

# SUPER BOWL XXXI

## Contributions of Packers' terrific trio well received

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Andre astounded 'em, Antonio amazed 'em and Desmond dazzled 'em at the Superdome Sunday night.

The trio of waiver-wire castoff Andre Rison, second-year star Antonio Freeman and free-agent steal Desmond Howard ran wild over the New England Patriots as the Green Bay Packers returned the Super Bowl title to Titletown with a 35-21 victory.

They did it with big plays from their play-makers.

The Packers, who had 12 regular-season TDs of 50 or more yards — the most in the NFL since 1970 — got three more Sunday: Howard's 99-yard kickoff return, Rison's 54-yard reception and Freeman's 81-yard catch.

"That's how we played all year," Freeman said. "Nothing different." Except that this time the world

was their stage.

"I think we showed the world what this offense is capable of," Rison said. "We have a lot of great players. And we have the MVP back there in Brett Favre. Don't forget that."

Howard, the first special-teams player to win Super Bowl MVP honors, had 244 return yards, including a Super Bowl-record 90 punt-return yards.

His biggest play, though, was an NFL playoff-record 99-yard kickoff return for a touchdown after Curtis Martin's TD pulled the spunky Patriots within 27-21 late in the third period.

"I was just another strong link in this very, very strong chain," Howard said.

Rison and Freeman did their damage in the first half.

Nobody was happier about get-

ting out of Green Bay for this game than Brett Favre's starting receivers, who had languished at frigid Lambeau Field, where the runners ruled.

Their eagerness to put the pass back into Mike Holmgren's West Coast offense showed in a hurry.

On the Packers' second play from scrimmage, Favre stunned the Patriots by finding Rison for a 54-yard touchdown.

Rison, who said he dreamed last week about scoring 10 touchdowns, spun cornerback Otis Smith, hauled in the pass at the New England 20 and strutted the final eight yards to the end zone.

After the Patriots went ahead 14-10, Favre hit Freeman for an 81-yard touchdown that sparked a 17-point second quarter and put the Packers ahead 27-14 at half-

time.

Freeman's reception was the longest play from scrimmage in Super Bowl history.

Following three straight possessions that ended in punts, Favre, the two-time MVP playing just 60 miles from his hometown of Kiln, Miss., lined up on first-and-10 from his 19. Freeman, who missed a month with a broken forearm and still wears a cumbersome cast, saw strong safety Lawyer Milloy come up to the line and smiled.

"I was lacking my chops," Freeman said. "Take nothing from Milloy, but I knew that was a mismatch. I broke free and Brett delivered a strike."

Freeman juked his defender, grabbed Favre's pass at the Green Bay 46 and outsprinted Milloy and safety Willie Clay, dancing into the end zone untouched and dunking

the ball over the goal post.

There were stars on defense, too. Reggie White had three sacks and the Packers intercepted four of Drew Bledsoe's passes.

"We have playmakers on this team," Freeman said. "Today you saw the playmakers make the big plays. On offense, defense, special teams. That was special, because this is a team in the truest sense of the word."

"It wasn't just Andre, myself and Desmond."

Still, it was an amazing performance by those three stars, each of whom overcame adversity this season.

Howard's career appeared finished in training camp. He was sidelined for a week by a hip injury after general manager Ron Wolf signed him for \$300,000. But he made the team, then set a league

record with 875 punt-return yards, including three TD returns.

He also had a punt return for a touchdown in the preseason and one in the playoffs.

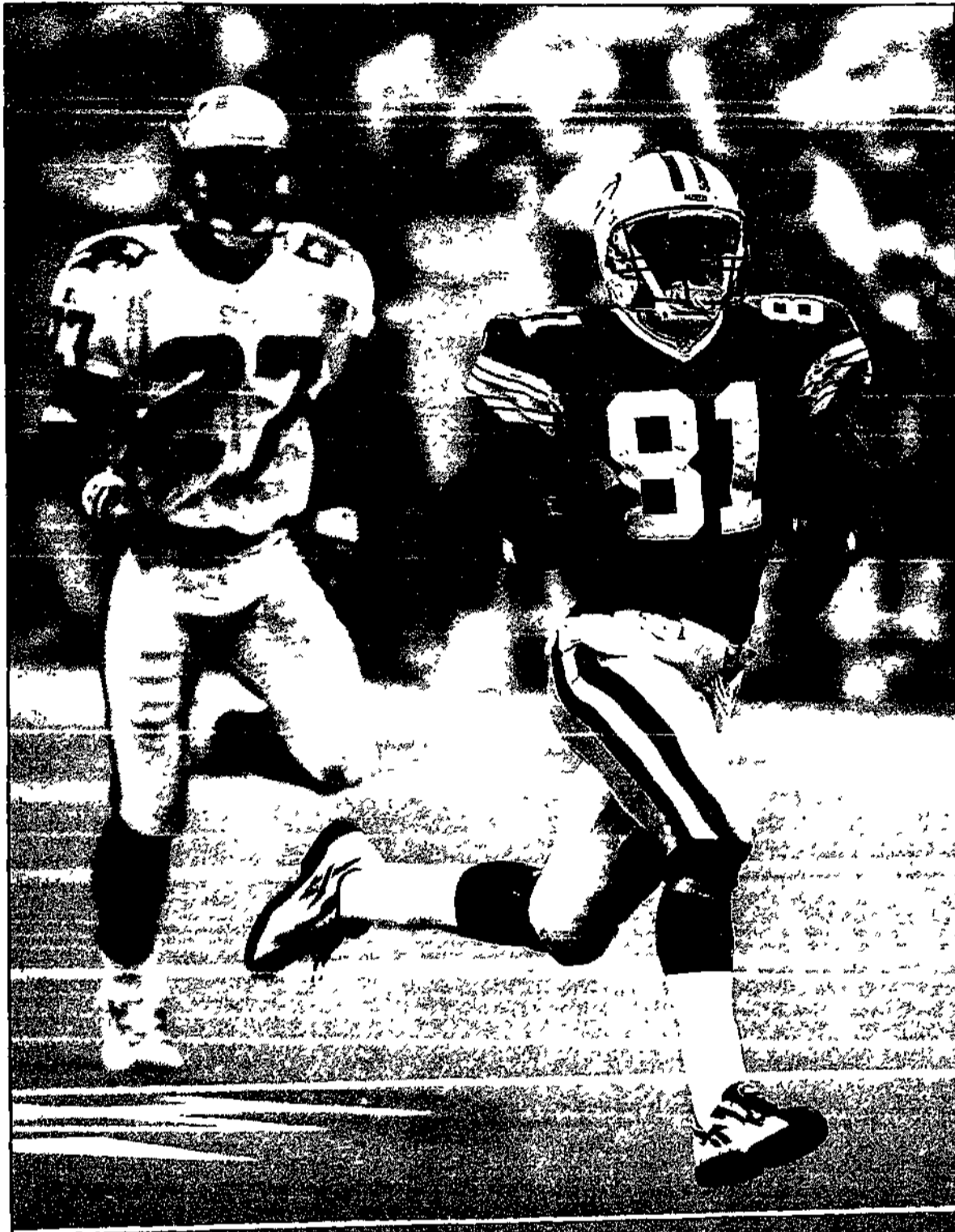
Freeman broke his left forearm on Oct. 27 against Tampa Bay and missed four games. During his absence, Jacksonville released Rison and Wolf grabbed him even though two teams had soured on him in five months, calling him undisciplined on routes and disruptive in the locker room.

That was Nov. 19, the day after the Packers lost 21-6 at Dallas.

They wouldn't lose again.

"They've said a lot of bad things about me in my career," Rison said. "They've called me a lot of bad names."

"Now they can call me a world champion."



Super Bowl MVP Desmond Howard of the Green Bay Packers races into the end zone on a kickoff return as Scooter McGruder of the New England Patriots tries in vain to catch him. (AP photo)

## Big role for big plays in Green Bay victory

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Packers would fulfill the predictions and their own expectations. They were preseason favorites to win the title and 14-point favorites in this game.

Only Holmgren tried to hold down the exuberance. Until two weeks ago, when his team won the NFC title, he referred to the Super Bowl as "that game" rather than talk too much about something he desperately wanted.

First there was the TD pass to Rison from Favre, who finished 14 of 27 for 246 yards. It was 10-0 just 6:25 into the game after Doug Evans' interception set up Chris Jacke's 31-yard field goal.

But by the end of the highest-scoring first quarter in Super Bowl history, New England led 14-10 on TD passes by Bledsoe of 1 yard to Keith Byars and 4 yards to Ben Coates.

And even after a 17-point second quarter by the Packers that included the 81-yard bomb to Freeman and 2-yard TD run by Favre, New England was still in it at 27-14.

When Ted Johnson stopped Dorsey Levens for a 7-yard loss on fourth-and-1 at the Pats 37 on the first drive of the fourth quarter, New England gained momentum.

They cut it to 27-21 on Curtis Martin's 18-yard burst up the middle with 3:27 left in the third quarter.

But Howard took the kickoff, burst up the middle and went nearly untouched to the end zone — only Hason Graham got a hand on him. Then Favre hit Keith Jackson in the back of the end zone for a two-point conversion to give the Packers a 14-point lead.

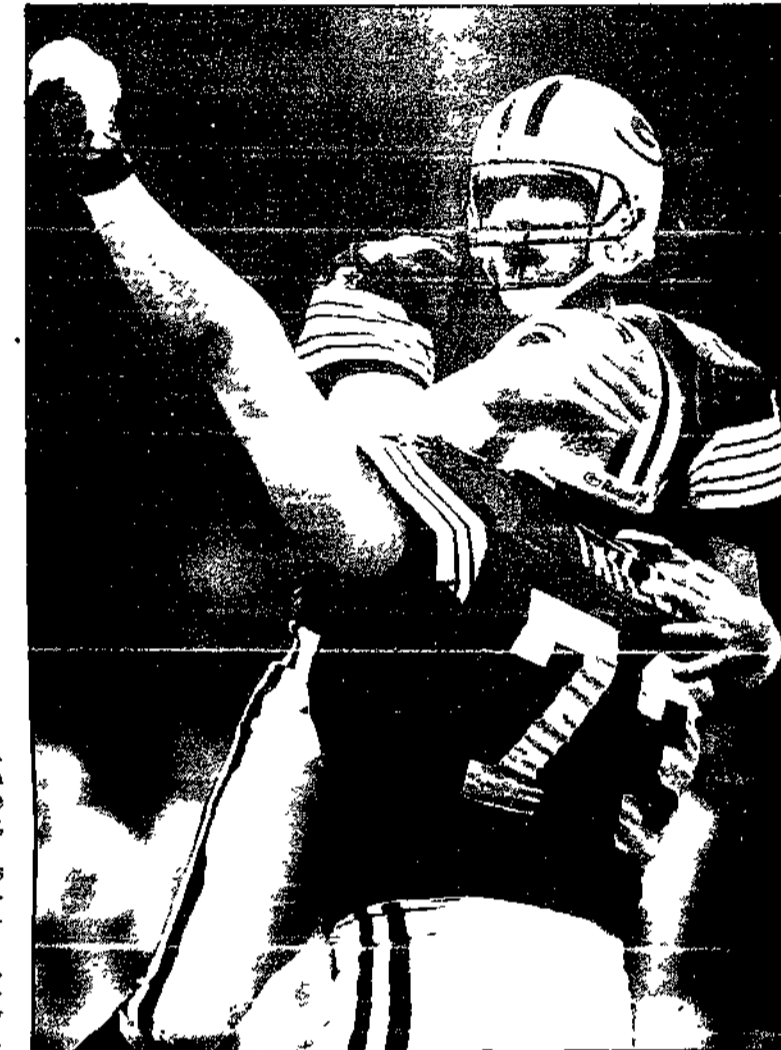
Bledsoe tried to rally the Patriots in the fourth quarter, but could not. He finished with four interceptions, going 25 of 48 for 253 yards.

The first half was so explosive that the only time to come up for air was on Green Bay's third touchdown drive, a nine-play, 74-yard march that took up 5:59 and gave the Packers a 27-14 lead at half-time.

Favre capped it with a 2-yard bootleg into the end zone on which he extended the ball over the goal line with his right hand as he went out of bounds. Levens ran four times for 33 yards in the drive, the first time in the game either team was able to move on the ground.

Otherwise, it was punch and counterpunch.

The Packers got in the first blow, when Rison turned around Otis Smith and took Favre's perfect pass over the middle for a 54-yard score. He duckwalked into the end zone, one reason why Holmgren first said when he heard of Rison's availability: "He may not be



Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre celebrates a touchdown with teammate Aaron Taylor during Sunday's Super Bowl XXXI victory over the New England Patriots. (AP photo)

our type of player."

"I said this week I might start on fire and I did," said Favre, the two-time NFL MVP who has started 1-for-11 in his last two NFC title games.

It became 10-0 on the next series after Doug Evans' interception of Bledsoe set up Jacke's 37-yarder.

Just when it looked like the rout was on, New England came back.

On the next series, Byars broke two tackles and rumbled 32 yards with a screen pass, then Martin took a short pass for Bledsoe and went 20 more. After Green Bay's Craig Newsome was called for pass interference in the end zone on Shawn Jefferson, Bledsoe found Byars for a 1-yard score that made it 10-7.

On New England's next possession, Terry Glenn made an acrobatic catch over Eugene Robinson to complete a 44-yard play that put the ball on the Green Bay 4.

On the following play, Bledsoe found Coates at the rear of the end

zone and it was 14-10.

In the first minute of the second quarter, the Packers struck. They had a first down on their own 19 when Favre spotted safety Lawyer Milloy alone on Freeman in the slot.

After an audible, Freeman streaked past the defensive back, Favre found him perfectly and suddenly it was an 81-yard touchdown — the longest play from scrimmage in Super Bowl history — and a 17-14 lead.

Jacke's 31-yard field goal made it 20-14. The luck was set up by Howard's 34-yard punt return.

Then came the Packers' long drive late in the first half, set up by Mike Prior's interception of Bledsoe.

Then, in the second half, came Howard.

"The luck return was the one that made the difference," Parcels said. "Up until that point, I thought we had a chance to win. The difference was on special teams."

## Howard pays big dividends

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But Howard had never brought a kickoff back all the way during his five-year NFL career.

Until Sunday.

The Patriots, a 14-point underdog, had just scored what seemed to be a momentum-changing touchdown on Curtis Martin's 18-yard run, shrinking the Packers' lead to 27-21.

Howard dropped back at the goal line to take the kick from Adam Vinatien, while the New England fans, though outnumbered, made

the place sound like Foxboro Stadium. So much for that blowout nearly everyone was expecting. This game was going down to the end.

Howard cradled the ball at the 1, burst up the middle, bounced off a tackle by Hason Graham at about the 30 — and that was it. He was gone. Touchdown.

"I just tried to hit the hole at full tilt and make the kicker miss," Howard said. "After that, we pretty much knew it was a touchdown."

And, though there was still 3:10 left in the third, the Packers pretty

much knew the game was over.

"He's been the backbreaker all year for us," teammate Antonio Freeman said.

Howard didn't run one step further than he had to. He stopped at the goal line and began strutting a Deion-like dance, a grin showing through the facemask. Later, he had to break away from his postgame news conference to take a telephone call from President Clinton.

"He told me he knew I had some trying times over the years, and he was happy to see me prevail," said Howard.

## Halftime mixes tribute, entertainment

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Sentiment shared center stage with commercial glitz in a rollicking "Blues Brothers Bash" of a Super Bowl halftime show Sunday.

While a production crew set up a giant stage, the Superdome audience watched a video salute to Pete Rozelle, the NFL commissioner for 26 years and the person who directed the Super Bowl's growth. He died last Dec. 6 of brain cancer.

The video showed a montage of the man who presided over the merger of the NFL and AFL, instituted Monday Night Football and forged the television contracts that built the league.

The tribute was followed by a commercial for Oscar Mayer, the halftime corporate sponsor, on the giant screens. The House of Blues, a chain of music clubs-restaurants, also received a big publicity boost from the show, with the circus sacred-heart logo decorating the field in front of the stage.

Fox Television, which broadcast the Super Bowl for the first time, also got in on the act. The show opened with a phony news bulletin from Fox News — anchorwoman Catherine Crier announcing that Elwood Blues, the fictional character from the "Blues Brothers"

movie, had escaped from prison.

Then, with spotlights flashing across the stadium, the mesh screens surrounding the giant stage in the center of the field fell away, and with an enormous puff of smoke and flash of fireworks, the music began.

The current version of the Blues Brothers — actors Dan Aykroyd, Jim Belushi and John Goodman —

opened the performance with "Everybody Needs Somebody To Love."

Their rendition of "Soul Man" introduced James Brown, who sang his timeless hit, "I Peel Good."

The finale of the show, which had 500 dancers and about 1,000 performers, was the arrival of a red hot and dozens of motorcycles as ZZ Top performed.

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