

## **Bears/Packers Week: The Emotional Roller Coaster**

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By Joe Flaherty

Heading into Thursday's game against the Green Bay Packers, the Bears showed a side of themselves that fans haven't seen since 1985: swagger.

After pounding the Colts in a lopsided 41-21 affair, Jay Cutler and Brandon Marshall were showing a cocky side that not only raised eyebrows, but raised the confidence of Bears fans everywhere.

Jay Cutler's now infamous "good luck" quote was directed at the Packers' secondary when reporters asked him what would happen if Green Bay's defensive backs tried to play physical against the Bears' receivers.

Even Marshall was going out of his way to talk about how much bigger he was than any defensive back the Packers had to offer. A statement of fact? Yes. Cocky undertones? You bet.

Maybe, just maybe, they were good enough to take down the Packers. The players seemed to think so, and they weren't afraid to let the public, and the Packers, hear about it.

And this bravado, this "I'm the best and I know it" style of confidence, is exactly what endeared that '85 Bears team to so many Chicagoans.

The Chicago football legacy has roots way back in the 1920s, with the Decatur Staleys and George Halas. After all, "we'll never forget the way you thrilled the nation, with your T-formation."

But the 1985 Bears team may have been the most iconic group of athletes ever assembled, and their legend lives on here in Chicago as the true representation of the "Monsters of the Midway."

Chicago has always been a football town, but the '85 team amplified football's importance 10 fold. Never before had a team so openly flaunted its talent. The Bears made a video predicting a Super Bowl victory... one day after losing to the Dolphins.

The team as a whole was completely confident in its abilities, and individually, Chicagoans could really connect with that bunch of characters.

For those who were serious about their business, there was Iron Mike Ditka and "Sweetness," Walter Payton. For those who had a crazy side, there was Steve "Mongo" McMichael, "The Fridge," William Perry, and the punky QB, a.k.a. Jim McMahon.

For any lifestyle you may have led, you could make a personal connection to the players on the '85 Bears, which brought fans even closer to them. That's why, when they won it

all that year, they cemented their immortality in Chicago.

Fans to this day still reminisce about how that team dominated opponents, especially in the playoffs. They tell vivid stories of the defense eating teams alive and Walter Payton hurdling defenders at the goal line. Personally, whenever I see a Polish Sausage, I automatically think “Ditka”.

It’s a Chicago thing, and I love it.

Some fans watch the current team to try to find “the next Payton” or “the next Hampton”. They want the players to succeed because they know once they do, they will be treated as gods. More than anything, they want to feel that excitement that united the entire city one more time.

That’s why I was both shocked and excited to see the trash talk from Cutler and the offense leading up to the rivalry game against the Packers.

And the local and national media ate up every second of it.

After watching the offense work like a well-oiled machine and put up 41 points, the majority of the reporting revolved around ways you could justify the smack talk.

Headlines from ESPNChicago and the Windy City Gridiron (a Bears blog on SB Nation) included things like “Cutler Carefree, Confident --- and Dangerous”, “Jay Cutler’s Swagger is Sincere Now, Even Against the Packers”, and “2012 Bears: The Greatest Show on Sod.”

The national media, especially ESPN, was editing up clips of that “good luck” quote and running it over and over to the point of nausea.

Even I gave into the hype and wrote an article for The Sports Bank titled “Don’t Underestimate the Chicago Bears.”

You have to understand it from a fan’s perspective: we’ve been waiting for so long for this team to play up to that 1985 standard, or even be as good as a renowned big-market team should be.

I don’t blame the fans or media one bit for diving headfirst into the whole “confidence” thing. There were very few reports about how the Bears might want to hold back on their cockiness until after they had played the Packers.

Nobody wanted to rain on this parade.

But apparently the Packers had no problems with doing just that in prime time on national TV. Instead of running their mouths, they let their play do the talking.

The Packers actually looked like they were inspired to play better by the comments Cutler and Marshall made.

That swagger the Bears were showing only days beforehand took a u-turn and became frustration. The offensive line once again resembled a set of revolving doors that the Packers and Clay Matthews found no trouble walking through multiple times; 7 to be exact.

Cutler ended up running for his life for most of the night but also made some of those patented back-footed throws right into the arms of the Packers' secondary.

The frustration was apparent from the start. First there was the verbal abuse by Cutler on his offensive linemen, and it ended up leading to a physical confrontation with left tackle J'Marcus Webb.

The performance on Thursday could not have been a more resounding rebuttal to all of that smack talk from earlier in the week. The fact that it was on display for the whole nation to see made one loss feel like two.

During the game, the commentators made note of how the Bears' confidence was obviously misguided because of how terrible they were playing. It was clear to see that the Packers' actions were speaking much louder than any of the Bears' words.

What makes things unfortunate is that after an abbreviated week of celebration and confidence, the Bears must wallow in the disgusting aftertaste from this loss for nine full days before they can take the field again and try to prove they are truly the Bears we saw in week 1.

The Chicago media is usually pretty tough on Jay Cutler regardless of what he does. But they are in the middle of having a field day with how he carried himself on Thursday night.

The sports talk of the town isn't about how the White Sox are in a pennant race, it's about how Cutler emotionally imploded after talking a big game.

ESPN's Michael Wilbon wrote a detailed article titled "Can't Count on These Bears." Former offensive lineman Mark Schlereth and former linebacker Tedy Bruschi have come out and said they would've retaliated differently if they were in J'Marcus Webb's shoes, and that Cutler owes his teammates an apology.

In less than a week, the Bears' bandwagon lost thousands of newly admitted members. Even though it's not uncommon to go through highs and lows in an NFL season, it's devastating when it happens so drastically and in such a short amount of time and so early in the season.

Since the Bears are such an integral part of Chicago, it's easy to be a hero one week and a

goat the next. Jay Cutler has experienced this before since coming to Chicago in 2009. But this has been his most severe fall from grace yet, and I'm curious to see how he and the team will rebound this Sunday.

If the Bears learned anything from the Packers game, it's that maybe they should think better of talking trash, especially to an opponent who had beaten them in six of the last seven meetings going into Thursday.

I am still waiting for the day when the Bears have enough talent to back up their tall talk. Then I will rightfully have a reason to get excited when I see quotes like "good luck" plastered all over the back pages of Chicago newspapers.

Until then, maybe we should leave the cockiness back in 1985 where it belongs.