

NFL

VIKINGS VS. GREEN BAY

Kickoff: 7:20 p.m. Sunday • **Where:** U.S. Bank Stadium • **TV:** NBC, Peacock • **Line:** Vikings by 1½
Radio: KFAN-FM 100.3; Sirius/XM 85, 225 (Vikings), 82, 226 (Packers), 88 (Westwood One)



CHANGING FACE OF THE VIKINGS' STARTING QUARTERBACK

Weeks 1-7
Kirk Cousins

Was on record pace for yards when a torn Achilles tendon ended his season.
4 wins, 4 losses

Week 8
Jaren Hall

Started against Atlanta, but only threw six passes before a concussion.
1 win, 0 losses

Weeks 9-13
Joshua Dobbs

Cooled after a strong debut. Turnover-prone with six fumbles, five INTs.
2 wins, 2 losses

Weeks 15-16
Nick Mullens

Integrated Justin Jefferson back into the offense, but had six INTs in two starts.
0 wins, 2 losses

Week 17
Jaren Hall

Rookie QB is back as starter after inconsistent performances from Dobbs and Mullens.

A HIGH-STAKES REMATCH

Story by BEN GOESSLING • ben.goessling@startribune.com • Star Tribune and Associated Press photos

VIKINGS OFFENSE VS. PACKERS DEFENSE

Trying to handle Jefferson shorthanded

After Jaire Alexander made himself a captain last week and nearly bungled the Packers' choice on the coin toss, Green Bay suspended its top cornerback for the game against the Vikings. The news was a disappointment for Justin Jefferson, who was looking forward to facing Alexander for the first time since the New Year's Day game last season where the cornerback mocked the Griddy. Alexander has struggled with back and shoulder injuries for much of this season, and after D.J. Chark and Adam Thielen's success against him for Carolina last week, Jefferson might have been in line for a big day. Instead, he'll likely see rookie Carrington Valentine. The Packers also lost another cornerback Saturday when they put Eric Stokes (hamstring) on injured reserve.

Hall could have space to throw, if protected

Much of the criticism surrounding beleaguered Packers defensive coordinator Joe Barry has focused on his zone coverages that keep defensive backs deep and allow receivers free releases or room to work underneath. The Packers have allowed opponents to be successful on 48.5% of their dropbacks — the third-highest rate in the league, according to data from NFL Fast R — and Jaren Hall could find a friendly environment to work in if the Vikings can handle a front seven that includes four former first-round picks in addition to veteran Preston Smith. Expect the Packers to test the Vikings' protection scheme with stunts and line movement early in the game.

VIKINGS DEFENSE VS. PACKERS OFFENSE

Love has looked different since first meeting

In their 24-10 victory on Oct. 29, the Vikings built their largest lead at Lambeau Field in 14 years, with Cousins carving up the Packers defense and Jordan Love averaging just 5.6 yards per pass attempt. Since then, Love has completed 66.4% of his passes for 2,095 yards, throwing 16 touchdowns against just three interceptions in a 5-3 stretch that has helped the Packers catch up to the Vikings in the NFC North. He has played with an injured receiving corps for much of that stretch but has looked more assertive while showing the arm strength to throw into tight windows during victories over the Lions and Chiefs. If he is as efficient as he has been in recent weeks, the Vikings will have a tougher challenge than they saw at Green Bay in October.

Jones' return means Packers might run more

Packers running back Aaron Jones had just seven carries for 29 yards while recovering from a hamstring injury in the first matchup between the teams. He has received a larger workload the past two weeks, though, carrying 21 times for 127 yards last week at Carolina in a game where Green Bay ran 34 times. Jones was limited in practice by a knee injury this past week, but if he and A.J. Dillon are ready for this one, the Packers could try to copy the approach the Lions used against the Vikings last week, with a combined 38 touches for Jahmyr Gibbs and David Montgomery.

THE BIGGEST STORY LINE

Hall gets the call with season on the line

When Kirk Cousins tore his right Achilles tendon on Oct. 29, Hall was the team's only other active quarterback with Nick Mullens on the injured reserve. It put the rookie in line to get his first NFL regular-season snaps at Lambeau Field and start the following week against the Falcons, before a concussion took him out of the game after 11 snaps. Now, he will get another chance to start, after a four-interception game ended Mullens' time as the starting QB after just two weeks. The 7-8 Vikings likely need to win their final two games to maintain any hope of a playoff berth.

PREDICTION

The Vikings once again will have to calibrate their offense for a different quarterback, with Hall taking over for Mullens. They have struggled to adapt their scheme for passers other than Cousins, and the rookie could have to withstand some hits from a Packers defense that has posted the NFL's sixth-highest pressure percentage this season. But after Green Bay allowed Tampa Bay's Baker Mayfield to post a perfect passer rating and let Carolina rookie Bryce Young have his best day of the season, this could be a friendlier matchup for Hall, especially with Alexander out and Jefferson looking to feast against the Packers secondary. The Vikings will avoid their sixth home loss of the year and stay alive in the playoff race for another week. **Vikings 27, Packers 23**