

RIGHT BACK AT YA

Exploiting Detroit for a quick touchdown on the opening kickoff set the day's tone.



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Teammates rushed to embrace Percy Harvin after he returned the opening kickoff 105 yards untouched for a Vikings touchdown Sunday in Detroit.

● A well-executed game plan was most evident in special teams highlights, but the Vikings also stuffed the run and neutralized Calvin Johnson.

INSIDE THE GAME DAN WIEDERER



DETROIT - Vikings special teams coach Mike Priefer knew something was there. All week long, the always caffeinated Priefer kept peppering his kickoff return team with instruction and encouragement, sensing vulnerability in Detroit's coverage unit and wanting his players to sense the golden opportunity.

"Coach Priefer was calling touchdown," Percy Harvin said. "All week. He knew it was a great chance for us to score."

That kind of prediction would be one thing if it was just hollow bravado. But it was quite another when

CHIP SCOGGINS Season of rebuilding is turning into something more C8

Priefer detailed the plans and engaged his players in the prep work, dialing up a simple yet explosive return designed for Harvin to be Harvin.

So when Detroit's Jason Hanson boomed Sunday's opening kickoff 5 yards right of the bold blue "S" in the Lions end zone, the Vikings knew they had something special.

"In our first special teams kickoff return meeting,

Vikings continues on C11 ►

HISTORICAL HARVIN

Percy Harvin of the Vikings has five career kickoff returns for touchdowns, tying him for eighth on the NFL's all-time list:

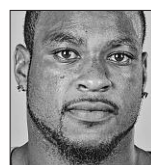
NFL KICKOFF RETURN TDS

- 8 Josh Cribbs*
- 7 Leon Washington*
- 6 Mel Gray, Dante Hall, Ollie Matson, Gale Sayers, Travis Williams
- 5 Michael Bates, Tim Brown, Percy Harvin,* Devin Hester*, Terrence McGee*, Justin Miller, Bobby Mitchell, Allen Rossum, Abe Woodson

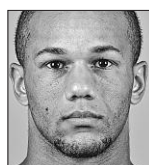
*active player

vikings 20, lions 13

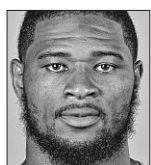
game balls



PERCY HARVIN
Vikings receiver
All-purpose star returned the opening kickoff 105 yards, the longest play in Vikings history.



MARCUS SHERELS
Vikings cornerback
Sherels scored his first career touchdown on a tackle-breaking 77-yard punt return.



JAMARCA SANFORD
Vikings safety
Had five tackles, defended three passes and forced and recovered a fumble as a substitute starter.

« WITH THE TYPE OF PLAYERS AND THE CHARACTER WE HAVE ON THIS TEAM, WE'LL HAVE A CHANCE IN EVERY BALLGAME. » Coach Leslie Frazier

RIGHT BACK AT YA



Photographs by CARLOS GONZALEZ • cgonzalez@startribune.com

Everson Griffen killed a Lions drive when he threw down quarterback Matthew Stafford on fourth down in the fourth quarter.

VIKINGS FROM C1

we saw some things," coach Leslie Frazier said. "And we pointed out that if everybody holds their block, Percy's going to score. It was obvious."

As practiced, Harvin immediately veered right across the field and waited for 10 teammates to seal the Lions' coverage. With key blocks, first from Matt Asiata and Rhett Ellison and then from Tyrone McKenzie and Robert Blanton, Harvin made two simple moves and raced untouched up the right sideline.

Just like that, in 105 yards and 12 seconds, the Vikings had the major catalyst for their 20-13 upset.

Priefer could not have been more ecstatic. And his excitement only heightened as the special teams delivered repeated jolts of electricity, scoring all 20 of the team's points.

Harvin's return fireworks were matched in the second half by a 77-yard punt return touchdown by Marcus Sherels. Rookie kicker Blair Walsh made field goals from 49 and 27 yards.

And Chris Kluwe delivered clutch punts at the end of each half, the last one pinning the Lions at their own 2 with 1:42 left — 98 yards from a tying score with no timeouts left.

Yep, it was a banner day for Priefer's special teams.

"He'll get a nice big hug,"



Vikings safety Harrison Smith made a point of being in star receiver Calvin Johnson's face as he broke up a pass in the third quarter.

Frazier said. "For sure."

There were plenty of hugs to go around in the jubilant visiting locker room. In the unpredictable NFL, the Vikings are the team that has suddenly caught a wave of positive energy, surfing it like they're Kelly Slater.

Yep, figured by everyone outside of Winter Park to be irrelevant for the 2012 season, the Vikings are now 3-1 and alone atop the NFC North — for 24 hours at least.

They're also blessed with a schedule that provides three October home games.

Sunday's victory wasn't perfect. But it included many of the accomplishments Frazier wants every week.

The turnover battle? Won,

thanks to Mikel Leshoure's third-quarter fumble, forced and recovered by safety Jamarca Sanford.

Run defense? Sturdy, surrendering only 55 yards on 20 Detroit carries.

Strong ground attack? Present, thanks to Adrian Peterson's 102-yard day.

No wonder Frazier seemed as pumped as he's ever been as a head coach.

The Vikings are resilient, they're focused and, man, they're packing quite a pop right now. Just ask Lions receiver Calvin Johnson, who managed five catches for 54 yards. But Johnson also had taken big shots several times.

The most notable came with

2 minutes left in the first half when Stafford put a 13-yard touchdown dart right onto the 81 of Johnson's jersey.

For a second, it looked like Detroit would pull within 13-10. Until both Vikings safeties, Sanford and Harrison Smith, sandwiched Johnson.

Smith's textbook shot sent the ball skidding into the turf for an incompletion. Detroit settled for a field goal.

"That was a good collision," Sanford said. "I'm glad Harrison was there. Harrison cleaned him on up for us, man."

Johnson was priority 1, 2 and 3 in the Vikings' defensive game plan. As Sanford summarized: "Know where Calvin's at. Know where 81 at every time."

The Vikings' ability to neutralize Johnson stymied Detroit's offense. The Lions' touchdown came with 2:56 left.

Just like that, an 11-game division losing streak ended.

More significant, the Vikings matched last season's win total before the calendar flipped to October.

And a surprising Week 3 upset of San Francisco can no longer be categorized as a "lightning in a bottle" triumph.

"We're playing smart, tough, disciplined football," Frazier said. "Combine that with the type of players and the character we have on this team, we'll have a chance in every ballgame."

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game scoring

	1	2	3	4	Final
VIKINGS	10	3	7	0	20
DETROIT	3	3	0	7	13

FIRST QUARTER VIKINGS 10, LIONS 3

VIKINGS — Percy Harvin 105 kickoff return (Blair Walsh kick), 14:48.
LIONS — FG Jason Hanson 40, 13:06. **Drive:** Four plays, 58 yards, 1:42. **Key play:** 56-yard defensive pass interference penalty on Vikings safety Jamarca Sanford.
VIKINGS — FG Walsh 49, 1:16. **Drive:** Seven plays, 60 yards, 3:53. **Key play:** 31-yard defensive pass interference penalty on Lions cornerback Bill Bentley.

SECOND QUARTER VIKINGS 13, LIONS 6

VIKINGS — FG Walsh 27, 8:14. **Drive:** 11 plays, 82 yards, 4:56. **Key play:** Adrian Peterson 18 run; Harvin 17 pass from Christian Ponder on third-and-2; 26-yard defensive pass interference penalty on Bentley.
LIONS — FG Hanson 31, 1:46. **Drive:** 14 plays, 67 yards, 6:28. **Key play:** Brandon Pettigrew 8 pass from Matthew Stafford on third-and-6; Calvin Johnson 19 pass from Stafford; Titus Young 17 pass from Stafford.

THIRD QUARTER VIKINGS 20, LIONS 6

VIKINGS — Marcus Sherels 77 punt return (Walsh kick), 13:09.

FOURTH QUARTER VIKINGS 20, LIONS 13

LIONS — Stafford 1 run (Hanson kick), 2:56. **Drive:** 11 plays, 75 yards, 3:12. **Key plays:** defensive pass interference penalty on third-and-6 on Vikings cornerback Antoine Winfield.

team statistics

Vikings		Detroit
227	total net yards	341
77	Return yards	35
6-43.2	Punts-average	5-39.6
5-87	Penalties-yards	5-72
0-0	Fumbles/balls lost	1-1

Vikings		Detroit
100	net passing yards	286
2-11	Sacks-yards lost	5-33
111	Gross yards	319
16-26-0	Completions-attempts-interceptions	30-51-0
61.5	Completion percentage	58.8

Vikings		Detroit
127	net rushing yards	55
28	Total rushes	20
4.5	Average per attempt	2.8

Vikings		Detroit
15	first downs	23
9/4	Rushing/passing	2/17
2	Penalty	4
3-12	3rd down: made-attempted	6-16
0-0	4th down: made-attempted	1-3

Vikings		Detroit
2	touchdowns	1
0	Rushing	1
0	Passing	0
2	Returns	0
29:18	Time of possession	30:42
	Game attendance	63,616

individual statistics

RUSHING

Vikings	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Lg	TD
A. Peterson	21	102	4.9	18	0
P. Harvin	3	12	4.0	14	0
T. Gerhart	3	8	2.7	4	0
C. Ponder	1	5	5.0	5	0

RECEIVING

Vikings	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Lg	TD
J. Simpson	4	50	12.5	27	0
A. Peterson	4	20	5.0	9	0
P. Harvin	3	22	7.3	17	0
K. Rudolph	2	8	4.0	7	0
T. Gerhart	1	8	8.0	8	0
M. Jenkins	1	4	4.0	4	0
J. Carlson	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0

PASSING

Vikings	Cmp.	Att.	Yds.	TD	Int.	Rat.
C. Ponder	16	26	111	0	0	71.2

PUNT RETURNS

Vikings	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Lg	TD
M. Sherels	1	77	77.0	77	1

KICKOFF RETURNS

Vikings	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Lg	TD
P. Harvin	1	105	105.0	105	1
C. Ballard	1	4	4.0	4	0

FIELD GOALS

Vikings	1-29	30-39	40-49	50+
B. Walsh	1-1	0-0	1-2	0-0

PUNTING

Vikings	No.	Avg.	TB	I20	Lg
C. Kluwe	6	43.2	0	2	52

TACKLES

Vikings	Solo	Ast.	Sacks	FR
C. Greenway	7	4	0	0
A. Winfield	6	4	0	0
J. Brinkley	5	5	0	0
J. Robinson	7	0	0	0
J. Allen	4	2	1	0
J. Sanford	5	0	0	1
E. Griffen	3	0	2	0
B. Robison	2	1	0	0
L. Guion	2	0	2	0
K. Williams	1	1	0	0
C. Ballard	0	2	0	0
H. Smith	1	0	0	0
C. Cook	1	0	0	0
F. Evans	1	0	0	0
M. Mitchell	1	0	0	0

week 5 vikings vs. tennessee

3:25 p.m. at Mall of America Field • **TV:** Ch. 4 • **Radio:** 100.3-FM, 1130-AM • **Line:** Vikings by 6

Week	Opponent	Result
Week 1	Sept. 9 Jacksonville	Win 26-23 (OT)
Week 2	Sept. 16 at Indy	Loss 23-20
Week 3	Sept. 23 San Fran.	Win 24-13
Week 4	Sept. 30 at Detroit	Win 20-13
Week 5	Oct. 7 Tennessee	3:25 p.m. Ch. 4
Week 6	Oct. 14 at Washington	3:25 p.m. Ch. 9
Week 7	Oct. 21 Arizona	Noon Ch. 9
Week 8	Oct. 25 Tampa Bay	7:20 p.m. NFL Network
Week 9	Nov. 4 at Seattle	3:05 p.m. Ch. 9
Week 10	Nov. 11 Detroit	Noon Ch. 9
Week 11	Nov. 18 Bye	
Week 12	Nov. 25 at Chicago	Noon Ch. 9
Week 13	Dec. 2 at Green Bay	Noon Ch. 9
Week 14	Dec. 9 Chicago	Noon Ch. 9
Week 15	Dec. 16 at St. Louis	Noon Ch. 9
Week 16	Dec. 23 at Houston	Noon Ch. 9
Week 17	Dec. 30 Green Bay	Noon Ch. 9

NEXT OPPONENT: TENNESSEE

Second-year QB Jake Locker re-injured his left shoulder and was replaced by veteran Matt Hasselbeck on Sunday. Locker will have an MRI on Monday.

TITANS WEEK 4

Houston 38, Tennessee 14
Danieal Manning and Kareem Jackson returned interceptions, by Hasselbeck for touchdowns, and Matt Schaub threw two TD passes to help the Texans win at home.



Chris Johnson

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Chris Johnson, tailback
Johnson struggled this season until Sunday. He entered the game having gained just 45 yards combined in the first three games, but had 25 carries for 141 yards on Sunday.

OUTLOOK

The Titans have only an overtime victory over Detroit, and have been one of the NFL's worst defensive teams this season. And all of a sudden the Vikings are ... hot. **Outlook:** Horns up.

