

Life After Favre
A Season of Change with the Green Bay Packers and Their Fans

By Phil Hanrahan

Skyhorse Publishing Hardcover Original

On Sale: October 5, 2009

ISBN: 978-1-60239-773-6

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**SUGGESTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR
PHIL HANRAHAN**

1: How did *Life After Favre* come about?

A: It was a couple weeks after Brett Favre announced his retirement from the Packers, in March 2008. I was in Los Angeles working on a stalled screenplay and to get away from it I started kicking around book ideas. A book about the Packers, the town of Green Bay, and Packer Nation in the first year A.B.—*After Brett*, which was my original title—was one of those ideas. It seemed like a manageable topic for a first book, and I liked what one editor called its “counter-intuitive” aspect. A book not about Favre, but about . . . life after Favre. Of course given what happened a few months later, Favre marched right back into the book.

2: And then there was *Summer of Favre II*, the “Feeling Minnesota” sequel.

A: The gift that keeps on giving, as my brother calls it. I honestly thought he was going to stay retired after the Jets. Then he had the shoulder surgery. At that point, I started getting excited, book-wise, because were he to come back again and play for the Vikings, it would be the biggest story in the NFL in 2009, and a gigantic story in Wisconsin all season. Through June and most of July, all signs pointed to him playing in purple. Late into July, I sat down and wrote the book’s ending. It had Favre the Viking getting intercepted and then sacked by outside linebacker Aaron Kampman at Lambeau Field on November 1. A couple days later Favre announced he was going to stay retired. I had to rewrite my ending. And once again, I actually thought he was retired for good. But just in case, I gave the book some wiggle room by writing, “He decided not to join the Vikings for the start of training camp.” *Start* turned out to be the operative word.

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3: Was writing this book harder or easier than you expected going in?

A: Harder. I'd always had great respect for sportswriters, but now my respect is off the charts. I don't know how they turn out these elegant, precise, insightful game stories in time for the morning's paper. I think they're maestros—underpaid maestros. Not being a sportswriter myself, and wanting to write a book with a few different colors than you might get in newspaper coverage, my process proceeded more deliberately.

4: How deliberately?

A: It took seven months. And that was working literally every single day, as many hours as I could. About four months in, I had to buy one of those inflatable seat “donuts” for my chair. I pretty much only left my writing room to raid the refrigerator or make coffee. The last month I didn't even have time to jog. Two or three times a week I'd take a walk around the block at 4 a.m. or whenever I finished for the night. There's a page in the book written while Fourth of July fireworks were going off in a park three blocks away and my parents were having a barbecue below my window. I ran down for a couple grilled brats.

5: How did you handle all the down and distance, play-call, time-on-the-clock nitty gritty?

A: Technology. Thank god for NFL Game Rewind on NFL.com. For a \$20 off-season subscription, you get unlimited access to every single NFL game played in 2008. This was invaluable, since I only took minimal notes while actually attending games or watching them on tavern TVs. Later, though, I rewatched all sixteen Packers games (and the last Jets game) on my laptop and filled up two spiral notebooks. Certain plays I would watch multiple times. Favre's final play with the Jets—a short pass followed by a lateral back to him then a crushing hit after he flipped the ball forward—I probably watched three dozen times. Along with NFL Game Rewind, I also made use of the play-by-play feature on ESPN.com's game wrap-ups.

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6: Did you play any football yourself?

A: Nope. I was 115 pounds as a fifteen-year-old, and then just when I started lifting weights and growing a little, I broke my neck in a diving accident and that was the end of any football dreams. It was the summer of my sixteenth year and I dove off a rock into Lake Michigan on a very hot day during Milwaukee's annual Summerfest, a lakefront music and food festival. I hit my head on another rock a few feet underwater. Instead of doing a flat racing dive, I did a "Tarzan" dive to impress some girls. That kind of backfired. I spent that summer as Robot-Boy in a halo head brace, screws in my skull, torso in a body cast.

7: Did you play any other sports?

A: Does summer softball in Central Park and Los Angeles count? In high school, I was still scrawny pretty much through my senior year, and because of my neck all contact sports were off-limits. I always loved pickup basketball, though. I finally grew a little, and when I was down at Duke for grad school I played a lot of hoops. For a heady couple weeks my second year I "ran" with Duke Blue Devil players before the season, in Card Gym beside Cameron Indoor Stadium. One day I found myself on the court playing with nine Dukies. Two of the Blue Devils—Danny Ferry and Alaa Abdelnaby—went on to play in the NBA, and a third, Phil Henderson, got drafted. Quin Snyder was playing that day, too. Also Billy King. Robert Brickey. I had six buckets in game two. You think I'd forget? That was my Super Bowl, my World Series game seven, in terms of athletic experience. The thing is, I was trying *way* harder than the Dukies. They were just having a run. I was playing for posterity. I remember their passing—incredibly pinpoint. I kept getting easy layups. Eventually I irritated 6-foot-10 Danny Ferry with my eager-beaver hustle. Saving a ball from going out of bounds, I bounced it off him. He was kind of a hothead back then. The future general manager of the Cleveland Cavaliers retrieved the ball, whipped it at me, and called me "a bleeping scrub."

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8: What did you think about the Packers' decision to go with Aaron Rodgers over Favre?

A: You had to ask. I guess the first thing I would say is that I'm glad I wasn't GM Ted Thompson. If I was Thompson, in July 2008, I'm pretty sure I would have said yes to Favre coming back. That was the safer bet. From a quarterback perspective, a franchise perspective, a fan-base perspective. It still kind of amazes me that Thompson—and Mike McCarthy—let Favre go. Were I to hook Thompson up to a lie-detector, or administer truth serum, my first question would probably be: "True or false, on some level you made peace with the notion that the team's record might suffer a little in 2008 with Rodgers instead of Favre, but you were willing to accept this because you believed Rodgers would soon be a top-5 NFL quarterback who could bring great things to the Packers for the next ten years and beyond?" Now I don't know if this is true, but that's what I would ask Thompson. At any rate, as a Packers fan, I thank heavens for Thompson's decision. Not only do I think Rodgers will be a top-5 quarterback, if he is not one already, but I think he has a chance to be the very best before too long.

9: What are your thoughts on Favre going to Minnesota?

A: I don't have a problem with it. Once the Packers suggested to Favre they were "moving on," I think all bets were off in terms of what he did next. When he says things like, "It's my legacy—let me worry about my legacy," I find myself agreeing with him. If he's not bothered by leading another team to victory over guys he used to play with, and if he's willing—with eyes wide open—to turn off a percentage of Packers fans, possibly for a long time, this tells us something about him emotionally or psychologically, but unlike some fans and commentators, I don't think it tells us something about Favre's character. I don't think it's a moral failing, or even unseemly or uncool behavior, for Favre to don Vikings purple. I guess I don't understand standing in judgement of this move. Even if part of Favre's motive is to "stick it" to Packers management, and I'm sure that's part of it, I don't have a problem with that. I might be the same way. I think he's being human, as I say in the book. And simply as a football fan, I'm thrilled at the thought of the potential drama in store for those October 5 and

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November 1 Packers–Vikings games. And if Favre beats us—that sounds weird to say—well, then, hats off to him. Let the better man win—that’s my attitude. Let the Packers beat the Vikings when they’re at their best, the fully-loaded Vikes. We’ll have to see if Favre actually makes them better. But it would be pretty hard for him to do worse than Tarvaris Jackson and Gus Frerotte did against the Pack in 2008 [QB ratings of 59.0 and 53.4, respectively].

10: Are you doing anything special to promote this book?

A: Yes. One thing I’m looking forward to is the possibility of holding book events in some of the Packers bars I visit in the book, like Baumgartner’s Cheese Store and Tavern in Monroe, the cheese capital of Wisconsin (every other year they hold a September ‘Cheese Days’ festival), and Ruby’s Roadhouse in Bloomer. Maybe an event in the Stadium View bar a block from Lambeau. I’d love to get back to the Broke Spoke in Kiln, too. These events will be a little bit like reunions with the fans I met in these places. Another thing we want to do is some reconnecting on the book’s lifeafterfavre.com Web site with some of the book’s key figures—maybe more than a few. For example, on October 18 I will be tailgating at Lambeau before the Lions game with featured tailgaters Jon Neuhaus and his mom, out from California, along with the rest of his crew, who fly in from all over the country. Santiago Gardner, a huge Packers fan from San Diego (and born in Tijuana), will also be there, as by chance that happens to be the one ‘09 game he is attending. So we’ll all get together, and the next day I’ll do some blogging about the day and the game. I also hope to track down the stadium sage behind the mantra “*We’re at the game*” that I use as the title to my Introduction. He was sitting two benches in front of me at the November 30 Carolina game. I have a couple leads that might allow me to find him—an interview with him would be a fun thing for the blog. We also have some short videos planned, including one with footage from New York City’s Packers bar Kettle of Fish. And I’ll be adding fan interviews, new player interviews, and lots of photos to the Web site.

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11: *Life After Favre* not only tells the stories of Favre’s departure and the 2008 Packers football season, but also incorporates team history, portraits of Green Bay, the weather, coverage of Packers “culture” (the bars, the fans, the national scope), visits to farflung player hometowns, and more—was this kind of multi-strand approach part of the plan from the beginning?

A: The book grew on me. In a good way, I hope. The Packers story is a large one even without the Favre angle. My goal was to write a kind of one-stop book for contemporary football fans with either a passion for or simply a basic curiosity about the Green and Gold. And because the team and town, indeed the team and the whole state, are so closely intertwined, to capture the story of Favre’s departure I had to build in elements highlighting the team’s unique cultural context. But in the end, what drives the book are stories. Stories about people, whether Packers players or fans. Who they are and where they’re from. Stories.

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