a late touchdown off a turnover. Lambeau Field fell silent as the Giants swarmed the field in celebration, with a handful of New York fans chanting, "Let's go, Giants!" "I knew we were going to beat them on Wednesday, to be honest with you," running back Brandon Jacobs said. The win came four years after the Giants beat a Brett Favre-led Packers team in the NFC title game. It wasn't nearly as frigid this time around, and the Packers' vulnerable defense seemed to be waiting to get sliced up. Manning found six different receivers against a porous Packers defense. But Manning did the most damage with his throws to Nicks, who caught seven passes for 165 yards and two touchdowns. Nicks' biggest play was a 66-yard touchdown catch in the first quarter. His score at the end of the half came on a 37-yard pass into the end zone with defenders all around. "It was a big momentum play for them, but we were not deflated as a football team," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. The Giants' defense also was able to defuse the big-play abilities of Aaron Rodgers and the Packers' offense. Rodgers was 26 of 46 for 264 yards, with two touchdowns and an interception. He also was the Packers' leading rusher with 66 yards on seven carries. The Packers fully expected to go back to the Super Bowl, but the reality hit Rodgers quickly. "Oh, it's real," Rodgers said. "We got beat by a team that played better tonight. We play to win championships. You win a championship and you're kind of at the top of the mountain, and you forget kind of how bad this feeling is. We had a championship-caliber regular season and didn't play well today." The Packers' past problems with dropped balls by their talented group of wide receivers returned at the worst time imaginable. And while the Packers' defense has been vulnerable all season, giving up far too many yards and big plays, they've typically made up for it by forcing turnovers. This time, the Packers were the ones giving the ball away. Green Bay lost three fumbles, including one on a rare giveaway by Rodgers. The Giants also sacked Rodgers four times. With the Packers trailing 20-10 at halftime but finally beginning to look like themselves on offense to start the second half, Osi Umenyiora swatted the ball away from Rodgers, and Deon Grant recovered the fumble. "With a 10-point lead, we're going to get after you," Umenyiora said. "And that's what we did." But the mistake didn't cost the Packers points, and Green Bay cut the lead to seven points on a 35-yard field goal by Mason Crosby late in the third quarter. The Packers put together another drive early in the fourth quarter, but Michael Boley and Umenyiora combined to sack Rodgers on fourth-down play in Giants territory. After carving up the Packers in the first half, the Giants' offense hit a lull in the second half. But they broke out of it to drive for a 35-yard field goal by Lawrence Tynes to take a 23-13 lead with 7:48 left to play. Packers running back Ryan Grant then fumbled after catching a pass and the Giants recovered, taking the ball back deep into Green Bay territory. Manning then threw a 4-yard touchdown pass to Mario Manningham and the Giants took a 30-13 lead. Rodgers rallied the Packers for a 16-yard touchdown pass to Donald Driver, cutting the lead to 30-20 with 4:46 left. The Packers then tried on onside kick, but the Giants' Victor Cruz recovered. Jacobs scored on a 14-yard run with 2:36 left to put the game away. It was an emotional day for the Packers, who welcomed offensive coordinator Joe Philbin two days after the funeral service for his 21-year-old son, Michael. Philbin had been away from the team all week after Michael Philbin's body was recovered from an icy river in Oshkosh, Wis. on Monday. A preliminary autopsy showed that he drowned. "I think deep down, a lot of us wanted to kind of get this one for him," Rodgers said. Notes: Giants safety Deon Grant left the game with a head injury. ... Packers running back John Kuhn left the game with a knee injury, and wide receiver Greg Jennings sustained a rib injury. ... Driver caught three passes, giving him a franchise-record 49 postseason receptions in his career. ... Packers LB Brad Jones blocked a 40-yard field goal attempt by Tynes in the second quarter. © 2011 STATS LLC

2. Minnesota Vikings

Week	Day	Date	Time (ET)		Opponent	Score	W/L/T	Stories
1	Sunday	Sep. 11	1:15 PM	at	Chargers	17-24	L	Recap Box
2	Sunday	Sep. 18	12:00 PM		Buccaneers	20-24	L	Recap Box
3	Sunday	Sep. 25	12:00 PM		Lions	23-26	L	Recap Box
4	Sunday	Oct. 2	12:00 PM	at	Chiefs	17-22	L	Recap Box
5	Sunday	Oct. 9	12:00 PM		Cardinals	34-10	W	Recap Box
6	Sunday	Oct. 16	7:20 PM	at	Bears	10-39	L	Recap Box
7	Sunday	Oct. 23	3:15 PM		Packers	27-33	L	Recap Box
8	Sunday	Oct. 30	1:00 PM	at	Panthers	24-21	W	Recap Box
9								Bye Week
10	Monday	Nov. 14	7:30 PM	at	Packers	7-45	L	Recap Box
11	Sunday	Nov. 20	12:00 PM		Raiders	21-27	L	Recap Box
12	Sunday	Nov. 27	1:00 PM	at	Falcons	14-24	L	Recap Box
13	Sunday	Dec. 4	12:00 PM		Broncos	32-35	L	Recap Box
14	Sunday	Dec. 11	1:00 PM	at	Lions	28-34	L	Recap Box
15	Sunday	Dec. 18	12:00 PM		Saints	20-42	L	Recap Box
16	Saturday	Dec. 24	1:00 PM	at	Redskins	33-26	W	Recap Box
17	Sunday	Jan. 1	12:00 PM		Bears	13-17	L	Recap Box

Tolbert's 3rd TD lifts Chargers over Vikings 24-17 SAN DIEGO (AP) -- The San Diego Chargers spoke during training camp about avoiding the slow starts that had haunted them in the first four seasons of coach Norv Turner's tenure. Then they went out and fell behind the Minnesota Vikings 17-7 at halftime on Sunday, drawing the usual early-season boos from their fair-weather fans. Not to worry, though. With the Vikings sputtering badly, Philip Rivers got the opening he'd been waiting for all afternoon. He threw a 19-yard touchdown pass to fullback Mike Tolbert with 5:01 to play to lift the Chargers to a 24-17 win on Sunday. Tolbert's third TD of the afternoon eased the sting of Rivers' two interceptions and Percy Harvin returning the opening kickoff 103 yards for a touchdown. "It's big," Rivers said. "We'd love not to have those interceptions, and we'd love to have that kickoff back and just let it be smooth and easy, but it's these kind of wins that you really grow. You grow more than a week." The victory appeared to come at a cost, though. Kicker Nate Kaeding hurt the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee and could be lost for the season. He's scheduled to have an MRI exam on Monday. Also, defensive end Luis Castillo limped off with a knee injury. Kaeding was hurt on the opening kickoff. Punter Mike Scifres took on placekicking duties for the first time since college. "When we face adversity, we don't curl up and call it quits," said Scifres, a nine-year veteran who signed a \$19 million contract extension Wednesday. On the winning play, Rivers rolled left and waited for Tolbert to get open inside the 5-yard line, then lobbed the pass. "The protection was great, so I had time to step up, step up, and then to get out of the pocket, he was hanging with me," Rivers said. "He was looking at me like, 'Are you going to run it or throw it?' I would prefer to throw it." Rivers completed 33 of 48 passes for 335 yards and was intercepted twice. Tolbert also scored on a 7-yard run in the third quarter and had a 1-yard TD catch in the first quarter. "We were hyped even when we were down 17-7," said Tolbert, who had stars shaved into his hair to commemorate the 10th anniversary of 9/11. "Nobody had their head down and said, 'Here we go again.'" Minnesota led 17-7 at halftime, but gained only 26 yards on 17 plays in the second half. Their new quarterback, Donovan McNabb, struggled against San Diego's defense and was only 7 of 15 for 39 yards, with one touchdown and one interception. "It's embarrassing to have the numbers that we had, whatever we had," McNabb said. "I can do that in one series and we'll get them corrected." Adrian Peterson, who set the NFL single-game record with 296 yards against San Diego as a rookie in 2007, was held to 98 yards on 16 carries one day after signing a contract extension potentially worth \$100 million. "We really had some opportunities and felt we ran the ball pretty well in the first half," Peterson said. "We didn't get anything going in the second half. We have to get our passing game going better." Chargers linebacker Takeo Spikes said he heard that Peterson said during the week that he was going to rush for 200 yards and the Vikings would win. "We really felt disrespected," Spikes said. "San Diego's rally included Tolbert bullying in from the 7 early to cap the first drive of the third quarter, and Scifres kicking his first NFL field goal, a 40-yarder with 10:05 left that tied the game at 17. Scifres also had three PATs. The game had a crazy first few minutes. Harvin returned the opening kickoff 103 yards for a touchdown, showing that the Chargers hadn't fully erased their special teams nightmare of 2010, which cost them a playoff berth. On the Vikings' first play from scrimmage, Chargers outside linebacker Shaun Phillips deflected McNabb's pass and intercepted it at the 6-yard line. Three plays later, Rivers found Tolbert wide open for a 1-yard scoring pass to tie it. Ryan Longwell kicked a 33-yard field goal for the Vikings in the second quarter, and then Peterson finally got going with a 46-yard run. Chargers safety Eric Weddle, who signed a \$40 million contract in the summer, had an arm around Peterson's right foot at about the 40, but the running back broke free and raced to the 3. McNabb then threw a TD pass to Michael Jenkins for a 17-7 lead. Rivers overthrew a wide-open Vincent Jackson on what would have been a sure touchdown pass late in the second quarter that would have made it 17-14. Rivers stood with his hands on his head after the play. © 2011 STATS LLC

Comeback kid: Freeman, Bucs rally at Vikings 24-20 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- Josh Freeman and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers retreated to the locker room after an awful first half, still confident they could win despite a 17-0 deficit. The comeback, after all, is what Freeman has perfected in his 26-game career. LeGarrette Blount's 4-yard touchdown run with 31 seconds left sent the Buccaneers past the stunned Minnesota Vikings 24-20 on Sunday, completing another rally guided by Tampa Bay's calm young quarterback. "He doesn't blink," coach Raheem Morris said. Eight of Freeman's 14 career victories have come when the Bucs (1-1) went ahead in the fourth quarter or overtime. Given how overwhelmed they were before halftime, outgained 284 yards to 62 during the first two quarters, this might have been the most impressive. "Arguably our worst half of football since I've been a head coach," Morris said. After expressing frustration he wasn't more involved last week, Blount finished with 71 yards and two scores on 13 carries. "We just came together and collectively said, 'This is not how we play football. Let's go out and do what we do best,'" Freeman said. There was no screaming, throwing chairs or drastic readjustments to the game plan. The Bucs simply

emerged with the kind of steadiness and confidence down the stretch that the Vikings (0-2), still led by a bunch of veterans, haven't shown yet. "We have to have that attitude that we can't be stopped," quarterback Donovan McNabb said. Freeman found Arrelious Benn for a 25-yard touchdown pass over Cedric Griffin with 6:39 remaining to cut Minnesota's lead to three points. A 19-yard leaping catch by Dezmond Briscoe and a 15-yard late hit penalty on Jared Allen set up the score. Freeman told Benn to watch for the ball because the Vikings were focusing on Blount. "He just ran by him, straight up," Freeman said. "There's just nothing special about that play." Morris said he thought his young team "blinked" last week in the 27-20 loss to Detroit, when the Lions led at the half and held on. This time, the Bucs didn't flinch. "If we thought we were going to lose in the second half, we would've stayed in the locker room," linebacker Quincy Black said. Tampa Bay even overcame a couple of costly mistakes. The Bucs recovered an onside kick after Blount's first touchdown, but Freeman threw off his back foot for Kellen Winslow into the end zone. Husain Abdullah returned the interception 32 yards. Then an illegal shift penalty wiped out what would've been a terrific touchdown catch in the corner of the end zone by Mike Williams, and they settled for a field goal by Connor Barth to pull within 17-10. "With the bitter taste in our mouths from last week, we had to be better," Blount said. Adrian Peterson had 25 carries for 120 yards and two touchdowns in the first half for the Vikings (0-2), who blew a healthy lead for the second straight week and were booed off the field when their desperation drive was stopped around midfield as the clock ran out. "Wow. You're not supposed to give away a game like that," Peterson said. McNabb was much better than in his Minnesota debut, finishing 18 for 30 for 228 yards and effectively using the rollout often to find open receivers in the middle of the field. But Freeman was the better quarterback when it counted most, completing 22 of 31 passes for 243 yards, one touchdown and one interception. "I thought Josh did a wonderful job of keeping his composure, being a great leader and leading his team to a big victory," McNabb said. "When the chips were down, they were able to keep confidence in themselves. Josh did a great job leading the charge, but this is a game we should've won." The Vikings showed better balance than the week before. But in mixing up their play calls, they might have strayed too far in the second half from Peterson, who plowed and danced through Tampa Bay's front seven for much of the afternoon. The Bucs needed several ankle tackles to bring him down in the first half, and the Vikings had touchdown drives of 90 and 75 yards. The Vikings were flawless on defense before halftime, but their tackling was substandard again down the stretch and Freeman was able to find cracks in the coverage with better protection. The Bucs began the go-ahead drive at their 39-yard line and got to the Vikings 16 by the two-minute warning, but coach Leslie Frazier chose not to use any of Minnesota's three timeouts - leaving only 24 seconds for the offense after Percy Harvin fumbled the kickoff and was tackled at the 10. "I really had confidence we were going to stop them," Frazier said. NOTES: The Vikings have started 0-2 in consecutive seasons for the first time since 2001-02. They started 0-4 in 2002. ... After failing to complete a pass to a tight end in the opener, McNabb connected three times with Visanthe Shiancoe and targeted TEs a total of nine times. ... The Buccaneers have won five straight games in this series, dating to 2001, when they were together in the old NFC Central division. ... Through the first half, Blount's season totals were 10 carries and 19 yards. He now has 18 rushes for 90 yards. ... Bucs LB Mason Foster had 10 tackles and a sack. © 2011 STATS LLC

Lions stun Vikings for first 3-0 start since 1980 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- That 20-0 halftime deficit under the Metrodome might've stifled many of their predecessors, but these Detroit Lions weren't deterred. Each week, it seems, they're stopping some kind of long losing trend. That 20-point halftime lead held by the Vikings? It still wasn't big enough for a team making a troubling habit of second-half stumbles. Matthew Stafford threw two touchdown passes in the second half to Calvin Johnson to rally Detroit, and Jason Hanson's fourth field goal of the game gave the Lions a 26-23 overtime victory over the Vikings on Sunday. The Lions (3-0) have the league's longest active winning streak at seven straight games, including the final four contests of last season. Heck, they even won all four of their preseason games. Yes, the Lions, who hadn't won in Minnesota since 1997. "This is what I expect from this team," defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh said. Yes, the Lions, who haven't started a season with three straight wins since 1980. "It goes to show we're not going to lay down. We saw in their first two games they got relaxed after they had a big lead. We felt if we started to put some points up we could get in their head if we continued to make plays," said Johnson, whose Willie Mays-style over-the-shoulder 40-yard sideline catch with Cedric Griffin in tight coverage set up Hanson's winner less than two minutes into extra time. The Vikings (0-3) insisted they didn't relax. They took extra steps to avoid just that and emerge from the intermission with the same edge, having squandered a 17-7 lead at San Diego in a 24-17 loss and blown a 17-0 advantage to Tampa Bay in a 24-20 defeat. Defensive end Jared Allen, who had three of their five sacks of Stafford, was just as active in the locker room and on the sideline as he was on the rush - frequently exhorting his teammates to not let up. Afterward, spirits were sagged. "It ain't lack of effort. We've got talented guys, and we see what happens when we fire on all cylinders: People can't move the ball on us," Allen said. "Something's not right." The numbers behind Minnesota's tale of two halves this season are stunning. The Vikings have outscored their foes over the first and second quarters 54-7. Their cumulative post-halftime deficit is 67-6, with just one of 15 third downs converted by their offense and 13 of 22 by their opponents. "I'll tell you this: There will be adjustments. This won't happen again. This will not happen again," said Adrian Peterson, who finished with 78 yards rushing and a touchdown for the Vikings, but only five yards on five carries after halftime. The signature moment for the Vikings in this game was early in the fourth quarter, facing fourth-and-1 at Detroit's 17-yard line. The crowd was revved up and the players on offense so determined to score that they waved at the field-goal unit to stay off the field. Head coach Leslie Frazier decided to go for it, refusing to settle for a kick with the Lions roaring back and within three points. Toby Gerhart was stood up at the line after a quick inside handoff, and the Lions went the other way to tie the game. "We were positive that we could get it. We worked on it in practice. They didn't do anything that we didn't expect," Frazier said. The Vikings were too consumed - and confused - by their own collapse to recognize the significance of this win for the Lions. Stafford completed 32 of 46 passes for 378 yards, and he saved his best throw of the day for his last to Johnson. With blitzing linebacker Chad Greenway in Stafford's grill, the third-year quarterback heaved a pass off his back foot in Johnson's direction. The 6-foot-5 Johnson hauled in the ball with Griffin all over him, and Hanson calmly came out to end the game. "We have good players. We just needed to settle down. The worst thing we could do was to throw gasoline on the fire," said Lions head coach Jim Schwartz, who charged on the field and pumped his fist after the victory. "I have a lot of confidence in this team, a lot of confidence that if we're in a slump then we're going to break out of it." The Lions rushed for only 20 yards on 19 attempts, and the Vikings put Stafford under constant pressure. In the first half, he threw to a lot of empty spots on the turf, looking out of sync with his receivers. But he found his groove in the middle of the field with tight end Brandon Pettigrew, who had 11 catches and 112 yards. "We got back to what we do best: spreading the ball around, playing fast, getting up on the line of scrimmage," Stafford said. "Guys were making plays for me. That's all I can say." © 2011 STATS LLC

Chiefs draw up critical win over Vikings, 22-17 KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) -- On a playground, Dwayne Bowe's instructions might have sounded something like this: Take off like you're heading deep, do a little hitch at the parked car, and then sprint to the oak tree that marks the end zone. Except the play that Kansas City Chiefs coach Todd Haley drew up on the sideline Sunday happened to be at Arrowhead Stadium, in the fourth quarter of a critical game against the Minnesota Vikings. After seeing the defense sneaking toward the line of scrimmage, Haley designed a play for his Pro Bowl wide receiver on the fly. Bowe headed straight down the sideline, shook cornerback Cedric Griffin and caught Matt Cassel's pass in stride for a 52-yard touchdown reception. Just like Haley

dreamed it up. Kansas City held on down the stretch for a 22-17 victory, its first of the season, keeping Minnesota without a win through four games for the first time since 2002. "It was a great adjustment by our coaching staff," Cassel said. "They saw that they were jumping some of those routes, intermediate routes, so we thought we had an opportunity. We didn't have it in the game plan. We put it in on the sideline. "So I pumped him, and sure enough it opened up just like they thought it would." Bowe said that Haley had confidence he would make the play. "It was a simple play, a simple hitch-and-go route," he said. "Coach told me, 'If I call this, will you score?' And I told him, 'Coach, all you have to do is put it in my hands and I'll do my best to come down with the touchdown.' He believed in me. Matt made a perfect throw; the offensive line held up and voila - there you have it." Voila, indeed. The Vikings answered with a 13-play drive that Donovan McNabb capped with a short pass to Michael Jenkins for Minnesota's first second-half TD of the season. But after getting the ball back, McNabb eventually threw four straight incompletions to effectively end the game. "We had a little momentum going. Our defense did a good job getting a three-and-out and getting us the ball back," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said. "But they made some good plays with deflections and good coverage on fourth down." Ryan Succop hit five field goals, including a career-best 54-yarder in the second half, to match Jan Stenerud and Nick Lowery for the single-game Chiefs record. The defending AFC West champions lost to Buffalo 41-7 in their opener and were trounced 48-3 at Detroit, before nearly rallying in a 20-17 loss to San Diego. The miserable start had some fans calling for Haley and general manager Scott Pioli to be fired. The heat is off them for a week. It's still squarely on Frazier. Minnesota squandered big first-half leads in each of its first three games, but this time dug a 9-7 hole. After taking the lead on Ryan Longwell's field goal in the third quarter, the Vikings wilted down the stretch. McNabb finished 18 of 30 for 202 yards, two touchdowns and an interception, while Adrian Peterson carried 23 times for 80 yards in another underwhelming performance. "It's frustrating," McNabb said. "We've got to go back and do the same thing we've been doing the last couple of weeks and try to find a solution." Kansas City's defense set the tone early, holding the Vikings to three-and-out on their first possession, and Succop's 40-yard field goal provided the Chiefs with their first lead all season. The Vikings answered quickly with a nine-play, 80-yard drive. Peterson carried the load, forcing the Chiefs to stack the line of scrimmage, and McNabb made them pay when he found Devin Aromashodu streaking down the sideline. He made a diving catch in the end zone, and the touchdown was upheld after video review. It was McNabb's 233rd TD pass, breaking a tie with Steve Young for 21st all-time. Minnesota looked as if it would build on the 7-3 lead, marching deep into Chiefs territory early in the second quarter. But after a sack by Tamba Hali set up third-and-long, McNabb's pass was tipped by running back Toby Gerhart and intercepted by Brandon Carr. The Chiefs struck with a 42-yard completion to Steve Breaston, but the drive fizzled when Cassel didn't see Breaston open in the end zone on second down. Cassel inexplicably chucked the ball into the ground on third down, and Succop's 24-yard field goal made it 7-6. Cassel got an earful from Haley when he came over to the sideline, the coach clearly unhappy with the execution, but they were on the same page by the fourth quarter. "I was proud of the way our guys responded," Cassel said. "The beginning of the season hasn't gone the way we anticipated it going, but today was a step in the right direction." Notes: Vikings DE Jared Allen had a pair of sacks against his former team. ... Hali finished with two sacks. ... Next on the career TD passing list for McNabb are George Blanda (236), Jim Kelly (237) and Len Dawson (239). ... Nick Lowery and Lawrence Tynes are the only other Chiefs kickers with two 50-plus-yard field goals in a single game. © 2011 STATS LLC

Peterson's 3 TDs power Vikings over Cards 34-10 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- The NFL is dominated these days by power-armed precision quarterbacks, and the teams who can't spread the ball around the field and take over a game with their passing attack are being left behind. The Cardinals and Vikings showed why they're at the bottom of the standings at this early stage of the season, with struggles by each quarterback during Minnesota's 34-10 victory over Arizona on Sunday. It was the Vikings who finally ended their troubling habit of stumbling down the stretch, building a lead so big even they couldn't let it slip away this time. Adrian Peterson's three first-quarter touchdowns helped them take a 28-0 advantage less than 12 1/2 minutes into the game. "Last week was just kind of sad and down in the locker room. It was quiet. It was OK today. Night and day difference," said Peterson, who rushed 29 times for 122 yards. "It was a good feeling, just hearing guys saying that this is what I like to feel like after a game." Donovan McNabb jogged in for a score, too, but the Vikings (1-4) were booed at home several times while stumbling through the second and third quarters. McNabb's bounced passes had a lot to do with the dissatisfaction, and he finished 10 for 21 for 169 yards. He has thrown for only four touchdowns in five games. But McNabb insisted he's not worried about the public perception. "There are things we need to clean up, and we'll clean them up next week," McNabb said. "When we needed them, we obviously completed them." That wasn't the case for Kevin Kolb - McNabb's former backup in Philadelphia. Kolb had two of his three turnovers in the defining first quarter for the Cardinals (1-4) and finished 21 for 42 for 232 yards and one touchdown pass, his shakiest performance yet for his new team. He was sacked four times, twice each by Jared Allen and Brian Robison. "I'm as frustrated as I have ever been. That needs to turn into determination just like you said," Kolb said. "Hopefully within the next 24 hours we can flip that around, because you have to stay true to this team and not start doing crazy things and try and get back on the winning track." The Vikings started three straight first-quarter drives at the Arizona 18, 24 and 25, stretching the lead so quickly that fans stopped chanting for rookie Christian Ponder. McNabb and the Vikings were still jeered off the field at the half with a 28-3 advantage after a sack prompted a run-out-the-clock order from coach Leslie Frazier. Frazier said he remains confident in McNabb as the starter. With a wide, sly smile, the coach insisted he was unaware of the boos. "I thought he made some good throws today that really helped us to keep the chains moving, and we'll always continue to work on the things that we're not doing as well," Frazier said. The Vikings lost their first four games by a combined 19 points, including two devastating defeats here last month when Tampa Bay (17-0) and Detroit (20-0) came back from big halftime deficits. So while none of the Vikings were happy about the derision from their own fans, they weren't exactly surprised. "It's the NFL. If you're not big enough to handle that at this point, then you're in the wrong business," linebacker Chad Greenway said. Most of the angst is targeted at the passing game, a problem for the Vikings for the last five years - except for Brett Favre's turn-back-the-clock storybook season in 2009 - that has not gone away with the arrival of McNabb. His receivers and his blockers have plenty to do with the lack of punch and rhythm, too, but the 13-year veteran has often been out of sync on his footwork or his follow through. McNabb has at least avoided those costly turnovers, unlike Kolb, who has six interceptions and three lost fumbles in five games. The Cardinals had six possessions in the first quarter, only once crossing their own 30. Kolb's batted pass was intercepted by Asher Allen, and Robison knocked the ball out of Kolb's hand on a speed rush to end another series before it started. "We're going to look at what we're doing and who we're doing it with. We've got the bye week coming up and that will give us the chance to assess that," coach Ken Whisenhunt said. "I'm just disappointed with the way we started the game. We dug ourselves a hole we couldn't climb out of, and that's not something that we've done this year." The Vikings gave the Cardinals their chance to get back in this one, too, when a fumble lost by Michael Jenkins on the first drive of the third quarter gave them the ball near midfield. Kolb was under heavy pressure on the next drive, but he finally found Larry Fitzgerald for a critical back-shoulder completion near the goal line, and Beanie Wells rumbled in on the next play to cut the lead to 28-10. An eerie silence came over the crowd, as if everyone in the stadium started to dread another collapse. But on the ensuing possession, McNabb found Devin Aromashodu, who took over Bernard Berrian's role as the deep-route wide receiver, on a crossing pattern that netted 60 yards. That drive at least ate up some time and ended with a 26-yard field goal by Ryan Longwell, the first score by the Vikings in more than 29 minutes. "Take your hat off to the Vikings. Those guys were 0-4. They were hungry. They knew they needed to get a win, and they played that way from the opening kickoff," Fitzgerald said. Notes: Fitzgerald was

limited to four receptions and 66 yards. The Minneapolis native is 0-3 in his hometown against the Vikings. ... The Vikings have actually outscored their opponents this year, 111-106. Just as remarkable is that they're plus-3 in turnover margin. ... The Cardinals played without TE Todd Heap (hamstring) and lost FS Kerry Rhodes (foot) and LG Darryn Colledge (concussion) to injuries during the game. © 2011 STATS LLC

Hester has 2 long TDs as Bears beat Vikings 39-10 CHICAGO (AP) -- Given the beating Jay Cutler was taking and the big plays the defense was allowing, this one looked like potential trouble for the Chicago Bears. So it was hardly shocking that a blowout developed. That the Bears delivered the beating was a bit of a surprise. The Bears got two big touchdowns from Devin Hester, stopped Adrian Peterson and held their ground against Jared Allen in a 39-10 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night. Hester set the tone with a 48-yard touchdown catch and scored on a career-best 98-yard kickoff return before leaving with a chest injury - and he had a lot of help in the win. "Hopefully, that's who were are, the team that you saw tonight," coach Lovie Smith said. Jay Cutler threw for 267 yards and two touchdowns without an interception. Julius Peppers had two sacks and the Bears (3-3) held Peterson to 39 yards rushing. Smith didn't think the injuries to Hester and tight end Kellen Davis (elbow) were serious, but he's made similar statements in the past about players who wound up missing big chunks of time. Hester did not make himself available for comment. His 48-yard TD pass from Cutler on Chicago's first possession got the Bears started quickly as they grabbed a 26-3 halftime lead. Hester's kickoff return early in the third quarter erased any chance the Vikings (1-5) had at a comeback. "You feel like you're getting ready to come and that kickoff return was a big momentum turn," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said. It's no secret that teams are inviting danger by kicking to Hester, and Minnesota paid a big price right after Peterson scored on a 4-yard run. Hester took the kickoff, turned to his right and was touched maybe once on his way to the end zone, making it 33-10. It was his first kickoff return for a touchdown since Nov. 25, 2007, against Denver. "We're all kind of witnessing history every time he touches it," Smith said. Hester set a record with his 11th punt return for a touchdown against Carolina on Oct. 2. On Sunday, the good feelings gave way to concern when the announcement came early in the fourth quarter that he was finished for the game. Along with the big return, Hester had five catches for 91 yards. Cutler, meanwhile, had all the time he needed and - for one game, anyway - avoided a big beating. Never mind that league sacks leader Jared Allen was lining up for the Vikings, the Bears' maligned blockers held their ground. That allowed Cutler to complete 21 of 31 passes while being sacked just once. The defense did its job, too. A surprise starter after sitting out practice this week with a sprained left knee, Peppers got his two sacks and stayed in until the closing minutes even though the knee was bothering him. "Did I want to stay in? I mean, I don't know," Peppers said. "I wanted to play, if that's what you're asking. I wanted to play, but the smart thing to do is get everybody out of the game and not risk an injury in a blowout." Donovan McNabb threw for 177 yards and completed 19 of 24 passes. He was sacked five times before being lifted for a debuting Christian Ponder, but it was a brutal night for Peterson aside from that scoring run. He simply couldn't get anything going against a defense that had been giving up plays at an alarming rate, and it didn't help that the Vikings lost center John Sullivan (concussion) and right tackle Phil Loadholt (bruised knee) to injuries in the third quarter. Even so, the Bears dominated from the start. Now, after dropping three of four, they can breathe a little easier. They still trail unbeaten Green Bay by three games and Detroit by two with losses to both teams, but they have to feel a little better about themselves as they get ready to play Tampa Bay in London. "That was awesome," linebacker Brian Urlacher said. "We ran the ball, protected our quarterback, we made plays in the kicking game as usual, good team win." Notes: Ponder was 9 of 17 for 99 yards. ... Frazier said he didn't think Loadholt was seriously injured, but had no more information on Sullivan and S Jamarca Sanford (concussion). ... Peppers has 20 multi-sack games. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers helps Pack stay unbeaten, top Vikes 33-27 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- Despite the disparate records, Aaron Rodgers and the Packers found plenty of competition from Christian Ponder in the fearless rookie's first start for the Vikings. Rodgers was up for the challenge again, and the defending Super Bowl champions still didn't flinch. Rodgers kept Green Bay unbeaten with three touchdowns and 335 yards passing, holding off Minnesota 33-27 on Sunday. "There's not a lot of panic in this team. We've been down a couple times at halftime. Just a lot of focus," said Rodgers, who completed his first 13 passes and finished 24 for 30 on another near-unstoppable afternoon against a depleted secondary. "We expect nothing less," said Greg Jennings, who had seven catches for 147 yards. He jogged in for a 79-yard score on the second play of the second half after an egregiously blown coverage, giving the Packers their first lead at 20-17. Ponder was picked off twice in the third quarter by Charles Woodson, who almost grabbed a couple more interceptions, but he kept the Vikings in it from start to finish after completing a 71-yard pass play on his first snap. Adrian Peterson helped him out by rushing 24 times for 175 yards and a touchdown for the Vikings (1-6), but James Starks put the game away with two big gains for first downs before the 2-minute warning and another one right after. He had 75 yards on 13 carries for the Packers (7-0). "It's frustrating to come out against the defending champs and be that close and not to come up with the win," Peterson said. "Give credit to those guys. They made plays when they needed to, and we ended up on the wrong side of it." Mason Crosby had four field goals for the Packers, including a franchise record 58-yarder, one of many delights among some anxious moments for the thousands of Packers fans in attendance who made the trip across the border. "We're not going to swing from a rope around here as far as extremes, one way or another," coach Mike McCarthy said. "We're very happy being 7-0, stating the obvious, but to a man we know we can play better. That's what's exciting." This rivalry is still fierce, as evidenced by a couple of early skirmishes. Vikings defensive end Brian Robison, frustrated by some unwelcome contact from Packers guard T.J. Lang during one second-quarter play, gave Lang a swift kick to the groin area, a caught-on-camera personal foul that drew a penalty and is likely to bring Robison a fine. Ponder's first foray against the Packers, despite the mistakes, showed flash and promise. "They could be 0-14, 0-15. It doesn't matter," Jennings said. "When they play in this building, you're going to get their best shot." Ponder went 13 for 32, but he never looked rattled and finished with 219 yards and two touchdowns. Ponder also ran four times for 31 yards. He found Michael Jenkins for a score with 7:49 left, after a rare three-and-out by the Packers, to cut the lead to six points. He had the ball back with plenty of time to win it before a couple of errant heaves effectively ended the comeback. Green Bay has quite the grip on the NFL right now, with Rodgers and his rocket right arm leading the way. "He's putting together an unbelievable year, and he's playing extremely well," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said. "You have to give him a lot of credit. He's really developed over the last few years into a topflight quarterback." The Vikings have struggled in the secondary at full strength, and they weren't even close to that. Safety Jamarca Sanford was recovering from a concussion. Antoine Winfield was still on the sideline with a stiff neck, and fellow cornerback Chris Cook - their best player in pass coverage - was not even at the stadium. He was in the county jail, for an alleged domestic assault. The rest of the Vikings were in the building, but they're just not in Green Bay's league this year. This usually tight rivalry has been this one-sided in decades. The Packers won for the eighth time in 11 meetings, and the common denominator is Rodgers. He's connecting on roughly seven of every 10 passes, and many of those rare incompletions have been drops by his otherwise-stellar receivers. Rookie Randall Cobb was wide open on a drag route across the middle on third-and-16 at the 20, but the pass from Rodgers glanced off his hands and the Packers settled for three points. Yes, Jared Allen tacked two sacks on his NFL-leading total to give him 11 1/2, but Rodgers spread the ball around to just about every receiver and made a perfect throw to just about every spot on the field. He went 6 for 6 on his first drive, firing passes to six players during a ho-hum 91-yard march for the tying score. The only three incompletions he threw in the first half? Two drops and a spike to stop the

clock. To keep this game competitive, the Vikings needed a timely turnover or two, and the rookie Cobb gave them one at the end of the first quarter when he fumbled a fair catch with teammate M.D. Jennings getting in his way. The Vikings recovered at midfield and scored a few minutes later to make it 14-7. "Coach said in the first quarter, 'They're going to shoot their wad, and we've just got to come out and play our type of ball,' and we did," said tight end Jermichael Finley, who caught a third-quarter touchdown pass. "We're the only team in the league that's got that goose egg behind us. We've just got to stay humble and don't get complacent." NOTES: The Vikings added former DE Chris Doleman to their Ring of Honor during a halftime ceremony. ... Packers RB Alex Green hobbled off with a knee injury following a first-quarter kickoff return. ... Allen set a franchise record with a sack in his ninth straight game. He has 11 1/2 sacks in his last six games against the Packers. ... This was the first 100-yard game for Jenkins in eight NFL seasons. ... Ryan Longwell had three touchbacks and two field goals, including a 52-yarder, for the Vikings against his former team. © 2011 STATS LLC

Ponder's Vikings top Cam's Panthers 24-21 CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) -- Christian Ponder took only two starts to get his first career win, outdueling the more-heralded Cam Newton in the process. The rookie showed tremendous poise in the pocket, particularly on third downs, and got a huge assist from Adrian Peterson on Sunday as the Minnesota Vikings held on to beat the Carolina Panthers 24-21. Peterson had 162 yards from scrimmage and scored two touchdowns, and Ryan Longwell kicked a 31-yard field goal with 2:43 left as the Vikings (2-6) snapped a two-game losing streak. The Panthers had a chance to tie the game with 26 seconds left, but Olindo Mare missed wide left from 31 yards. Ponder, the 12th overall pick in the draft, completed 18 of 28 passes for 236 yards to beat Newton, the first choice in the draft. Ponder moved the chains with key completions on third downs in the second half to keep scoring drives alive. "It's satisfying to get a win no matter what," Ponder said. "Cam played extremely well. He had three touchdown passes, and a big drive there at the end. Fortunately, the ball bounced our way with the missed field goal." Peterson, the NFL's leading rusher, bounced back from a slow start and scored on a 9-yard run to tie the game at 21 late in the third quarter. He ran for 86 yards and had five catches for 76 yards, including a 19-yard touchdown reception in the second quarter. "They kept dropping deep and leaving him open," Ponder said. "I kept taking it. ... I'll take that all day." Newton threw for 290 yards and a career-high three touchdowns, but once again the Panthers (2-6) failed to finish in the fourth quarter. It was their fifth loss by a touchdown or less this season. The Panthers had their chances. Carolina went three-and-out on three straight possessions in the second half and watched their lead slip away. But after Longwell's field goal gave the Vikings the 24-21 lead, Newton seemed poised to lead a memorable comeback. He completed a 44-yard pass to Brandon LaFell on fourth-and-15 to reach Vikings territory. The Panthers appeared to reach the 7 on a first-down run by Newton, but the play was called back because of a holding penalty on Steve Smith. "I got a few texts saying already in the HD it didn't look too bad," Smith said of the official's call. "For a 70-year-old man limping down the field, I guess that's what he saw." Newton went back to Smith on the next play, but he was stopped short of the first down. Mare's kick sailed wide left and the home crowd groaned before heading to the exits. "Whoever thinks that this game came down to the last possession is a fool," Newton said. "Offensively and defensively, we had opportunities, man." Minnesota's defense came up with some timely turnovers, jarring the ball loose from Newton on a pair of blindside hits; both fumbles led to first-half touchdowns. Still, the Panthers led 21-14 after a 22-yard touchdown catch by Smith in the third quarter. But Carolina's offense sputtered most of the second half - going three-and-out on three straight possessions. The Vikings tied the game on Peterson's ninth touchdown rushing this season late in the third quarter. "I got more involved in the passing game today," Peterson said. "The first half was critical. Carolina was stacking the box and slowing down the run. I was able to get around the perimeter on a checkdown. Christian did a great job of finding me." Minnesota took the lead for good on a 13-play, 72-yard drive in the fourth quarter that took 7:10 off the clock. Smith, who came into the game leading the NFL in yards receiving, had seven catches for 100 yards. Tight ends Jeremy Shockey and Greg Olsen also had touchdown catches for Carolina. Jared Allen, who entered the game leading the NFL in sacks, had a big game for the Vikings with five tackles, a sack, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery. Percy Harvin had four catches for 58 yards and scored on a touchdown run for the Vikings. The game began with a crazy flurry. Marcus Sherels returned the opening kickoff 78 yards to the Carolina 27. However, the Vikings went three-and-out and Longwell missed a 45-yard field goal. It seemed Carolina had seized the early momentum with that defensive stop. But E.J. Henderson sacked Newton from behind on Carolina's first play and Allen recovered at the Carolina 16. Harvin, lined up in the backfield, scored two plays later on a 10-yard run to give the Vikings a 7-0 lead. The Panthers evened the score in the second quarter when Shockey hauled in his first touchdown pass of the season, a 1-yarder from Newton. Shockey celebrated by blowing kisses to the crowd. Less than four minutes later, following an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on Harvin, Newton took advantage of great field position at midfield and connected on a 39-yard touchdown strike down the seam to Olsen to give Carolina a 14-7 lead. NOTES: Allen has a sack in 10 straight games. ... The Panthers were already thin at linebacker coming in and lost Jason Phillips (calf) and Thomas Williams (neck) to injuries on Sunday. Both left the game and didn't return. ... Panthers DE Charles Johnson has a sack in seven of Carolina's eight games and 15 sacks in his last 15 games. ... Panthers cornerback Darius Butler missed the game to be with his daughter, who had open heart surgery earlier this week. She had a setback on Friday, but is doing better, according to team officials. © 2011 STATS LLC

Rodgers throws 4 TDs, Packers beat Vikings 45-7 GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) -- Aaron Rodgers was just fine sharing the spotlight with the Green Bay Packers defense. Thrilled, actually. If the Packers now can field a dependable defense along with their trademark high-octane offense, they just might be unstoppable. The Packers (9-0) remain the NFL's lone undefeated team - not that Rodgers is quite ready to ponder the possibility of a perfect season. "I'm sure there will be, obviously, more pressure, more scrutiny from the outside of this locker room," Rodgers said. "But we've got a good locker room." Rodgers threw four touchdown passes against a fierce Vikings pass rush, Randall Cobb returned a punt 80 yards for a touchdown and the Packers defense contained Adrian Peterson and the Minnesota Vikings in a 45-7 victory on Monday night. "It's (our) best game, because of the margin of victory," Packers coach Mike McCarthy said. "And at the end of the day, it's about points." Green Bay's defense came into the game giving up nearly 300 yards passing per game, second-most in the NFL. Their last time out, the Packers nearly blew a big lead in the fourth quarter at San Diego, holding on for a 45-38 victory. The Packers finally played to their potential against the division rival Vikings (2-7), holding rookie quarterback Christian Ponder to 190 yards passing with an interception and limiting Peterson to 51 yards and a touchdown. "I felt as a defense we owed it to ourselves to play a game like that," cornerback Charles Woodson said. "Owed it to our fans, our team, especially our offense who's been playing out of their minds this year. We needed a game like that. It feels good, but it's still one game." Worse yet for the Vikings, they may be without cornerback Antoine Winfield because of a broken clavicle, according to coach Leslie Frazier. Monday's game was Winfield's first since sustaining a neck injury. The Vikings' defense did its best to rough up Rodgers, sacking him three times and hitting him hard virtually every time he took off running. Defensive end Jared Allen harassed Rodgers at every turn. The pressure didn't force any uncharacteristic mistakes from Rodgers, who was 23 of 30 for 250 yards without an interception. Rodgers threw a pair of touchdown passes to Jordy Nelson, and also found Greg Jennings and John Kuhn for scores. "Our performance tonight was very disappointing," Frazier said. Allen didn't need anybody to recite Rodgers' gaudy stats. "I don't even know what that means," Allen said. "All I know is he crushed us tonight." McCarthy put backup quarterback Matt Flynn in the game with 10:30 left in the fourth quarter - and the Vikings couldn't keep him

out of the end zone, either, as he scrambled 3 yards for a touchdown with 4:27 left. But it was Cobb, a second-round rookie out of Kentucky, who got it all started for the Packers. After the Packers' defense forced the Vikings to go three-and-out on their first possession, Cobb fielded a punt from Chris Kluwe and squeezed through a seam in the middle of the field. Cobb accelerated down the left sideline and danced the final few steps into the end zone, tossing the ball in the air as if he was shooting a basketball before doing a "Lambeau leap" into the stands. Cobb also had a 108-yard kickoff return for a touchdown in the Packers' season opener against the New Orleans Saints. "I guess when the lights come on my tempo and my game speed goes up," Cobb said. "But I've got to get to where I'm doing it every game." Rodgers finally got the ball and directed an 11-play, 70-yard drive that included conversions on third-and-8, to Donald Driver, and third-and-7, to running back James Starks. Rodgers then finished the drive with a perfect pass to Jennings in the middle of the field for a touchdown, and the Packers led 14-0. With the Vikings driving near the end of the first quarter, Woodson wrestled a ball away from Visanthe Shiancoe for what initially was ruled an interception. Frazier challenged the call and it was overturned, giving Ryan Longwell a shot at a 47-yard field goal. But the Vikings committed a penalty, and Longwell came up just short on a 52-yard attempt. Rodgers then put together another drive, and Rodgers hit tight end Jermichael Finley for 25 yards on a fourth-and-5 conversion attempt at the Vikings 34-yard line. Allen sacked Rodgers on first-and-goal, and the Packers ended up settling for a 25-yard field goal by Mason Crosby to take a 17-0 lead with 12:04 left before halftime. Ponder then threw an interception to Packers cornerback Tramon Williams, misfiring on a deep ball after a flea-flicker toss back from Peterson. Rodgers was sharp on the first possession of the second half, leading an eight-play, 69-yard drive that included a fourth-down conversion to Nelson. Rodgers found Nelson on the right sideline two plays later, Nelson threw a stiff arm at Vikings cornerback Cedric Griffin and broke free for a touchdown, giving the Packers a commanding 24-0 lead with 10:45 left in the third quarter. The Packers forced another punt but Cobb fumbled, and the Vikings recovered deep in Packers territory. Ponder threw to Percy Harvin, then handed to Peterson for a 3-yard touchdown up the middle. The Vikings cut the Packers' lead to 24-7 with 8:41 left in the third quarter. Cobb then made up for his mistake with a long kickoff return to give the ball to the Packers at midfield. Rodgers led yet another precision drive, finishing it off with a 9-yard touchdown pass to Kuhn for a 31-7 lead. Notes: Cobb's return was the Packers' first punt return for a touchdown since November 2008. ... Including the playoffs, the Packers have won 15 straight games dating back to last season, the longest such streak in team history. ... Monday's attendance was 70,519. © 2011 STATS LLC

Palmer, Raiders hold on to beat Vikings, 27-21 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- Hue Jackson watched his Oakland Raiders overcome a serious injury to receiver Darrius Heyward-Bey, a costly turnover by running back Michael Bush and, in Jackson's eyes, some unfair treatment from the officials to remain on top of the AFC West. Just another day at the office for one of the league's most resilient teams. Carson Palmer threw for 164 yards and a touchdown and ran for another score in a 27-21 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday. "We continue to battle and that's what I really love about my football team is they won't quit," Jackson said. Bush rushed for 109 yards and a touchdown for the Raiders (6-4), who barely held on in a mistake-filled fourth quarter that may have been influenced by Heyward-Bey's scary exit. Adrian Peterson left the game in the second quarter because of an injured left ankle for the Vikings, who fell to 2-8 for the first time since 1962. Palmer, who completed 17 of 23 passes in his third game as the Oakland starter, led the Raiders to touchdown drives after two turnovers and a botched field goal by the Vikings, helping Oakland take a 27-7 lead into the fourth quarter. But Heyward-Bey was injured when linebacker E.J. Henderson's knee inadvertently hit him in the back of the head while he was being tackled, and his teammates were visibly shaken as he was taken off the field with no movement in his extremities visible. "It's definitely scary," Palmer said. "Our thoughts and prayers are with him and I know he has family watching the game. It's a tough situation to be in." Jackson said Heyward-Bey had total movement in his limbs and that he has been diagnosed with a neck injury. Jackson said it was his hope that the former first-round draft choice would join the team on the plane ride home and undergo further tests in Oakland. "He's going to be fine," Jackson said. "I truly believe he's going to be OK, but obviously we have to take all the precautionary measures to make sure he's going to be OK." After the injury, the Raiders had a field goal blocked and their defense committed a rash of penalties to help the Vikings get back in the game. Christian Ponder threw a 26-yard TD pass to Percy Harvin to make it 27-14. Three Raiders penalties helped the Vikings move into scoring range again on the next possession, but Stanford Routt intercepted Ponder in the end zone to end that threat. But Bush fumbled a few plays later and Ponder cashed in with a 1-yard TD to Kyle Rudolph. The Vikings got the ball back at their own 29 with three minutes to play. But Tyvon Branch broke up a pass to Harvin on fourth down to preserve the victory. Ponder was 19 for 33 for 211 yards, two touchdowns and three interceptions. "Bad decisions by me, and I take full responsibility for this loss," Ponder said. "The defense played unbelievably well and kept us in the game. We just kept making mistakes." The Raiders were penalized 12 times for 117 yards in the game, including four personal foul penalties for hits deemed illegal by the officials. Jackson said he thought some of those calls were "unfair." "I know everyone says we're the most-penalized team in football and that's a fact, and I'm not running from that," Jackson said. "But there's no way, some things that happened today on that football field, I question. I just do, and I have to, and I'm going to defend my team. It's time that I do that." Peterson left the game early in the second quarter after a nifty 12-yard run. He lost the shoe on his right foot during the run and his left ankle rolled grotesquely as he was pulled down from behind by a couple of Raiders defenders. Peterson limped off the field and was taken by cart to the locker room for X-rays, which were negative. Palmer did what a veteran quarterback is supposed to do - capitalize on mistakes. After Matt Giordano picked off a poorly thrown pass from Ponder at the Raiders 5 and returned it to near midfield, Palmer guided the Raiders the rest of the way, capping the drive with an 11-yard TD pass to Chaz Schilens for a 10-7 lead. The Vikings botched a field goal attempt on the next drive when holder Chris Kluwe bobbled the snap. Bush ripped off a 28-yard run, Palmer executed a nice shovel pass to Marcel Reece and Bush flattened safety Tyrell Johnson after meeting in the hole at the 2-yard line to bulldoze into the end zone. Lorenzo Booker fumbled the ensuing kickoff, giving the Raiders the ball at the 16 with about 90 seconds to go in the first half. Palmer hit Kevin Boss for 11 yards and sneaked into the end zone from 1 yard for a 24-7 halftime lead. "Like Coach Jackson said, we haven't played a complete football game yet," Palmer said. "And it's scary to think, when we do, what it's going to look like." NOTES: The Raiders also lost RB Taiwan Jones (hamstring), C Samson Satele (concussion) and DE Jarvis Moss (hamstring) to injuries in the game. All three will be evaluated on Monday. ... Heyward-Bey had four catches for 43 yards in the game. ... A bizarre sequence happened in the first quarter when officials forgot to reset the down marker after a first down holding penalty on Vikings WR Michael Jenkins. So when the Vikings were sending in a package for third-and-8, the officials had it as fourth down. The Vikings called timeout, and after a long delay and several conversations, referee Jerome Boger made the correction and gave Minnesota its timeout back. "It was just a madhouse," Harvin said. "But they did get it right in the end." © 2011 STATS LLC

Ryan throws 3 TDs, Falcons hold off Vikings 24-14 ATLANTA (AP) -- Mike Smith cracked a joke after the Falcons held on for another win that was probably closer than it should've been. "We make it exciting enough for you?" the Atlanta coach said, managing a smile. Then he took a swig of water and breathed a sigh of relief. His team held on in a game it absolutely couldn't afford to lose. Matt Ryan tossed three touchdown passes and the Falcons came through with a goal-line stand after Percy Harvin's 104-yard kickoff return, preserving a 24-14 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday. Atlanta (7-4) had to beat the lowly Vikings to maintain its spot in a tight NFC playoff race. Minnesota (2-9) didn't appear much of a threat without star running back Adrian Peterson, who was

sidelined by a sprained left ankle. To make matter worse for the visiting team, three more players went down to injuries in the first half. The game started according to plan for the Falcons, who raced to a 17-0 lead by halftime. Ryan hooked up with Harry Douglas on a 27-yard touchdown and Roddy White on a 6-yarder. The Vikings had only two first downs and 38 yards until their final possession of the first half, when they padded their numbers a bit against the prevent defense. Even then, Minnesota went to the locker room with five first downs and 97 yards. Instead of putting the Vikings away, the Falcons let them back in the game. "We know we're a lot better than that," tight end Tony Gonzalez said. "Sooner or later we're going to hit our stride." Toby Gerhart, filling in for Peterson, scored on a 1-yard run late in the third quarter. Then, after Dominique Franks inadvertently touched a punt the Falcons were trying to run away from, allowing the Vikings to recover, Christian Ponder went to Harvin for a 39-yard touchdown pass on fourth-and-13 to make it 17-14. Ryan responded with two long completions to White before hitting backup tight end Michael Palmer with a 3-yard touchdown that extended the lead with 6:40 remaining. Still, the Vikings wouldn't go away. Harvin took the ensuing kickoff 7 yards deep in the end zone, found a wall of blockers to the right and took off right in front of the Falcons bench. Christopher Owens made a diving tackle at the 3, and that might've saved the Falcons. "That was the most pivotal play of the game," Smith said. "We were able to put our defense out there and live to play another play." The Vikings got it to the 1 and decided to go for the touchdown on fourth down. But Sean Weatherspoon burst into the backfield and stuffed Gerhart right after he took the handoff, throwing him for a 2-yard loss. The Falcons ran out the clock. "When the guy comes screaming off the edge like that, you have no chance," Gerhart said. The game was a near repeat of Atlanta's performance the previous week against Tennessee, and doesn't bode well for this team - considered a Super Bowl contender before the season - making a long run in the playoffs even if they do get in. The Falcons built a 20-point lead on the Titans but staggered to the finish, barely preserving a 23-17 win. Now, another close call. "At the end of the day, we had more points than they did," Smith said. "That's the most important stat." Vikings rookie coach Leslie Frazier admitted it was mistake to go for a touchdown on fourth down, instead of kicking a chip-shot field goal that would've made it a one-score game. "That's purely on me," he said. "I let my emotions get the best of me." The Vikings looked a lot better over the final two quarters than they did in the first two, though they were still outgained 335-226 in total yards. "The first half was ugly," Gerhart said. "There's no rhythm. We came back after halftime and wanted to get the ball back and wanted to get a little momentum. Unfortunately, they stopped that momentum at the end of the game." Ryan completed 27 of 34 for 262 yards and had his best efficiency rating of the season. White, showing signs of turning around a disappointing season, had his second straight big game with 10 catches for 120 yards. "It's kind of the nature of NFL. Teams execute at a high level and things are going exactly as planned. Then there are times where you don't execute as well as you would like," Ryan said. "The most important thing is how we responded to that and played in the fourth quarter. We did a great job when we needed to score." Ponder was 17 of 25 for 186 yards but was sacked four times and had to scramble away from pressure several more times. Gerhart managed only 44 yards rushing, while Harvin had eight catches for 95 yards to go along with his big play on the kickoff, which was the longest non-scoring return in NFL history, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. NOTES: Falcons CB Brent Grimes (right knee) went out in the first half and didn't return. ... The Vikings lost S Tyrell Johnson (hamstring), CB Asher Allen (shoulder) and deep snapper Cullen Loeffler (back). DE Jared Allen took over the snapping duties from Loeffler. ... Harvin took advantage when the Falcons dropped linebacker Curtis Lofton into coverage on the fourth-and-13. He had no chance of keeping up with the speedy receiver. "We'll take that matchup every day," Ponder said. --- Follow Paul Newberry on Twitter at www.twitter.com/pnewberry1963 © 2011 STATS LLC

Tebow, Broncos do it again, beat Vikings 35-32 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- Tim Tebow and the Denver Broncos came through again with a strong, determined finish after enduring another slow start. This time, Tebow was in a groove the entire second half -- not just in the waning minutes -- and his teammates on defense were getting gobbled up. But there they were in the end, emulating Tebow's late-game touch. Tebow passed for a season-best 202 yards and two third-quarter touchdowns to help the unflappable Broncos win their fifth straight game, 35-32 over the Minnesota Vikings Sunday on Matt Prater's 23-yard field goal as time expired. "I know that I had a lot of help. Offensive line did a great job, and receivers stepped up and made me look a lot better than I really am," said Tebow, who completed 10 of 15 passes, his best percentage as an NFL starter, and posted a career-high passer rating of 149.3. Prater kicked two field goals in the final 93 seconds for the Broncos (7-5), who forged a first-place tie in the AFC West with a loss by the Oakland Raiders. Christian Ponder set Minnesota's single-game rookie record with 381 yards passing, including a pair of long touchdowns to Percy Harvin, but his sideline throw with 1:33 remaining was intercepted by Andre Goodman and returned to the 15-yard line. Lance Ball's first-down run for 11 yards made it first-and-goal at the 4 with 1:12 remaining, but the Vikings decided against letting them score right away and took their chances with a shank or a block instead. But the Broncos drained the clock for Prater's winner and raised their record to 6-1 with Tebow as the starter. "Hard to argue. That guy wins games," Ponder said. Harvin had a career-high 156 yards for the Vikings (2-10), who lost their fourth in a row. "Too many times this year we've had leads and then had letdowns or missed assignments," Harvin said. "It's another game we feel we had control of, and to somehow let it slip away, that's disgusting." In seven games with Tebow, the Broncos offense has 30 first-half points. They were blanked in this one, on the board only because of Mario Haggan's 16-yard interception return for a first-quarter score. Tebow's third turnover of the season, a sack by Jared Allen that forced a fumble with 39 seconds left before halftime, gave the Vikings three free points. But they can't be counted out. Whether their unconventional quarterback is trying to complete a down-field pass or if they're flirting again with defeat, the Broncos haven't flinched. "There were a lot of questions on the outside. Sometimes it gets built up like they were on the inside, but the one thing I will say is the guy wins," coach John Fox said. "He does it with his feet. He does it with his arm. He's young. He's just going to get better." Harvin, a fellow former Florida star, said he was worried once Tebow got the ball late in the game. "I was sure enough hoping we were going to get him, but I've been on his teams," Harvin said, adding: "He's a winner. He's a leader. All of the things you hear about, you may think it's too much, but that's what he is." After serving as the backbone of Denver's resurgence, putting Tebow in position for all of those rallies, the Broncos gave up 489 yards. Toby Gerhart gained 91 yards on 21 carries. But they picked off Ponder twice, recovered his fumble and applied enough pressure to equalize the game. "It's been fun, a fun ride," Haggan said. "This team is close, believes, has a lot of character, but we're not done." Demaryius Thomas caught four passes for 144 yards and both touchdowns for the Broncos, who have won four games with Tebow by either four or three points. Thomas was wide open twice, with the coverage by Minnesota's depleted secondary breaking down often, but Tebow had to find him. Pushed out of the pocket with no one open, he ran left and delivered on on-target across-his-body throw to Thomas, who ran the rest of the way and dragged a couple of defenders into the end zone for a 41-yard score that cut the Minnesota lead to 22-21 late in the third. "We put in a lot of work," Thomas said. "It's paid off. It's about that time." During a dizzying display of back-and-forth touchdowns, with both Ponder and Tebow putting together their best games as pros. Ryan Longwell's third field goal, with 3:06 left, made it 32-29 Vikings, teeing another one up for Tebow. He threw a wobbler that still landed on target, when Thomas hauled in a 40-yard completion. Thomas couldn't bring in the third-down pass at the goal line, but Prater tied the game with a 46-yarder before Ponder's second glaring mistake. Harvin's second score, a 48-yard catch and run, was the first fourth-quarter touchdown given up by the Broncos in five games and made it 29-21 Minnesota. They averaged 15 points allowed over their previous four games. But there went the Broncos again. Tebow hit Thomas for 42 yards, and Willis McGahee rumbled into the end zone from 24 yards out. Then Tebow took the snap on the 2-point conversion and rolled to his right and over the goal line to tie the game at 29. Except for that play, he looked more like pocket

passer on this afternoon, running only four times. "It's crazy. Just try to do whatever they ask of me," Tebow said. Notes: Haggan, a ninth-year veteran who started in place of injured LB Von Miller, came up with the first interception of his career. He also led the team with 12 tackles, three for losses. ... Tebow's NFL career high is 308 yards passing, against Houston on Dec. 26, 2010. ... Allen tied an NFL record with his fourth career safety, stopping McGahee in the end zone on the Broncos' first play. McGahee had 111 yards on 20 attempts. ... All three replay reviews, including a TD pass to Kyle Rudolph, went in favor of the Vikings. © 2011 STATS LLC

Lions barely beat Vikings 34-28 on final play DETROIT (AP) -- DeAndre Levy had a fist full of Joe Webb's facemask, got away with it, and wasn't apologizing for Detroit's good fortune in a 34-28 win over Minnesota on Sunday. "We get a lot of calls called against us," the Lions linebacker said. "So, they owed us one if I did." Detroit (8-5) is still in prime position in the NFC wild-card race. Barely. Webb had the Vikings a yard away from a potential winning touchdown on the game's final snap, but the backup quarterback fumbled just before Levy's right hand tugged his facemask, and a penalty wasn't called. "I didn't see a replay, but people have told me that they grabbed Joe's facemask," Minnesota coach Leslie Frazier said. Oh, the Vikings (2-11) will get plenty of chances to see an apparent missed call that would've given them one more shot to win with no time on the clock. "No one is going to remember how this game ended," insisted Detroit defensive end Cliff Avril, who fell on the loose ball at the Minnesota 43 to conclude the wild final play. "It only matters that we got the win." The Lions, seeking to make the playoffs for the first time since the 1999 season, were in a precarious spot coming in after losing five of seven. They looked as though they were going to win easily, leading by 21 twice in the first half, but Webb made it interesting when he replaced Christian Ponder in the third quarter after the rookie's fourth turnover. Webb ran for a 65-yard score to pull the Vikings within 10 points late in the third and tossed a 2-yard TD pass to Toby Gerhart that made it 34-28 midway through the fourth quarter. Detroit didn't pick up enough first downs to seal the victory, giving Webb another opportunity. He drove the Vikings down the field, and they had first-and-goal at the 1 with 9 seconds left after Avril jumped offside to stop the clock and move Minnesota a yard closer to the end zone. Replays clearly showed Levy yanking Webb's facemask, but a flag wasn't thrown. Levy's hand grazed the ball, knocking it loose, just before he grabbed on, and he was credited with the sack and forced fumble. The ball popped free at the 11 and was batted back toward midfield by Detroit's Stephen Tulloch. Webb ran it down and tried to pick it up, but the football came loose again and Avril pounced on it. Webb couldn't complain afterward because he said he couldn't remember what happened. "I had so many things running through my head," Webb said. "I was just trying to make a play." Matthew Stafford threw for two scores in the first quarter to give Detroit one of its three-touchdown leads. But the Vikings, playing for pride, nearly rallied from a 31-14 halftime deficit and a 34-21 hole early in the fourth quarter. The Lions almost blew a big lead as the Vikings did in Week 3 against them. Detroit won at Minnesota 26-23 in overtime after trailing 20-0 at halftime. This time, Detroit led by 17 after two quarters despite making just five first downs and going 0-for-5 on third down. The Vikings committed four turnovers in the first half, including a play when running back Lorenzo Booker fumbled without being touched, and finished with six. Ponder was benched after his fourth turnover. He fumbled on his first play of the game, getting stripped by Avril, and Tulloch recovered for a score. Ponder threw an interception on his fourth snap to set up Stafford's first TD pass. Alphonso Smith made his second interception early in the second quarter and returned it for a TD to give Detroit a 28-7 lead. "I gave them 17 points in the first half," Ponder said. Ponder's day was done after he threw his third interception on the opening drive of the third quarter, faking a handoff to no one, rolling right and throwing over the middle to cornerback Eric Wright. Webb replaced Ponder and promptly scored on his long run to pull Minnesota within 31-21. The Lions stalled at the Vikings 2 on the ensuing drive, and instead of going for it on fourth-and-1, they settled for Jason Hanson's field goal and a 34-21 lead. That almost wasn't big enough. "We just got to close out teams," Tulloch said. "We can't get comfortable." NOTES: Stafford was 20 of 29 for 227 yards without a turnover. ... Ponder, playing with a hip pointer, was 11 of 21 for 115 yards with two TDs. Frazier said he'd start next week if healthy. ... Webb ran for 109 yards and was 12 of 23 for another 84. ... Vikings RB Adrian Peterson missed his third straight game with a sprained left ankle. ... Minnesota's Percy Harvin had a career-high 10 receptions for 109 yards and a score. ... Detroit was missing RB Kevin Smith (right ankle), two starters in the secondary - Louis Delmas (right knee) and cornerback Chris Houston (left knee) - and DT Ndamukong Suh, who served the second of his two-game suspension for stomping on a Green Bay Packer on Thanksgiving. ... Vikings DE Jared Allen had three sacks for the second time against Detroit this year, putting him at 100 1/2 sacks over his eight-year career. © 2011 STATS LLC

Brees throws 5 TDs as Saints roll Vikings 42-20 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- The way Drew Brees is playing as the heart and soul of the New Orleans Saints, nothing is safe. Not Dan Marino's single-season passing record, not Aaron Rodgers' presumed MVP award, and perhaps not even the label for best team in the NFC. Brees threw for 412 yards and five touchdowns to lead the surging Saints to their sixth win in a row, 42-20 over the free-falling Minnesota Vikings on Sunday. "I'd definitely vote him MVP," Saints guard Carl Nicks said. "But I don't think what I say goes and I'm definitely biased, but he's not going to get it. This is the year of the quarterback, him, Rodgers, (Tom) Brady. He might break the yardage record and Rodgers might break the touchdowns record. What do you value more?" The answer is clear in the Big Easy. Brees completed 32 of 40 passes to help the Saints (11-3) overcome a slow and sloppy start to stay two games ahead of Atlanta in the NFC South. They turned the ball over twice deep in their own territory in the first half, botched a surprise onside kick and had a 40-yard TD pass called back because of a penalty. But Brees threw two touchdowns to Lance Moore and one each to Darren Sproles, John Gilmore and Jimmy Graham in just over three quarters of work to keep the Saints steamrolling toward another NFC South title. The 412 yards gives Brees 4,780 yards for the season, putting him 304 away from Marino's single season record set in 1984 with two games to play. "I'm aware that we're close," Brees said of Marino's hallowed mark. "I just know if we keep doing what we're doing all of that stuff will take care of itself." He also has already set a career high with 37 TD passes and on Sunday became the first player in league history to throw for more than 400 with five TDs, and complete percent of his passes with no interceptions in a game. "I'm as comfortable now in this offense as I've ever been," said Brees, who led the Saints to a Super Bowl win in 2009. The much-maligned Saints secondary held the Vikings to 102 net yards passing and sacked rookie Christian Ponder four times. Ponder completed 14 of 31 passes for 120 yards and two touchdowns to Toby Gerhart, but most of that production came in the final six minutes of garbage time. The Saints outgained the Vikings 573-207 and Brees had his fifth TD pass and was out of the game before Ponder had his fifth completion. Adrian Peterson rushed for 60 yards in his return from a three-game absence, but the Vikings dropped their sixth straight game. Their depleted secondary lost cornerback Asher Allen to a concussion in the first half and they had no chance once Brees and the Saints got rolling. "You can break down every player - good, bad or ugly - but we just aren't good enough as a team, as a group," Vikings linebacker Chad Greenway said. The Saints stumbled out of the gates, with Graham fumbling a first-down catch, Sproles dropping what would have been another first down and Robert Meachem's 40-yard touchdown catch wiped out because of a holding call on fullback Jed Collins. After Brees hit Moore for a 5-yard touchdown, the Saints turned the ball over again when Brees wasn't ready for a shotgun snap from Brian De La Puente that squirted right past him. Everson Griffen scooped the ball up and gave the Vikings great field position at the New Orleans 21. The Vikings only went backward, settling for a 49-yard field goal to make it 7-6. Brees threw a 1-yard fade to Graham for a touchdown midway through the second quarter, but coach Sean Payton's decision to try a surprise onside kick backfired and

let the Vikings back in the game. Griffen recovered the kick to give Minnesota good field position, Peterson ripped off a 39-yard run and Gerhart scored on a 10-yard shovel pass to make it 14-13, breathing a little life into a stale Metrodome crowd. "We were shooting ourselves in the foot," said Saints left tackle Jermon Bushrod, who held Jared Allen without a sack. "We had to lean on the defense to get us out of some jams." After losing to the lowly St. Louis Rams on Oct. 30, the Saints weren't about to drop another one to an overmatched opponent with the second seed in the NFC playoffs on the line. Brees put his foot on the gas and didn't let up. He threw a 13-yard touchdown to Sproles toward the end of the first half, then started the third quarter with a 2-yard TD to Gilmore and hooked up with Moore on a 47-yard score. "Not the missed assignments this time," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said about his defense's struggles. "Just a very good quarterback. If you give him time, you'll have problems." Notes: Brees went over 40,000 yards passing for his career and became the first QB to top 350 yards passing in a game seven times in a season. ... Moore had five catches for 91 yards, Marques Colston had eight catches for 91 yards and Graham had seven catches for 70 yards. ... Saints CB Patrick Robinson intercepted Ponder on the last play of the game. ... Vikings CB Benny Sapp was benched for the first two plays of the game for disciplinary reasons. © 2011 STATS LLC

Peterson, Ponder hurt; Vikings top Redskins 33-26 LANDOVER, Md. (AP) -- Out for the game - and now much longer - with a serious knee injury, Adrian Peterson was on his way back from the X-ray room in the depths of the stadium when he looked at a television monitor. "I see Toby break up the sideline," Peterson said. "So, 'Go, Toby, go.'" What else could happen to the Minnesota Vikings in one of the worst seasons in franchise history? How about losing Peterson to a direct hit on the left knee and Christian Ponder to a possible concussion on back-to-back plays to start the second half? It just didn't seem fair. And the news only got worse as Saturday went on. The Vikings said an MRI showed that Peterson tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee, and coach Leslie Frazier will provide a further update at his news conference Monday. But here's a twist: They won the game. Toby Gerhart and Joe Webb answered the call, leading Saturday's 33-26 victory over the Washington Redskins that snapped a six-game losing streak and helped make up for the fact that their best player was standing on crutches in the locker room. "I can enjoy my Christmas now," Frazier said. Gerhart scampered for a 67-yard run - the play Peterson saw on TV - to start Minnesota's next series after the Peterson-Ponder injuries and finished with 109 yards on 11 carries. Webb again made a case to be a starting quarterback by throwing for two touchdowns and running for another as the Vikings (3-12) kept alive their hopes to not finish with the worst record in team history. A win next week against Chicago would put them ahead of the dubious 1984 Minnesota team that went 3-13. Asked if it's time to give the option-running Webb a look at the No. 1 job, Frazier didn't hesitate. "Some of the things he does, and what it does to the rest of our team, you can't ignore," Frazier said. "So it's something we're going to have a real hard look at as we go forward. He definitely lifts our team." He might get the start next week, at least, because of Ponder's injury, but Webb surely was an inspiring presence Saturday, completing 4 of 5 passes for 84 yards and rushing five times for 34 yards. His 9-yard touchdown run came on the option, and he put a perfect 17-yard scoring pass into the arms of rookie tight end Kyle Rudolph, a touchdown appropriate for Christmas Eve, to give the Vikings a 23-20 lead late in the third quarter. "When they bring in a weapon like that," Redskins linebacker Perry Riley said of Webb, "not a secret weapon - we'd seen him on tape and we had a feeling - but it's hard to prepare fully on a short week for two quarterbacks. ... It's hard to change it mid-stream like that." Webb's 8-yard pass to Percy Harvin broke a 23-all tie early in the fourth quarter, and rookie Mistral Raymond's first career interception set up Ryan Longwell's 23-yard field goal to give the Vikings a 10-point lead with 4:05 to play. Minnesota had gone nine games without a pick before Raymond's big play. The Redskins pulled within a touchdown on Graham Gano's 47-yard field goal with 1:25 remaining. They got the ball back after a punt, but Rex Grossman's final long fling to the end zone fell incomplete to give Washington (5-10) a sixth straight home loss, its longest such skid since 1994. Peterson said he knew "it was something bad" the moment he was hit by safety DeJon Gomes at the end of a 3-yard gain on the first offensive play of the second half. The X-rays were negative, but Peterson had an MRI late Saturday after the team returned to Minnesota. "It's such a special person that you want to be right before you prognosticate on what might be," Frazier said before the exam. The torn ACL, the worst-case scenario, will likely sideline Peterson for some nine months and make it difficult for him to return for the start of next season. "Anytime you take a blow to the knee like that, you're concerned about the ACL, MCL," Peterson said before the diagnosis. "I'm trying to stay as positive as I can." On the play after Peterson was hurt, Ponder suffered a head injury when sacked by Adam Carriker and London Fletcher. Ponder remained in the game for one more play - a third-down incomplete pass - before heading to the locker room. Frazier said Ponder had "concussion-like symptoms." The coach said he's uncertain whether the quarterback will play in next week's season finale against the Bears. "We'll have to weigh it when we get back," Frazier said, "and I'll follow the doctor's lead." With the way Webb is playing, Ponder might get the week off anyway. Notes: Grossman had two more giveaways - a lost fumble and interception - to put his total at 24 for the season. He was already tied for the most turnovers in the NFL entering the game. ... Washington's Evan Royster, getting the start with fellow rookie Roy Helu out with an injury, ran for 132 yards on 19 carries. ... Minnesota's Jared Allen had one sack to raise his total to 18 1/2. ... The Vikings were also short-handed along the offensive line, with guard Steve Hutchinson inactive with a concussion and guard Anthony Herrera sidelined for part of the game with a lower back injury. --- © 2011 STATS LLC

Bears hang on to beat Vikings 17-13, finish 8-8 MINNEAPOLIS (AP) -- First, Jay Cutler. Then, Matt Forte. Finally, Brian Urlacher. The Chicago Bears stopped their five-game losing streak at the end of this what-could-have-been season, but even this victory was plenty painful. Charles Tillman's interception return in the second quarter gave the Bears the lead for good in a 17-13 victory over the Vikings on Sunday despite 3 1/2 of Minnesota's seven sacks by Jared Allen and a late injury to Urlacher, the soul of Chicago's defense. "It just breaks my heart to see. He is the Chicago Bears," quarterback Josh McCown said. "That's the name you think about, so to see that guy down on the turf is a sick feeling." Allen finished the season with 22 sacks, behind Michael Strahan's mark of 22 1/2 for the New York Giants in 2001. Joe Webb relieved Christian Ponder at quarterback for the Vikings (3-13) for the third time in the last month, but the wild-scambling Webb wasn't able to keep the Vikings from matching their worst record in franchise history, set first in 1984. "I was really hoping for one more one-on-one, one more third-and-9," Allen said. The Vikings claimed the third pick in next year's draft after going 0-6 in the NFC North, the first time in their 51 years they've failed to win a division game. Coach Lovie Smith said Urlacher sprained the medial collateral ligament in his left knee, which bent awkwardly in the end zone while he helped break up a pass with 5:15 left. He'll have ample time to recover this winter with the Bears (8-8) missing the playoffs for the fourth time in five years, but that wasn't a good way to finish for a guy who'll turn 34 before next season. Urlacher was able to walk off the field without assistance, but he was in enough pain initially that he briefly covered his face with his hand. The last month has been hard to watch for all of the Bears and their fans, following Cutler's broken right thumb. They were 7-3 with the postseason well within reach until Cutler was sidelined. Forte, their Pro Bowl running back, sprained his right knee two weeks later, and the Bears stumbled into this meaningless matchup at Minnesota with last season's trip to the NFC championship game a distant memory. "It's not a whole lot of fun finishing your season knowing that, but we're a good football team and we're going to try and keep as many of our coaches and players together as possible," Smith said. "We don't want to tear this team down and start over or anything like that. This is a good football team, and we're going to win a lot of games with this core remaining the same." Smith acknowledged he's concerned about Urlacher but also noted his recuperative history. "He heals a little bit

quicker than most people, so he should be OK," Smith said. Despite Allen being in his face all day, blowing by left tackle J'Marcus Webb often until the tight ends started to help. McCown finished 15 for 25 for 160 yards and a second-quarter touchdown pass to Roy Williams with one interception. Though the season was already lost, McCown fared far better than Cutler's first fill-in, Caleb Hanie, after being signed off the street to take his first NFL snaps in two years. "What a great group, and it's just an honor to play for the coaches and the guys that are on the field today," McCown said. The Bears have won five straight in this series, their longest streak against the Vikings since winning six in a row from 1983-86. "The last time I looked at our record we were 7-3, and from that moment on everything came tumbling down like a small snowball into a huge snowman," said receiver-returner Devin Hester, who had another quiet game. Though the circumstances were so much different on this day, the Vikings came full circle with another loss to McCown. He filled in for the Arizona Cardinals in the 2003 season finale and knocked Minnesota out of a playoff spot with a stunning heave into the end zone on the final snap. The Vikings got the ball back with no timeouts at their own 6-yard line and 1:51 left, but D.J. Moore's interception -- the second of the game by Webb -- at the Chicago 29 was the clincher. Ponder went 4 for 10 for 28 yards before aggravating a hip pointer he suffered a month ago. Webb, who rallied the Vikings to victory last week at Washington and brought them within 1 yard of a win at Detroit on Dec. 11, went 17 for 32 for 200 yards. He netted only 2 yards on four rushes. "They did a real good job of being gap smart and not letting him escape," Vikings coach Leslie Frazier said. The Vikings had their share of gaffes familiar to this at-times-woeful season. Most notable was Ponder's 13th interception, a poorly thrown pass behind Toby Gerhart that bounced off the running back's hands and into the arms of Tillman for an untouched 22-yard return. That was the third pick six in the last five games against Ponder, the first-round draft pick who took over as the starter for the seventh game of the season. Webb took a 10-yard loss on one of his scrambles instead of throwing the ball away on third-and-4 at the 20, moving Ryan Longwell's field goal attempt back to 48 yards. Julius Peppers blocked it, preserving a 14-10 lead. Longwell made a pair of 26-yarders in the first half, but a high snap and a dropped hold led to another botched field goal in the second half. Notes: Gerhart carried 15 times for 67 yards for the Vikings before leaving with an injury to his left knee. ... Kahil Bell rushed for 54 yards on 17 carries for the Bears. © 2011 STATS LLC