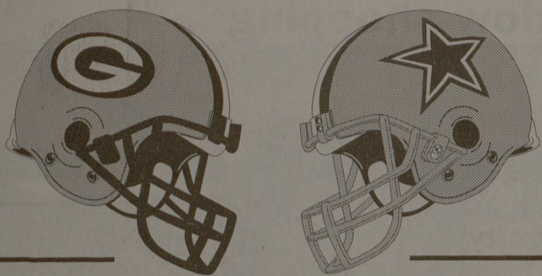


The Showdown in Titletown



GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — Forget about that debacle in Indianapolis. The Green Bay Packers are pumped up to face their tormentors the Dallas Cowboys.

"We always said it would be different if we got them at Lambeau Field," wide receiver Antonio Freeman said. "This Sunday, they'll be here." The team, the city, the state — heck, fans all across the country — have been waiting for this game since the schedule came out.

T-shirts proclaiming "The Showdown in Titletown" are everywhere. So are tickets, if you're willing to cough up \$400, the price of two pieces of newly issued Packers stock.

"It's going to be a special kind of excitement," Freeman said. "Everybody that's a football fan will be watching this game."

The Cowboys have beaten the Packers seven straight times since 1993 — all at Texas Stadium including three times in the playoffs.

The men with the stars on their helmets are making just their second trip to Lambeau Field since Bart Starr beat them in the fabled "Ice Bowl" 30 years ago, and it is their first visit to Green Bay since Oct. 8, 1989.

"All I know is the whole world's been looking forward to this game," free safety Eugene said. "This is the game to see who's America's team."

strong safety LeRoy Butler, who never hid his frustration when Carolina beat the Cowboys to reach the NFC championship at Lambeau in January, said.

Tight end Mark Chmura said the Cowboys represent unfinished business.

"I think a lot of people look at last year and, you know, we beat everybody but Dallas," he said.

Even rookies who have never lost to the hated Cowboys are well aware of the importance of this game, even with back-to-back trips to division co-leaders Minnesota and Tampa Bay following Sunday's showdown.

Top draft pick Ross Verba of Iowa was pulled aside by guard Aaron Taylor and quarterback Brett Favre.

"Brett came up to me earlier this week and said, 'This is bigger than the Iowa-Iowa State game,'" Verba recounted. "So I really don't need to be told that much more."

"It's been nuts," kicker Ryan Longwell, an undrafted free agent, said. "When they picked me up here in early July, the second I stepped off that plane, they started talking about Nov. 23."

"And now it's here, so we're excited." The game has been circled on both team's calendars for a long, long time.

"But it has a different flavor than what everybody predicted," Cowboys coach Barry Switzer said.

Because the Cowboys stumbled early, falling to 4-5 before winning their last two, and Green Bay (8-3) was riding high until Sunday, when it scored 38 points and still lost to the worst team in the NFL.

"It's almost comical how people view these

games," Packers coach Mike Holmgren said. "At the beginning of the year, they were printing up T-shirts, hats, all that stuff. Then, all of a sudden, both teams are not 11-0 and everyone's in a panic."

But that should not diminish Sunday's game, added Holmgren, 0-7 against the Cowboys and 66-27 against the rest of the NFL.

"Two real fine football teams with a little history to it. It doesn't get any better," he said. "The fact that we get to play them up here, that's a great thing for our fans, it really is."

"There should be no luster at all taken away from the game because the records aren't ... watch where they are at the end of the season in the NFC East. I trust we're going to be there in the NFC Central at the end. This is going to be a great game."

"This is a perfect opportunity for redemption," Robinson said Wednesday in a jovial locker room that featured four stink bombs.

Holmgren hopes to have nose tackle Gilbert Brown (ankle), defensive end Reggie White (back) and receiver Robert Brooks (rib) available for the Cowboys, although none of them practiced Wednesday and Brown was walking around with a special ankle boot following treatments.

"A game of this magnitude?" Holmgren said. "Against an opponent like this? With all that's at stake? You'd really have to dead not to play this game."

Major League Baseball's rendition of musical chairs not expected to slow following Tuesday's expansion draft, some big names are on the move

PHOENIX (AP) — This kind of ping-pong belongs to brokers on Wall Street, not teams trying to get to the World Series.

But in a stunning blitz Tuesday night, baseball offered its version of a chaotic day of heavy trading at the New York Stock Exchange.

Only one minute after journeyman pitcher Vaughn Eshelman was traded to the 70th and final pick of an expansion draft that dragged on for seven hours, the tumult started.

Pedro Martinez to Boston. Bob Nen to San Francisco. Mike Sweeney to Colorado.

General managers rushed to the podium, stacking up like airplanes waiting to take off.

Fred McGriff to Tampa Bay. Fris Fryman to Arizona.

The volume was startling. Announcements filled the Phoenix Civic Plaza.

Roberto Hernandez, Kevin Ecker and John Flaherty to the Devil Rays. Devon White and Harold Pulliam to the Diamondbacks. In all, 13 trades and four free-agent signings, affecting a total of 15 players. All done in a matter of seconds, it seemed.

"It's an exciting time," Giants GM Brian Sabean said. "I think it's good for baseball. When a lot of big deals are consummated like this, it puts the sport to the forefront."

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**BRIAN SABEAN
SF GIANTS GENERAL MANAGER**

Marlins and the Montreal Expos, though, did not fare so well.

The Devil Rays got McGriff, a Tampa resident, from Atlanta and Stocker from Philadelphia to settle their infield, and Hernandez is a proven reliever.

"It was a thrill to be involved in

ping-pong is going at full tilt. "Things were coming together and falling apart all night," Arizona general manager Joe Garagiola Jr. said later. "This is the kind of activity we used to have at the winter meetings, and fans love."

He paused to catch his breath. He was finished, for at least one day.

"I think for the night, that being the operative time frame," he said. "Tomorrow is another day."

By the time the bell struck at midnight EST, it was already time to start assessing the big winners and big losers.

The two expansion teams made out nicely, especially after each finished drafting its 35 players. The World Series champion Florida

the situation tonight," Devil Rays general manager Chuck LaMar said. "We had some scenario with every team during the week, or almost every team."

The Diamondbacks got Fryman from Detroit, and he will play third base next to shortstop Jay Bell, signed on Monday. White in center field gives Arizona strength up the middle.

The cost-cutting Marlins, meanwhile, continued their breakup that began with the recent trade of Moises Alou to Houston.

This time, Florida sent closer Nen, who is owed \$14.5 million in the next three seasons, to San Francisco and traded White, due \$3.5 million next year, to Arizona. Both deals were made for minor leaguers prospects.

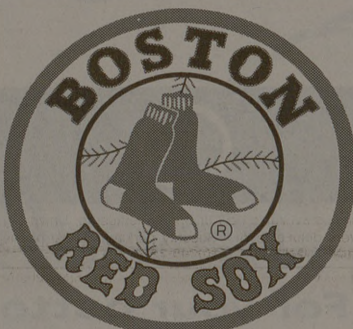
"We're going back and we're going to regroup in Florida," general manager Dave Dombrowski said. "There are still some moves to be made."

Sheffield and Brown could be the next to leave. Nen figured he was headed out of town.

"It's been a tough day," he said. "I'd heard I was going anywhere from Toronto to Mexico."

The Expos also are looking to reduce payroll. They traded Martinez, the NL Cy Young winner, to Boston for young pitcher Carl Pavano and a player to be named and shipped second baseman Lansing to Colorado for three pitching prospects.

"Obviously both of my trades were dictated by the economics of the times," Expos general manager



er Jim Beattie said. "We do not intend to win next year. We intend to build to have a championship club when we move into our stadium in 2001."

The Red Sox were delighted to get Martinez.

"This is the kind of trade when you go to bed at night as a general manager you dream about making," Boston GM Dan Duquette said.

By the end of the night, most everyone in baseball was marveling at what had taken place. So much movement, and so quickly.

Even comedian Billy Crystal, a small investor in the Diamondbacks, was shaking his head. He was in Arizona's "war room" earlier in the draft, watching the names fly past.

As a boy, he remembered, he filled days by "throwing a ball in the air by yourself and picking a team with Mantle, Mays and Musial in the same outfield."

Many years later, he said in wonderment, "you're doing it again, for real."

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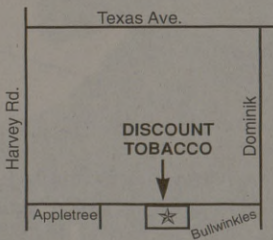


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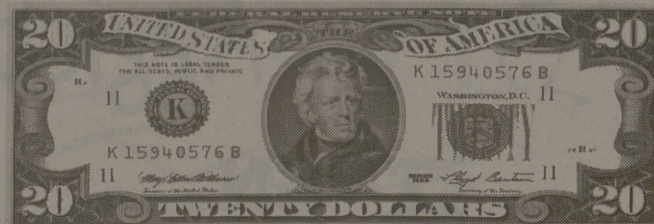
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