

A legend leaves the field

by *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

For years, the Green Bay Packers faithful figured the worst thing Brett Favre could do was break a leg. But Favre, always unpredictable, did something even more dramatic Tuesday and with far more impact for the franchise and the game. Broken bones, after all, heal. But when someone who breaks the mold - as Favre did in his memorable 17-year career - calls it quits, that's a different story. Packers fans, who can be found in most places on this planet - and that's only a slight exaggeration - won't have to worry anymore about whether Favre can recuperate from his latest injury to maintain his improbable consecutive starting streak. It's the fans' turn to try to recuperate, knowing that any question about No. 4 starting or not starting on any given Sunday is moot - probably moot, that is.

He could change his mind or play somewhere else, but we suspect that he will not. And recovering from his absence isn't going to be easy, even for people who knew only enough about football to realize that Favre was an extraordinary athlete and an even more extraordinary competitor. Somehow, he managed to pull himself off the turf time and again and continue playing after a vicious hit in what, despite all the protective gear and rules, is still a vicious, physical game. Favre broke records like they were fine china: most consecutive starts, most victories, most touchdown passes, most yards passing and most completions. Favre's last game, the Jan. 20 loss to the New York Giants in the National Football Conference championship at Lambeau Field, is, reportedly, still as painfully fresh for him as it is for most Packers fans. Favre did not play the game he had hoped to. But it's also clear that had he not decided last year to return for another season, the team never would have gone that far.

He had a highly infectious, boyish love for the game. Some of that undoubtedly can be traced to his father being a coach, but his toughness and willingness to play while hurt almost seemed to be part of his DNA.

Favre was so deeply respected throughout the league that Journal Sentinel Packers beat writer Bob McGinn said what we always suspected: After a while, many opponents took it "easy" on him.

But there was something else that helped make Favre a favorite wherever he went - for fans and for us, too. Despite fame and fortune, he was still human, painfully and publicly struggling with his wife Deanna's breast cancer, with his own problems with alcohol and pills and with the death of his father and other loved ones.

And, oh, yeah, the toughest guy on the field wasn't afraid to cry.

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