

Packers, Patriots roll to Super Bowl

NFL Playoffs

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — The challenge all season was to return the franchise to the luster of the Lombardi years.

And Sunday's stage was perfect: a frozen tundra at Lambeau Field, 60,216 Cheeseheads shouting their hearts out and a minus-17 wind chill.

When it was over, Green Bay and tradition had won out over second-year Carolina 30-13 in the NFC championship game to reach the Super Bowl for the first time since Super Bowl II.

Meanwhile, the weather and an 11-minute power failure couldn't keep New England from making its second Super Bowl in franchise history. The Patriots beat dream-crusher Jacksonville 20-6 to pave their way to professional football's biggest game.

"All of us were dreaming about this game all week. It was like we were being tormented," said Reggie White. "Now we can go home and have pleasant dreams."

New England Coach Bill Parcells said he will have pleasant thoughts as well.

"I'm just very excited for the opportunity," Parcells said. "These players have given me everything."

Like all Parcells-coached teams, the Patriots relied on their defense.

Trailing 13-6, Jacksonville quarterback Mark Brunell guided the Jaguars to the Patriot 5-yard-line late in the game before being picked off by Willie Clay. Otis Smith returned a fumble 47 yards to send Foxboro Stadium into a frenzy.

Then with 2:36 remaining, the Jaguars had one final shot to tie the game, but Otis Smith returned a James Stewart fumble 47 yards for the Super Bowl clinching touchdown.

In the final four minutes, the New England defense forced three Jacksonville turnovers.

The Packers won like they have all season relying on the arm of Brett Favre.

Favre, whose two turnovers helped Carolina to an early lead, was 19 of 29 for 292 yards, including touchdown passes of 29 yards to Dorsey Levens and 6 yards to Antonio Freeman.

Green Bay turned a 10-7 deficit into a 17-10 halftime lead within 38 seconds in the first half's final minute.

A Chris Jacke field goal and a touchdown reception by Freeman helped the Packers steal the momentum from the Panthers.

The Patriots ride a huge wave of momentum into the Super Bowl and have the chance to break the NFC's lock on the game. NFC teams have won 12 consecutive Super Bowls, but that could all change Jan. 26 in New Orleans. Parcells coached the New York Giants to a Super Bowl win during that stretch.

The Packers, however, head to New Orleans as the favorite over New England.

"It's very special," Packer Coach Mike Holmgren said. "We have a handful of players who are near the end of their careers. And that's very special, to have an opportunity to get to the Super Bowl, because not everybody gets there."

Lue scores 29 points as NU beats Aggies

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and win all of our home games."

The Huskers played their fourth straight game Saturday without senior Bernard Garner, the team's second-leading scorer. Coach Danny Nee suspended the 6-foot-7 forward for an undisclosed disciplinary reason following NU's 84-73 loss to No. 6 Cincinnati in the second game of the Puerto Rico Classic on Dec. 31.

In danger of missing the remainder of the season because of uncompleted academic course work, Garner regained his eligibility on Saturday and will practice with the team today for the first time in two weeks.

"We've really missed him," Nee said. "I think we would have won a couple games if he was here and he was healthy."

Before heading south, the Huskers lost 70-56 to No. 11 Minnesota at the Devaney Center on Dec. 21. NU then beat Old Dominion 72-66 in the first round of the Puerto Rico Classic.

NU also lost Luc in Puerto Rico. The 6-foot sophomore sprained his left knee in the first half of the loss to Cincinnati and didn't play in the Huskers' Jan. 1 game with Bowling Green, a 58-55 loss.

Sophomore Alvin Mitchell replaced Luc, scoring a career-best 16 points against the Bearcats, but NU missed Lue, its on-court leader, against Bowling Green, a team the Huskers beat less than a month earlier in the championship game of the Ameritas Classic.

Lue returned on Jan. 4 against

Colorado but was still slowed by the injury in the Huskers' 79-73 loss to the Buffaloes in Boulder.

Luc played at 80 percent in NU's 71-52 over Creighton on Wednesday and returned to near top form Saturday, he said. He scored 19 points after halftime, when the Huskers trailed 37-36, including the second half's first two points, which gave Nebraska its first lead of the day, 38-37.

The lead changed hands seven times in the second half before a Larry Florence bucket and a seven-foot Lue jumper gave NU a 73-69 advantage with 25 seconds left. A&M freshman Jerald Brown then drilled his eighth 3-pointer of the day—a school record—to cut the lead to one point.

After a Lue free throw, Nee called a timeout with 9.3 seconds left, but A&M's Dario Quesada missed a 3-pointer that would have won the game. Aggie guard Tracey Anderson grabbed the rebound and missed an off-balance shot as the clock expired, ending the game.

Brown, a 6-8 guard who was one of the nation's most highly-recruited players last season, led the Aggies (6-7 and 0-3) with 24 points, nailing 8 of 10 3-pointers. Florence scored 16 points for NU, which avoided its first 0-2 league start in four years.

"It was the type of game the Big 12 is going to be," Nee said. "We didn't do anything, but the bottom line is we found a way to win. We have no illusions of who we are and what we are, and we are going to keep working at it. But we do think we are getting better."

Win mends NU's pain

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The win improved the Huskers to 11-1 overall and 1-1 in the conference while Texas A&M dropped to 7-6 and 0-3.

"The win really showed the character and heart of our team in that we were able to battle back and go up by six at half," Nebraska junior Anna DeForge said. "From there on out we knew we weren't going to lose the lead."

"We were pretty upset with the sluggish start that we had."

Against the Aggies, DeForge scored a game-high 25 points and also grabbed a team-best six rebounds. In the past four games, DeForge, a 5-11 junior from Niagara, Wis., has led the Huskers in scoring and rebounding. Except for the game against the Aggies, DeForge has also been the leader in assists.

It hasn't just been DeForge the past two weeks. Both DeForge and Coach Angela Beck said the bench and the younger players played a key role in the win against the Aggies.

Ten players scored for the Huskers against Texas A&M, while 12 different players saw action on the court at

some point in the game.

"We kept looking for somebody different to step up," Beck said. "The ones who came off the bench really responded to what we needed. It was just a good response from the bench."

Beck said some of the key people off the bench were senior guard Sheila McPherson, who made a 3-pointer, sophomore forward Kate Benson, who made a turnaround jump shot to start a Nebraska run and senior Amy Gusso, who played seven solid minutes.

A key to the quick start has been the play of Nebraska's four freshman, most notably forward Charlie Rogers.

Rogers, who has been in the starting lineup the past two games, was the Huskers second-leading scorer against Texas A&M with 11 points.

Besides Rogers, freshman guard Nicole Kubik scored nine points while Cisco Gilmore, who had only seven steals this year, had four against the Aggies.

"We're a solid team," Beck said. "I don't know if that's enough because we've got some things we need to improve on. I am proud of our record and proud of the effort the players have put forth."

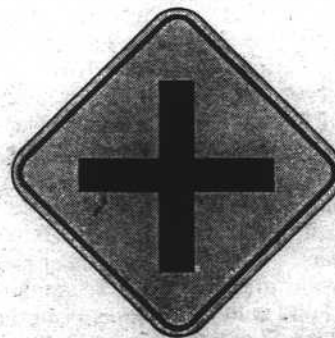
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