



green bay 33
vikings 27

Week 8: Noon Sunday at Carolina • TV: Ch. 9 (100.3-FM, 1130-AM)

vikings postgame

SWITCH SAYS 'ON'

It took only seconds for rookie Christian Ponder to hit a downfield pass and sell Vikings fans on the QB change. The efficient, explosive Packers got a serious test, but Super Bowl hero Aaron Rodgers executed when it counted.

VIKINGS INSIDER DAN WIEDERER



The moment felt so hopeful, the play unfolding better than Christian Ponder could have ever

envisioned. On the Vikings' first snap Sunday, there was the rookie quarterback, in play action, shuffling left into open space.

Up the sideline, receiver Michael Jenkins froze Green Bay cornerback Tramon Williams with a devastating out-and-up move. So here came this pass — a perfect spiral to a wide-open target — pumping adrenaline into a downtrodden fan base.

This one completion, netting 72 yards and setting up a 2-yard touchdown toss from Ponder to Visanthe Shiancoe, felt incredibly significant.

Suddenly, the worries that existed about giving Ponder his first NFL start against the defending Super Bowl champions were obliterated by a roar that rippled the Teflon roof covering Mall of America Field.

Just like that, the Vikings' advertisements of Ponder as their confident leader of the future seemed valid.

"That was huge," Jenkins said. "That not only got the crowd into it but it built Christian's confidence."

Yet by afternoon's end, no matter how much promise Ponder displayed, the Vikings had a sobering reminder of the NFC North pecking order.

Final score: Packers 33, Vikings 27.

Vikings continues on C9 ▶

Chip Scoggins
Secondary is forced to retool on the fly C7



Vikings quarterback Christian Ponder was face to face with Green Bay linebacker Clay Matthews as he tried to lead the Vikings back in the fourth quarter Sunday.

Photographs by CARLOS GONZALEZ • cgonzalez@startribune.com

VIKINGS LOSE BUT PRAISE POTENTIAL

◀ VIKINGS FROM C1

The reality check: While Ponder gives Minnesota a real sense of hope for the years beyond 2011, Green Bay has a proven star leading a Super Bowl charge right now.

Sunday may have been Ponder's breakthrough, an encouraging starting debut under some very bright lights. But truthfully, this was more an Aaron Rodgers showcase.

Before kickoff, it registered as a colossal mismatch. Here was Rodgers, playing the best football of his life, facing a depleted Vikings secondary missing starters Antoine Winfield (neck), Jamarca Sanford (concussion) and Chris Cook (in jail).

Like shooting fish in a barrel.

Immediately after Ponder's early emergence gave the Vikings a 7-0 lead, Rodgers responded by leading a 91-yard touchdown drive, completing all six of his passes to six different receivers for 76 yards.

Rodgers finished 24-for-30 for 335 yards and three touchdowns.

"He seems pretty comfortable," Vikings linebacker Chad Greenway said. "He has an idea of where he wants to go with the football, and he's seeing defenses really well."

Less than a minute after halftime, no play was bigger than Rodgers' 79-yard scoring strike to Greg Jennings, giving Green Bay the lead for good at 20-17.

Vikings safety Husain Abdullah was to blame for the busted coverage, charging out of position and letting Jennings drift up the field unaccounted for as Rodgers rolled right.

"It was almost too good to be true," Jennings said.

Added Frazier: "We talked all week that when he moves around, it's not like it used to be where he'd move around and run the ball. Now he's looking downfield to hit his guys downfield. That's another part of his maturation."

Still, Ponder refused to let his rookie inconsistency define the afternoon. Sure, his numbers — 13-for-32, 219 yards, two TDs, two interceptions — seemed quite ordinary. But never has production like that appeared so heartening.

The Vikings' 435 total yards were easily a season high.

With Ponder scrambling to keep plays alive and taking chances throughout the day, Adrian Peterson had more room than usual and erupted for 175 yards on 24 carries.

"It makes those coordinators think twice about putting eight or nine guys in the box every single down," Frazier said.



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Lost in the hoopla surrounding Christian Ponder's first start as Vikings quarterback Sunday was the latest monster rushing day for Adrian Peterson, this one for 175 yards on 24 carries with one TD.

VIKINGS TOP RUSHING DAYS

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| 296 Adrian Peterson vs. San Diego, Nov. 4, 2007 | 179 Ted Brown at Green Bay, Oct. 23, 1983 |
| 224 Adrian Peterson at Chicago, Oct. 14, 2007 | 179 Robert Smith at St. Louis, Sept. 13, 1998 |
| 200 Chuck Foreman at Philadelphia, Oct. 24, 1976 | 175 Adrian Peterson vs. Green Bay, Sunday |
| 192 Adrian Peterson vs. Green Bay, Nov. 9, 2008 | 172 Terry Allen at Pittsburgh, Dec. 20, 1992 |
| 180 Adrian Peterson at Cleveland, Sept. 13, 2009 | 170 Robert Smith at Chicago, Oct. 15, 2000 |

Most impressively, after Ponder went 0-for-5 in the third quarter, picked off twice by Charles Woodson, he continued to fire. A bold 24-yard touchdown dart to Jenkins, with Woodson in coverage, capped a 10-play, 93-yard touchdown drive that brought the Vikings to 33-27 with 7:51 left.

"I don't think I ever had any big-eyed moments," Ponder said.

"He never seemed rattled," Peterson confirmed.

Yet Ponder's final pass with 2:30 remaining fell incomplete on a crucial third-and-10. Subsequently, with the Vikings having three timeouts and the two-minute warning on their side, Frazier opted to punt.

And a potentially magical afternoon went down as merely entertaining when James Starks gained 55 yards on six carries, allowing Green Bay to run out the clock.

"They landed the last punch," Peterson said.

True. Only this time, the punch didn't seem to have the Vikings seeing stars. At 1-6, they remain a glass jaw in the NFL ring. But with Ponder under center, they at least seem more eager to fight back.



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Defensive end Jared Allen celebrated his second sack on Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers in the second quarter. However, when upright, Rodgers passed for 335 yards and three touchdowns.

« I DON'T THINK I EVER HAD ANY BIG-EYED MOMENTS. »

Rookie QB Christian Ponder, reflecting on his first NFL start

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