

A deafening silence has followed the Vikings' upset of the 49ers, and as far as the young team is concerned, that's OK.

WHERE'S THE LOVE?



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Chad Greenway had an outstanding game against the 49ers last Sunday, but he played to many empty seats and the victory resulted in little national buzz.

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Funny thing happened last weekend. The Vikings took the field at the Metrodome, lined up against a powerful San Francisco team that had become a popular pick to reach the Super Bowl and somehow delivered a resounding 24-13 beat-down.

The mauling proved as surprising as it was one-sided — like that scene in “A Christmas Story” when Ralphie finally blows a fuse and pummels Scut Farkus into the snow. It was an underdog uprising that should have jostled the NFL’s hype meter.

But for the past 20 months, the Vikings have been so far off the map, outside attention has been hard to come by.

Even as last week’s upset ensued, huge patches of empty seats were visible throughout the upper deck above Mall of America Field.

The announced attendance was 57,288, a second consecutive non-sellout for a franchise that hasn’t had three consecutive non-sellouts since 1996.

So where the heck did all the limelight go? Where are the fans? The caravan of satellite trucks? Where’s Rachel Nichols?

“With our situation now, we’re very much under the radar — far under the radar and justifiably so,” coach Leslie Frazier said. “But our guys aren’t feeling bad about that. They’re focused more on our goals as a team.”

If there was hope that last week’s energized defeat of San Francisco would bring at least some of the buzz back, the NFL’s bright lights quickly were diverted Monday, when in Seattle a replacement ref named Lance Easley ruled an interception by Green Bay’s M.D. Jennings to be a touchdown catch by Seahawks receiver Golden Tate.

“Yeah, then that happened,” Frazier said. “And all the attention in the National Football League went in one direction. And that’s all right. For us, right now, that’s not a bad thing.”

In a league where the wall-to-wall coverage is often noisier and more rambunctious than an LMFAO concert, the Vikings find themselves in a rare quiet zone.

“But it’s good for us,” receiver Percy Harvin said. “I don’t think we need all the hype. Personally, I’m a low-key guy. I like to make noise on the field, get done, then chill. I think that’s the way to sneak up on people.”

Give peace a chance

Today, the Vikings are in Detroit trying to halt an 11-game NFC North losing streak. If they do, they’ll suddenly be 3-1 and in first place in a strong division.

If that happens, the outside attention will inevitably spike, right?

“If it does, it does,” defensive end Brian Robison said. “And if it doesn’t, we can continue going about our business in peace.”

Still, all this quiet seems particularly odd given the media tsunami that crashed down in 2009 and 2010 during Brett Favre’s retreat here.

And while it may be hard to quantify exactly how little buzz there’s been recently, there are ways to take a pulse.

In September, for example, Sports Illustrated had five issues hit newsstands with more than 150 pages devoted in some way to NFL coverage. The Vikings received an obligatory two-page preseason preview — like every other team in the league — and then a couple of one-sentence blurbs on the fantasy stock of Toby Gerhart (falling) and Kyle Rudolph (rising).

Last Sunday, during the “NFL Today” and “Fox NFL Sunday” pregame shows, the Vikings were part of the conversation for a grand total of 21 seconds — most of it speculation regarding a potential 2014 trip to London.

And ESPN’s “Pardon The Interruption,” often a good barometer of the hottest sports topics? It addressed 37 topics this week, 27 of them dealing with the NFL. Only two even mentioned the Vikings, with Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon still trying to make sense of last week’s victory.

Oh, and as members of the Twin Cities media like to joke, Winter Park has been a Werder-free zone for nearly two years now.

Where’s Ed?

You remember Ed Werder, right? He’s was ESPN’s resident Favre-ologist in 2009 and 2010. And man, oh man, was that a 17-month circus.

“There was no end to the stories that came out of Minnesota those two years,” Werder said. “Every week something big happened, and it was often something ridiculous.”

The chaos all began that August day in ‘09 when coach Brad Childress took his Cadillac Escalade to pick up Favre at the St. Paul Downtown Airport.

Harvin was in the Winter Park cafeteria eating lunch, just an eager and wide-eyed rookie still learning about the NFL hype machine.

“We didn’t even know for sure that Brett was coming,” Harvin said. “Then we’re eating, watching on TV as the helicopters are flying over Coach Childress’ car. Hectic, man. It was like the president was coming.”

Added Robison: “Completely surreal. It was like watching O.J. get chased down the highway. But then all of a sudden that chase is in your driveway.”

“The Great Favre Spectacular” brought all sorts of magic in 2009. There was the miracle touchdown pass to Greg Lewis and Favre’s triumphant return to Lambeau Field — wearing purple.

There were dramatic victories over Baltimore and Chicago and the 34-3 playoff mauling of Dallas.

“That whole year was fun,” Harvin said. “You were on the stage, front and center every week. The attention was energizing. It was good chaos.”

Then came the crash when all the amusement was replaced by high-profile controversy — from the Favre-Jenn Sterger text-messaging scandal to Randy Moss’ return to Moss’ meltdown to Moss’ release. Which triggered Brad Childress’ firing, which led to Frazier’s promotion, which was followed three weeks later by a blizzard that tore a hole in the Metrodome roof.

Right before that storm, Werder came to Minnesota midweek for what he scheduled as a one-day trip with a couple of quick outdoor live shots mixed in.

“This is great,” Werder said. “I arrived in Minnesota on Tuesday night for a one-day assignment. And I wound up going home the following Tuesday. From Detroit.”

Yeah, Detroit. That’s where Werder signed off on a 21-3 Vikings “home” loss to the Giants at Ford Field, in a relocated, day-late contest that was also the first game Favre didn’t start since 1992.

OFF THE RADAR

Here’s one reason national media appear to have lost interest in the Vikings since Brett Favre retired:

Records in the post-Favre era

(Regular-season win-loss since start of 2011)

The worst five	
St. Louis Rams	3-16
Indianapolis Colts	3-16
Cleveland Browns	4-16
Minnesota Vikings	5-14
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	5-14

The best five	
Green Bay Packers	16-3
San Francisco 49ers	15-4
Baltimore Ravens	15-5
New England Patriots	14-5
Pittsburgh Steelers	13-6
Houston Texans	13-6
Atlanta Falcons	13-6
New Orleans Saints	13-6

The rest of the NFC North	
Detroit Lions	11-8
Chicago Bears	10-9

Buzzworthy

Werder’s last Twin Cities visit came just before Christmas in 2010, with the Vikings declaring Favre out for a Week 16 game against Chicago.

“Then here comes Brett, the NFL’s 41-year-old grandfather, deciding he’s never played in a snow globe and he really wants to start,” Werder said.

Favre did start, of course, but couldn’t finish, hitting his head so hard on the icy turf at TCF Bank Stadium that not only did his playing days end abruptly, so too did all the drama and attention he attracted.

That’s why the Vikings’ current absence from the national consciousness registers as so bizarre.

In juxtaposition to those 2009-10 days of yore, things are almost too quiet. But for a young team still finding its way, such calm has heightened the unity and focus.

“It allows you to really home in on yourself and focus on what you have to get done to be successful,” Frazier said. “Sometimes when you get that flood of outside attention, if you’re not careful, it can make you believe you’re something you’re not.”

That’s not to say Frazier and the Vikings have a permanent aversion to the hype.

“Oh, man. We’d rather have the buzz [return] than continuously stay under the radar,” Frazier said. “Because that will mean we’re having success. But for the short term, this is perfect.”