

PACKERS AND COWBOYS DECADE-LONG HISTORY

GREEN BAY: The Dallas Cowboys and Green Bay Packers go way back, as in the 1967 NFL championship game played in such frigid conditions at Lambeau Field that it is known in league annals as the "Ice Bowl." Cowboys receiver Dez Bryant has more recent memories, and they're painful for reasons other than the cold.

Two of the league's marquee franchises share a post-season history that dates back five decades. They have met seven previous times in the playoffs, with Dallas holding a 4-3 edge going into the divisional round game tomorrow against the Packers at AT&T Stadium. While the teams may not be heated divisional rivals, their postseason meetings often leave an impression.

"I hope the Cowboys don't spoil it, or I'll be really (angry) if they do," said former Packers offensive lineman Jerry Kramer. He was one of the blockers for Hall of Famer Bart Starr's game-winning, 1-yard quarterback sneak with 13 seconds left in the fourth quarter of Green Bay's 21-17 win in the Ice Bowl. Each team has made 32 postseason appearances, tied with the New York Giants for most in NFL history.

Dallas and Green Bay have unique owners. For the Cowboys, owner Jerry Jones is part-showman, part-personnel executive and part-spokesman. Dallas plays in a cavernous, modern stadium in a sprawling suburb. Green Bay plays in the league's smallest market. Lambeau Field is the league's longest-tenured stadium, situated in the middle of a blue-collar neighborhood. It's the only publicly owned franchise in the NFL.

"Part of it is, I don't think the organizations could be more different. Their stadium and our stadium - ours is iconic, an older stadium. Their (stadium) is glitzy," Packers president Mark Murphy said. "But I have tremendous respect for the Dallas organization and Jerry." A look back at some postseason highlights of postseason between the teams:

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Fifty years ago on Jan. 1, the teams met in the 1966 NFL championship game, which took on new meaning since the winner would represent the league in the first Super Bowl against the AFL winner. Starr was 19 of 28 for 304 yards and four touchdown passes in the 34-27 victory at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. The Packers went on to beat the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl. After joining the NFL as an expansion franchise in 1960, Dallas started a streak of 20 straight winning seasons in 1966.

ICE BOWL

The temperature was minus-13 at kickoff on Dec 31, 1967, when the Cowboys and Packers met at Lambeau in a classic NFL championship game. Cowboys equipment staff gave players a salve to rub on to keep warm, and put Saran Wrap around feet in an attempt to add another layer of warmth. There wasn't much of a rivalry then because the Cowboys were still relatively new to the league, Kramer said, though the seeds of a rivalry were planted.

DALLAS DOMINATION

The Cowboys dominated in the mid-1990s with a star-studded lineup led by the Hall of Fame trio of Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith and Michael Irvin. Dallas hosted the Packers and another future Hall of Famer, quarterback Brett Favre, for three straight seasons, from 1993-95, all Cowboys victories. Kramer remembers a weekend in which he attended one of those playoff games and got frustrated by the brash and confident Cowboys. His anger boiled over in a radio interview.

"There wasn't anything about any of them that I liked," Kramer recalled this week. He has become friends with former Dallas players, though his heart remains with the Packers. The loss in the 1995 NFC title game served as a learning experience for Green Bay. The Packers went on to beat New England in the Super Bowl in the 1996 season. "Every year, you got better, you learned from your mistakes," former center Frank Winters said. "From a motivational point ... you tried to overcome those adversities, tried to learn from them and move forward." They didn't face the Cowboys in the playoffs that year after Dallas was knocked out by Carolina. The Packers returned to the Super Bowl the following season, losing to Denver. "I think the signature 'win' for the Packers was a loss, and that was the NFC championship in 1995 in Dallas," former Packers linebacker George Koonce said. — AP



SAN DIEGO: In this Nov 16, 2014, file photo, the San Diego Chargers play against the Oakland Raiders during the first half of an NFL football game at Qualcomm Stadium. (INSET) Bre Priest gives the thumbs down while wearing a t-shirt mocking the team at San Diego Chargers headquarters after the team announced that it will move to Los Angeles. — AP photos

CHARGERS' NEXT MOVE? CHASING RESPECT IN SPORTS-SATURATED LA

LOS ANGELES: The Chargers were the biggest story in Los Angeles for about four hours. On the same rainy Thursday that the Chargers announced their relocation up the Southern California coast, the Los Angeles Rams hired 30-year-old Sean McVay to become the youngest head coach in NFL history. Welcome to LA, Bolts. You're no longer the greatest show in town.

While their franchise value soars and their stadium future becomes secure, the Chargers realize they face a lengthy struggle to gather respect, attention and a durable fan base among the roughly 19 million people who inhabit the five counties around Los Angeles, the nation's second-largest city. Chargers owner Dean Spanos' first public comments acknowledged the difficulty of the task they've accepted in leaving San Diego after 56 years.

"Our entire organization knows that we have a tremendous amount of work to do," Spanos said. "We must earn the respect and support of LA football fans. We must get back to winning. And we must make a meaningful contribution, not just on the field, but off the field as a leader and champion for the community. The Chargers are determined to fight for LA, and we are excited to get started." Indeed, the Chargers are entering quite a competition.

Athletics powerhouses

The Chargers relocated exactly one year to the day after the NFL's 21-year absence from LA ended with the Rams' official move back to town. The Southland will be home to two teams apiece in five professional sports after Major League Soccer's expansion LAFC arrives downtown next year. The wildly popular Lakers and Dodgers rule their respective calendar months. The

Clippers, Kings and Anaheim Ducks are perennial playoff teams. The Los Angeles Angels drew 3 million fans last season while losing 88 games.

There are collegiate athletics powerhouses at USC and UCLA, along with innumerable outdoor sporting pursuits around an entertainment-saturated metropolis that doesn't get obsessed with sports in the first place. Even among die-hard NFL fans, the Chargers will be at least a distant third-place team in their two-team market next fall. The Rams have a generational fan base that never gave up on them during 21 years in St Louis, and the Raiders are still wildly popular in Los Angeles from their 1982-94 run at the Coliseum - along with that outlaw franchise's status as a California lifestyle brand as much as a sports team.

But one intriguing aspect of the Chargers' machinations is their choice to play their next two seasons at StubHub Center, the LA Galaxy's compact soccer stadium in suburban Carson. Even with an expansion in capacity to 30,000 seats, it will be small by NFL standards - or even by some Texas high school football standards.

The Chargers and the Galaxy's owners, sports conglomerate AEG, have plans for expansion and improvement of the modest facilities around StubHub. Yet playing in a small stadium should protect the Chargers from the unpleasant optics of thousands of empty seats while they attempt to build a fan base. The Raiders' annual road game against the AFC West rival Chargers should be a fascinating sight this fall, but the Chargers hope they'll benefit from their temporary home by providing an unusually intimate setting for fans - and whatever ticket prices the market will bear.

Bold and innovative

"I would like to commend the Chargers on this bold and innovative decision to move to StubHub Center," AEG President and CEO Dan Beckerman said. "It is truly a testament to how strongly the Chargers feel about the fan experience and their willingness to create something special for people in Southern California."

The Rams were ripped on social media and by rival fans for empty seats this season at the cavernous Coliseum, which doesn't look full even with 80,000 people in attendance. The Chargers' games will be packed by comparison - even if the crowds are one-third of the Rams' turnouts. The Chargers' training complex is expected to be in Costa Mesa, 40 miles southeast of Los Angeles amid the Orange County fan base often cited by the Chargers as evidence of their appeal in the area.

But pure winning would be the easiest way to get LA fans' attention, and the Chargers could be in position to do that more quickly than the Rams, who are rebuilding from a 4-12 season with the youngest head coach in NFL history. The Chargers fired head coach Mike McCoy after going 5-11, but their new boss will inherit a team with decent talent around 35-year-old Philip Rivers, one of the league's most consistent veteran quarterbacks - assuming the father of seven has no qualms about moving to family-friendly Orange County.

Rivers' \$83.25 million contract extension through 2019 kicked in this season, and a good coach could put the Chargers in position for a quick return to the postseason - somewhere the Rams haven't been since the 2004 season. "LA chargers does not change our main goal and that's winning," Chargers cornerback Casey Hayward tweeted. "LA let's make this year great." — AP