

Green Bay’s LaFleur focusing on Steelers, not just Rodgers

Packers coach Matt LaFleur knows he and his players will get plenty of questions this week about facing Aaron Rodgers for the first time since the four-time MVP quarterback left Green Bay.

LaFleur is trying his best to deflect them.

“We’re playing the Pittsburgh Steelers, who happen to have Aaron Rodgers,” LaFleur said Monday. “It’s as simple as that.”

In reality, it’s not nearly that simple.

Rodgers spent 18 seasons with Green Bay, led the Packers to their most recent Super Bowl champi-

onship. The Packers traded Rodgers to the New York Jets shortly before the 2023 draft, but he never got to play against his former team during his Jets tenure.

That opportunity comes Sunday night when the Packers (4-1-1) visit the Steelers (4-2), who signed Rodgers in June. It’s also the first time Rodgers matches up with Jordan Love, who succeeded him as Green Bay’s quarterback.

“That is for you guys to talk about,” LaFleur said. “Granted, I mean, we’ve got a lot of love and respect for Aaron, what he’s done here. I mean, he’s a Hall of

Famer. And I know like our past together, we had a lot of great moments. But this game is not about that. It’s about going to Pittsburgh. ‘Sunday Night Football.’ Our guys will be jacked up. Their guys will be jacked up. It’s about the Green Bay Packers versus the Pittsburgh Steelers, and that’s for you guys to talk about all those other storylines.”

Love is one of 14 players remaining on the Packers’ roster who were with the team in 2022 during Rodgers’ last season in Green Bay.

The 41-year-old Rodgers is the latest in a series of veteran quarter-

backs to face the Packers.

Green Bay played against 40-year-old Joe Flacco twice in a span of three games. Flacco’s Cleveland Browns beat the Packers 13-10 before he was traded to the Cincinnati Bengals, who lost at Green Bay 27-18 on Oct. 12. The Packers also have gone against a couple of 32-year-old quarterbacks, as they tied Dak Prescott’s Dallas Cowboys 40-40 on Sept. 28 and edged Jacoby Brissett and the Arizona Cardinals 27-23 on Sunday.

The Packers will head into Pittsburgh with two straight wins, but

they still haven’t quite regained the form they showed when they opened the season with convincing victories over the Detroit Lions and Washington Commanders. The Packers trailed most of the way Sunday before handing Arizona its fifth consecutive loss.

“We’ll get back to the film room and try to find ways to be better,” safety Xavier McKinney said after Sunday’s game. “But we for damn sure can’t do this against good teams because it’s not going to work. I think the guys know that. We’re happy we got the win, but we’ve got to be a lot better.”

Briscoe moves from Stewart to Gibbs, earns shot at NASCAR title

TALLADEGA, Ala. (AP) — When he fired the engine on his race car before last year’s NASCAR finale, Chase Briscoe sat inside the cockpit and cried like a baby.

As an Indiana native aspiring to make it to the top levels of motorsports, he gravitated to Tony Stewart, a fellow Hoosier, three-time Cup champion and NASCAR Hall of Famer. It was a dream come true when Briscoe, couch-surfing in North Carolina while trying to crack his way into NASCAR, got a seat in 2020 at the team co-owned by Stewart.

But come the 2024 season finale, Stewart-Haas Racing was closing after the race and Briscoe’s full circle career moment would end.

“I remember sitting on the grid after we fired engines and just crying for my whole childhood. I idolized Tony, he was my hero,”

Briscoe said.

Briscoe had already lined up a new job at Joe Gibbs Racing, where Stewart had won two of his titles in the first part of his NASCAR career, but after four seasons driving Stewart’s No. 14, he was unsure of what life would be like inside a totally different organization.

He was picked to replace Martin Truex Jr., who was retiring, moving from Ford to Toyota and wouldn’t have his hero around for guidance. It was an emotional moment, part reflection and part fear, for Briscoe.

“Just knowing that chapter of my life was ending, not knowing what the JGR chapter was really going to look like,” Briscoe said. “You never know going to a new place. If I don’t go win, I’m never going to get hired again because the expectation is you have to go to JGR and win.

“If you can’t win in a JGR car,

why would anybody hire you for another team?”

Briscoe has nothing to worry about for the foreseeable future. His victory Sunday at Talladega Superspeedway locked him into the championship four and he will return to Phoenix Raceway a year after splitting with Stewart with his first chance to win a Cup title.

Briscoe joined teammate Denny Hamlin in the championship field, with the final two slots to be filled this Sunday at Martinsville Speedway in Virginia. Christopher Bell, the final JGR driver still eligible to race for the title, holds a one-point edge over Kyle Larson for the final two spots in the winner-take-all decider.

It would be the first Cup title for any of the three Gibbs drivers — assuming Bell advances — but Briscoe is the only one making his

championship debut. His chance at the Cup comes at the same Phoenix track where he won his first Cup Series race, in 2022 driving for SHR. A recent return trip back to the track caused him to reflect on how his career has developed and what is now at stake.

“I stood on the front straightaway, I hadn’t done that since I won there. I kind of thought how that day felt, winning my first Cup race,” Briscoe said. “Next time you stand here, you might be a champion.”

Briscoe has thrived in his move to JGR, where Talladega gave him his career-best third win of the season. He leads the Cup Series with seven poles this season as qualifying has been his strong suit and contributed to 15 top-5 finishes through 34 races.

Briscoe has been in the thick of this title race all season, even if he is

overshadowed at JGR by his teammates. He’s admitted that he feels every week driving for Gibbs is an audition to keep his job, a notion Gibbs himself dismissed after the victory when he said “I think right now he can get anything he wants. I’ll put it that way.”

Perfect timing because Briscoe’s wife, three children and his extended family in Indiana now all need to find transportation to the Nov. 2 finale in Phoenix.

“I’m going to call him real quick,” Briscoe said when he heard of Gibbs’ vow. “I need to see if one of them will fly my whole family to Phoenix. Because me and (wife) Marissa, we’re already talking about how chaotic that’s going to be, flying commercial with three toddlers. Maybe I can get lucky and see if they can let me go on one of their planes.”

THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE STANDINGS												
NFL Expanded Glance												
AMERICAN CONFERENCE												
East												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
New England	5	2	0	.714	181	133	1-2-0	4-0-0	3-2-0	2-0-0	2-0-0	
Buffalo	4	2	0	.667	167	137	3-1-0	1-1-0	3-1-0	1-1-0	2-1-0	
Miami	1	6	0	.143	140	205	1-2-0	0-4-0	1-5-0	0-1-0	1-2-0	
N.Y. Jets	0	7	0	.000	129	183	0-5-0	0-2-0	0-4-0	0-3-0	0-2-0	
South												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Indianapolis	6	1	0	.857	232	140	4-0-0	2-1-0	5-0-0	1-1-0	1-0-0	
Cincinnati	4	3	0	.571	146	155	3-2-0	1-1-0	2-1-0	2-2-0	1-0-0	
Houston	2	3	0	.400	108	61	1-1-0	1-2-0	2-1-0	0-2-0	1-1-0	
Tennessee	1	6	0	.143	96	192	0-3-0	1-3-0	0-5-0	1-0-0	0-2-0	
North												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Pittsburgh	4	2	0	.667	150	140	2-1-0	2-1-0	3-1-0	1-1-0	1-1-0	
Cleveland	3	4	0	.429	136	204	2-0-1	1-3-0	1-1-0	2-3-1	2-0-0	
Baltimore	2	5	0	.286	113	152	2-2-0	0-3-0	1-3-0	1-2-0	0-3-0	
	1	5	0	.167	144	194	1-3-0	0-2-0	1-3-0	0-2-0	1-0-0	
West												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Denver	5	2	0	.714	163	127	3-0-0	2-2-0	3-2-0	2-0-0	0-1-0	
Kansas City	4	3	0	.571	186	124	3-1-0	1-2-0	2-2-0	2-1-0	1-1-0	
L.A. Chargers	4	3	0	.571	151	163	2-2-0	2-1-0	4-1-0	0-2-0	3-0-0	
Las Vegas	2	5	0	.286	103	180	1-2-0	1-3-0	2-3-0	0-2-0	0-2-0	
NATIONAL CONFERENCE												
East												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Phila.	5	2	0	.714	170	165	2-1-0	3-1-0	1-1-0	4-1-0	1-1-0	
Dallas	3	3	1	.500	222	206	2-0-1	1-3-0	2-3-1	2-1-0	1-1-0	
Washington	3	4	0	.429	180	170	2-1-0	1-3-0	2-0-0	1-4-0	1-1-0	
N.Y. Giants	2	5	0	.286	153	177	2-1-0	0-4-0	1-2-0	1-3-0	1-2-0	
South												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Tampa Bay	5	2	0	.714	174	175	2-1-0	3-1-0	2-0-0	3-2-0	1-0-0	
Carolina	4	3	0	.571	145	152	3-0-0	1-3-0	2-2-0	2-1-0	1-0-0	
Atlanta	3	3	0	.500	110	120	2-1-0	1-2-0	1-0-0	2-3-0	0-2-0	
New Orleans	1	6	0	.143	125	186	1-3-0	0-3-0	0-2-0	1-4-0	0-0-0	
North												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
Green Bay	4	1	1	.750	158	125	3-0-0	1-1-1	1-1-0	3-0-1	1-0-0	
Detroit	5	2	0	.714	215	151	3-0-0	2-2-0	3-1-0	2-1-0	1-1-0	
Chicago	4	2	0	.667	152	155	2-1-0	2-1-0	1-1-0	3-2-0	0-2-0	
Minnesota	3	3	0	.500	145	125	1-2-0	2-1-0	2-1-0	1-2-0	1-0-0	
West												
	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	AFC	NFC	Div	
L.A. Rams	5	2	0	.714	175	117	2-1-0	3-1-0	5-0-0	0-2-0	0-1-0	
San Francisco	5	2	0	.714	145	138	2-1-0	3-1-0	0-1-0	5-1-0	3-0-0	
Seattle	4	2	0	.667	166	117	1-2-0	3-0-0	2-0-0	2-2-0	1-1-0	
Arizona	2	5	0	.286	153	154	1-3-0	1-2-0	0-2-0	2-3-0	0-2-0	
Thursday's Games												
Cincinnati 33, Pittsburgh 31												
Sunday's Games												
L.A. Rams 35, Jacksonville 7, London, GBR												
Carolina 13, N.Y. Jets 6												
Chicago 26, New Orleans 14												
Cleveland 31, Miami 6												
Kansas City 31, Las Vegas 0												
New England 31, Tennessee 13												
Phila. 28, Minnesota 22												
Denver 33, N.Y. Giants 32												
Indianapolis 38, L.A. Chargers 24												
Dallas 44, Washington 22												
Green Bay 27, Arizona 23												
San Francisco 20, Atlanta 10												
Open: Baltimore, Buffalo												
Monday's Games												
Detroit 24, Tampa Bay 9												
Houston at Seattle, late												

Thursday's Games
Cincinnati 33, Pittsburgh 31

Sunday's Games
L.A. Rams 35, Jacksonville 7, London, GBR
Carolina 13, N.Y. Jets 6
Chicago 26, New Orleans 14
Cleveland 31, Miami 6
Kansas City 31, Las Vegas 0
New England 31, Tennessee 13
Phila. 28, Minnesota 22
Denver 33, N.Y. Giants 32
Indianapolis 38, L.A. Chargers 24
Dallas 44, Washington 22
Green Bay 27, Arizona 23
San Francisco 20, Atlanta 10
Open: Baltimore, Buffalo

Monday's Games