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Super Day for Green Bay

Special game for Howard

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Desmond Howard didn't need another Heisman pose. This time, he flashed the Super Bowl Strut.

Just when the New England Patriots were envisioning an upset, Howard assured the Green Bay Packers of their first championship in 29 years — in the mere seconds it took for him to run from one end of the Superdome field to the other.

Howard's 99-yard kickoff return late in the third quarter of Green Bay's 35-21 victory over the Patriots was the biggest play in a game filled with big plays. He finished with a Super Bowl-record 244 yards on kickoff and punt returns, becoming the first special-teams player to win the game's MVP award.

"I never would have imagined that I would win the MVP of the Super Bowl, simply because I really didn't expect them to be kicking the ball to me that much," said Howard, who broke the Super Bowl record for longest kickoff return, breaking the mark of 98 yards held by two players.

"But like I said through the course of the two weeks before this game, they can roll the dice and kick it to me if they want," he said.

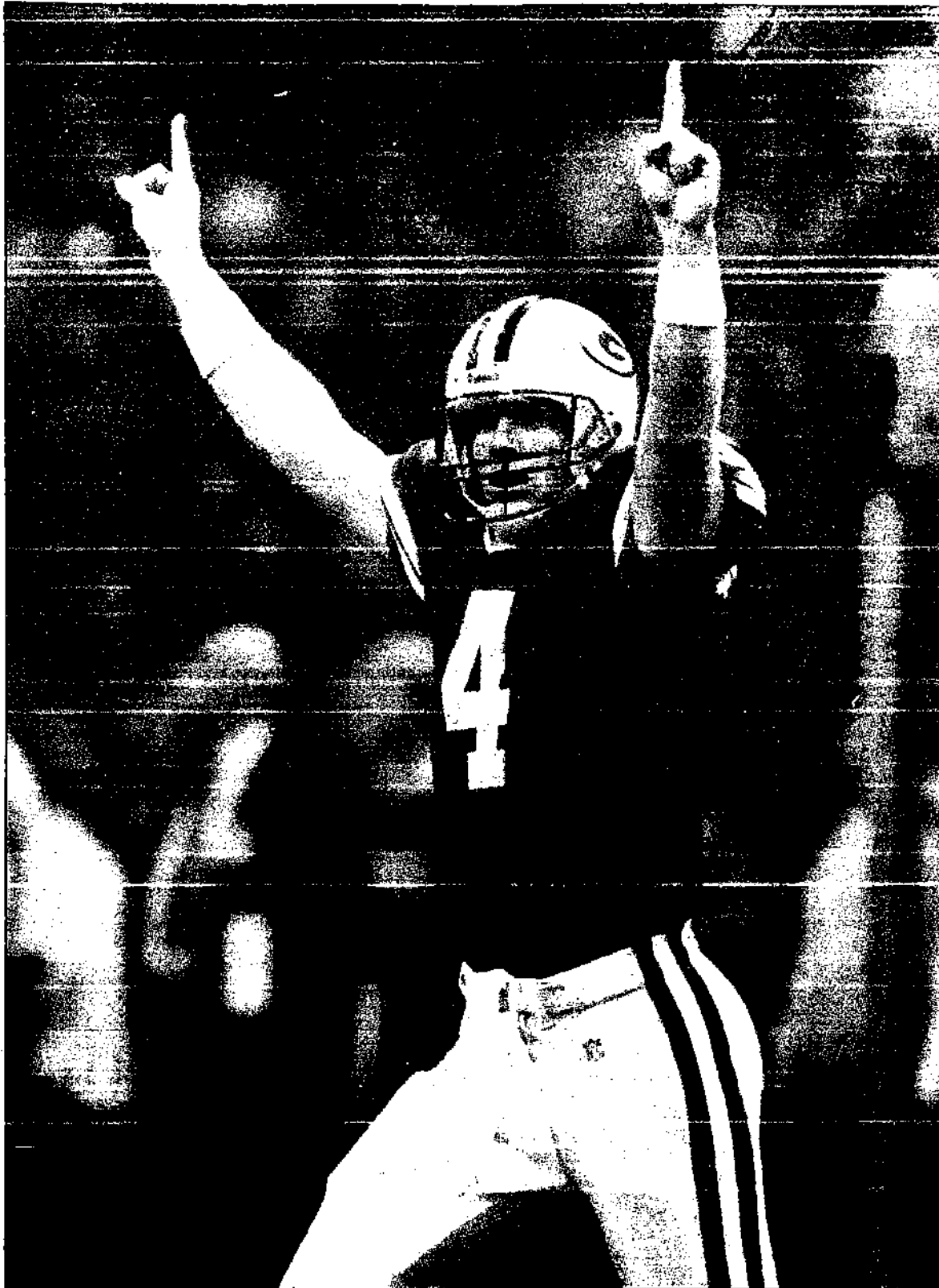
The Patriots tried to angle the ball away from Howard on their punts, but he still managed six returns for 90 yards. He had a 32-yarder on his first punt return, and followed that up with a 34-yarder in the second period. Both times, the Packers went on to score.

"I thought the game, obviously, turned on special teams," New England coach Bill Parcells said. "We were worried about him but, I mean, you can't cancel the game. You gotta play it. But I credit him. He made some guys miss on his own."

It was astonishing to watch a player who actually gets on the field so little make such a huge contribution.

The 1991 Heisman Trophy winner returned three punts for touchdowns during the regular season, then got another in a divisional playoff victory over San Francisco.

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Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre celebrates a second quarter touchdown pass during Sunday's win over the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XXXI. Favre threw for 246 yards, including a Super Bowl-record 81-yard scoring strike to Antonio Freeman.

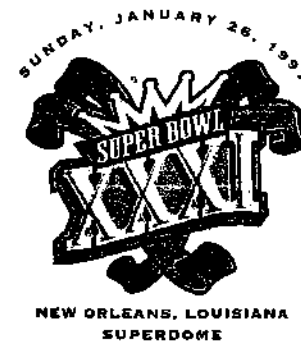
(AP photo)

Packers top Patriots to end title drought

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Green Bay Packers have a present to go with their past.

The 35-21 Super Bowl victory over the New England Patriots on Sunday returned Green Bay to NFL prominence and put the title back in "Titletown" after 29 long seasons.

But it was hardly Lombardiesque.



NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA
SUPERDOME



DESMOND HOWARD
... super MVP

It was a high-powered Pack — doing it with big plays, especially by Desmond Howard, the castoff college star whose 99-yard kickoff return turned the game and won him the MVP trophy. He capped it with his abbreviated Heisman pose — he won that award 1991 — a dagger in the heart of the Patriots after they had closed within 27-21.

It was Brett Favre finding the duckwalking Andre Rison, twice cut this year, for a 54-yard touchdown on the Packers' second offensive play, then throwing an 81-yard TD pass to Antonio Freeman in the first minute of the second quarter to put Green Bay ahead for good.

"I think it's time that the Lombardi Trophy goes home to Lambeau Field, where it belongs," Packers president Robert Harlan said.

Howard, the first special teams player ever to win MVP, finished with a record 244 return yards, the most important the kickoff return.

"It was disheartening. At that point we just were feeling we were getting back into the game," said New England quarterback Drew Bledsoe, who kept his team in the game with two touchdown passes but also threw four interceptions.

"It was a six-point game and we

had the momentum. All of a sudden, he breaks that play and it's back to a 14-point game."

The win was the 13th straight for an NFC team and kept Bill Parcells, who had two of those 13 with the Giants in 1986 and 1990, from becoming the first coach to win a Super Bowl with two different franchises.

"I'm disappointed, because I do think we had a chance there for a moment," said Parcells, rumored to be leaving the Patriots. "We played hard, we just cracked a little bit under pressure."

Instead, the Packers won the trophy named for the coach who led Green Bay to victory in the first two Super Bowls.

"Vince Lombardi had a wonderful legacy for the rest of us. Now we're just trying to do our part, and we hope we can do it for a long time to come," coach Mike Holmgren said.

There was, of course, time for sentiment.

The team that wanted to win one for Reggie White did it and he contributed — getting two straight sacks of Bledsoe after Howard's return, and a third late in the game. The three sacks were the most in a Super Bowl since sacks became an official statistic in 1982.

At the start, it looked like the

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White finally gets ring

Three sacks spark defense in victory

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — They saved him for last in the pregame introductions. So Reggie White saved his best for last in the Super Bowl.

White, the career sacks leader and leader of Green Bay's defense, admitted he was struggling in the first half Sunday. What better way to overcome that than with some sacks? He got three in the final 18 minutes as the Packers beat the New England Patriots 35-21, giving White his first NFL title.

"You strive so long and so hard to get to this point," the 12-year veteran said. "You want to put out your best effort when you get there."

"In the first half, I didn't feel too good. They were chipping me, doing a lot of cutting. Then the second half came around, and I think Desmond (Howard, the game's MVP for his kickoff and punt returns) really broke the game loose for us. He gave us some confidence, and I was able to end up the game with an excellent game."

The Packers held the Patriots to seven second-half points, and got consistent pressure on quarterback Drew Bledsoe. White was at the center of the pass rush, and he trapped Bledsoe on consecutive plays in the third quarter.

Packers fans in the crowd chanted "Reggie" "Reggie" and several teammates rushed to hug him as he came off the field.

But his work wasn't done. Green Bay did little offensively the rest of the way, so the Minister of Defense and his minions had to keep the pressure on.

"We had to keep calm and keep our poise," the 35-year-old White said. "When you play against Bill



Reggie White of the Green Bay Packers checks the scoreboard during the second quarter of Super Bowl XXXI against the New England Patriots on Sunday.

(AP photo)

Parcells, Bill usually wants to run a lot. Today, with this team, he wanted to pass a lot.

"I thank God I was able to step up when I did," added White, a Baptist minister. "They ran the ball real well, ran it for a touchdown, and they sure did an excellent job throwing the ball, particularly in the first half. We were able to come back in the second half and get the break we needed to get to get it done."

Considered one of the league's all-time greatest defenders, White surprised many when he signed with Green Bay as the first major free agent to change teams four years ago. He was the key member of the Eagles' overpowering defenses, but those teams never got close to a title.

White said he never felt the teams in Philadelphia had the

camaraderie necessary to compete for championships. And he never doubted this Packers team possessed that fellowship.

"Our guys just work together so good," he said. "This week was just a testament of us hanging together and caring about one another, and of us working hard for seven months."

White was joined on the interview podium by his son, 10-year-old Jeremy. When he was asked about the sacks — the third one came on the Patriots' final series and gave him a Super Bowl record, although sacks were not an official statistic before 1982 — he turned to Jeremy before answering.

"Now I can sit back with my son for years and watch the highlights of this Super Bowl, and he can see his Daddy getting three sacks."

Future uncertain for Parcells

Jets may be next big challenge for coach

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Bill Parcells couldn't win the Super Bowl with the second team he coached.

Will he be able to win it with his third?

With the New England Patriots' 35-21 loss to the Green Bay Packers on Sunday, Parcells failed in his attempt to become the first coach to win the Super Bowl with two different teams.

And with rumors swirling that he will leave New England for the New York Jets, this could be his last chance for a while.

"It is frustrating to get to this point and not take advantage of it. I've been fortunate, you know, in the past to do that," said Parcells, who won two Super Bowls in as many tries as coach of the New York Giants.

"I know how hard it is to get here. It is very disappointing to do it (lose), particularly in a game that I thought was fairly well played by both teams. I thought we kept it exciting for a long time."

Parcells thanked his players for their hard work, but did not tell them whether he would return next season.

"I just talked to them about the game," said Parcells, who felt the turning point was Desmond Howard's 99-yard kickoff return that made it 35-21 with 3:10 left in the third quarter. "In big games, when you fail to concentrate on just one play, that's when it could make the difference."

Quarterback Drew Bledsoe, whose relationship with Parcells has been rocky in the past, said his goodbyes before the game — just in case.

"I told Bill before the game, 'I'm glad I had a chance to play for you,'" Bledsoe said. "I don't know what's going to happen, but we had a good year because of him."

Parcells was heading into the fourth year of a five-year contract last summer when he asked owner



New England Patriots head coach Bill Parcells (left) congratulates quarterback Drew Bledsoe after Bledsoe threw a first quarter touchdown pass against the Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl XXXI on Sunday.

(AP photo)

Bob Kraft to cancel the final year.

Kraft agreed, and ever since then, reports swirled that Parcells has already decided to leave due to mounting tensions between the two. Publicly, they have said only that they will discuss it at the end of the season.

"I haven't even thought about it, really," Parcells repeated Sunday. "My whole time has been occupied with getting to this point."

Both sides said they would plan a meeting.

"Bill and I will talk sometime early this week. Then we'll have something to say," Kraft said. "Right now, we are coming down from a situation. It's been a great season. I just hoped we would bring the trophy back for our fans."

Parcells ignored questions about

whether he would return next year.

Parcells and Kraft have had a cool relationship, and it's been widely reported that the Jets are interested in Parcells for their coaching vacancy. Parcells' contract with New England expires next Saturday.

Parcells indicated that he may not return to Boston with the team on Monday, but said it would be only so he could travel with his family. However, Patriots spokesman Don Lowery said Parcells would accompany the team, adding "Why's everybody saying that he's not?"

Reports in the days before the Super Bowl had Parcells being replaced by Pete Carroll, the defensive coordinator of the San Francisco 49ers.