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Bart Starr will be back in Janesville, where he threw his first professional TD pass

By KEN VELOSKEY Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2010

JANESVILLE – Long before quarterbacks Brett Favre and Aaron Rodgers became Packer stars, Bart Starr quarterbacked the Green Bay Packers through the “Glory Years” of the 1960s.

Starr didn’t put up gaudy numbers, but he was smart and efficient. No. 15 helped the Packers win five world championships between 1961 and 1967, including two Super Bowls. He won more titles than any other quarterback and had a 9-1 playoff record, with wins in the last nine games.

Packer fans lucky enough to be at Monterey Stadium in Janesville on Aug. 4, 1956, got a glimpse of the future. Starr, a rookie 17th-round draft pick out of Alabama, threw his first professional touchdown pass to lift the Green to a 10-6 victory over the Gold on the last play of the Packers’ intra-squad game on the local field.

Those who missed watching Starr—and a core group of Packers that the late Vince Lombardi would turn into a legendary NFL team—can see the 76-year-old former quarterback when he returns to Monterey Stadium on Friday, Oct. 15, to help dedicate a plaque commemorating that touchdown pass at Monterey Stadium.

Lombardi also will be honored with a plaque that later will be placed in the Janesville Performing Art Center.

The Starr ceremony is scheduled at 7:10 p.m. before Janesville Parker’s homecoming game against Madison La Follette.

Like Starr, Lombardi has ties to Janesville. Lombardi gave a speech at Marshall Junior High School in 1969 before leaving for Washington, D.C., to coach the Redskins. It was Lombardi’s last public appearance in Wisconsin.

This will be at least Starr’s third appearance in Janesville. In 1982, Starr visited as part of a Monterey Stadium fund-raising project.

Starr and the Packers played their exhibition game here in 1956 to raise money for St. John Vianney Grade School.

Howard Gage, retired Janesville School District spokesman and Videogenics owner, was at the game.

“I stood on the opposite side of the field, and I remember the crowd,” Gage said. “It was packed full.”

A story in the Gazette said 4,300 fans “jam-packed Monterey Stadium for the unveiling of Coach Lisle (Liz) Blackbourn’s 1956 edition of the Green Bay Packers.’”

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The story went on to label Starr “a cool and clever quarterback from Alabama.’”

The story recounted the winning play:

“On the last play of the game, (Alton) Romine broke down the side lines, and much to his surprise found himself all alone. Starr flipped the ball 47 yards, and Romine caught it for the game-winning Green touchdown.”

The story concluded: “Starr was undoubtedly the best of the newcomers in action here. He was cool and completed 12 of 22 passes for 181 yards.”

After meeting Starr in 1982, Gage asked him about the pass play and the man on the other end of the throw. Starr said he didn’t remember Romine or what happened to him.

Game programs were sold for 15 cents and contained a Packer roster that listed Starr as No. 16. Tobin Rote was the Packers’ first-string quarterback, and the team featured Al Carmichael, Billy Howton, Dave Hanner, Jim Ringo, Gary Knafelc and Bobby Dillon.

Reprints of the program are for sale at 15 Janesville businesses, including local sports bars and Mac’s Pizza Shack, for \$5 each. The money collected will be used to pay for the plaques.

Gage and Tom Presny, the city’s parks director, are responsible for the project.

“We are excited to help bring this to the community,” Presny said