

Finding proper leaders challenges Packers

[Michael Cohen](#) and [Tom Silverstein](#) **Packers News** 4:59 p.m. CST November 12, 2016

GREEN BAY - Three sets of doors and one long hallway separated two players at the forefront of the Green Bay Packers, and early last Sunday evening, their reactions to a disparaging loss landed on opposite ends of the emotional spectrum.

Inside the media auditorium, where Aaron Rodgers stood behind a lectern to address reporters, the quarterback's tone matched the composure associated with his position. At times he tinged with frustration and gentle dismay — the Packers had just lost to the Indianapolis Colts, an inferior opponent — but not once did Rodgers flash a temper.

The mood in the locker room was different. As players dressed, their stunned silence proved an adequate postmortem to a game the Packers never should have lost, a game that deadened their record to 4-4 at the midway point of the season. Only Mike Daniels broke the mold; his profanity-ridden tirade echoed from the showers to reporters' ears.

"I didn't think you guys heard me," Daniels said the next day. "Some things in the locker room ought to stay amongst us as peers, but it got out."

At their very core, post-game antics are wrought with futility: You can kick and scream to your heart's delight, but the result of the game won't change. What the Packers could have used was a shot in the arm. They needed an injection of life on the sideline, where quarterback and coach said the typical "juice" was lacking.

When it comes to this year's Packers, the presence of such a player is open to interpretation. The most obvious candidate, Rodgers, told reporters he is not a "rah-rah" type of guy. Daniels is the most vocal of the bunch, but a number of teammates brushed aside his outburst as white noise during interviews with the Journal Sentinel throughout the week.

"A-Rod is not a vocal guy," outside linebacker Jayrone Elliott said, "so we don't really look for him to be vocal. He leads by example. (Julius Peppers) Pep does the same thing. Clay (Matthews) does the same thing. So we don't really have many vocal leaders besides like Mike Daniels, Josh Sitton when he was here, T.J. Lang."

As their season teeters, an important question is raised: Who can galvanize the Packers?

Or, more importantly: What happens if nobody can?

The Packers held their first padded practice on July 28, six weeks before the season opener in Jacksonville, and the coaching staff wasted little time before setting up the one-on-one pass-rush drill, a highly competitive event.

Daniels stepped in for his first rep against backup lineman Don Barclay, whose reserved personality comes to life between the white lines. Within seconds, the play devolved into a shoving match-turned-skirmish.

Later in camp, Daniels dressed down rookie nose tackle Kenny Clark, a first-round pick who probably hadn't been harangued like that in several years. Daniels, who signed a four-year, \$42 million contract extension last December and is considered among the best players in the league at his position, has the chops — and the stones — to pull something like that off.

"He plays his (expletive) off," safety Ha Ha Clinton-Dix said.

But that doesn't mean his style plays to the entire locker room. The shower-screaming incident was quintessential Daniels: He was enraged by the team's unsightly loss and unleashed a verbal blast. It just so happened reporters heard more of it than the players.

"I was talking to some of the guys just about some things," Daniels said the day after the game. "You know, nobody's happy right now. Nobody."

While teammates praise Daniels for his passion and determination, many inside the locker room tune out his antics or purposely ignore them. He carries himself like a vocal leader, but the message doesn't resonate with everybody.

"For me, after a loss, yelling is not going to do anything at that point, you know what I mean?" said one player. "That's not the right time to do it. Of course everybody is pissed off that we just lost. If somebody is going to yell, it needs to be the coach. The coach needs to yell. Mike Daniels is going to do what he wants, though. It used to bother me but now I just close my ears to it."

This week, a number of players rejected yelling as a method of inspiration. Some spoke about Daniels specifically, others spoke more generally about vocal leaders who choose to scream.

The Journal Sentinel interviewed nine players of various positions, ages and statuses within the team. Of those nine, seven said barking at them is ineffective.

"You don't really need that," safety Morgan Burnett said, when asked about whether ranting and raving did anything for him. "These are grown men with families. Man, there's a respect level. You can get your point across without having to get in a guy's face. You can get your point across many different ways."

Said Clinton-Dix: "A lot of people in here have kids and families, so you're not just going to yell at nobody. You've got to kind of take a different approach with that. I think that's the biggest thing from being in college to being in the league.

Said Elliott: "That's Mike every day of his life. That's Mike. That's how you reach some people, that's not how you reach some people. ... I don't really buy into that. Me and Mike are kind of on the same page: I look up to him. He's the leader so I follow him. But as far as yelling, I don't get involved in all that."

Two of the players suggested that Daniels' talent gives him a longer leash when it comes to confronting teammates. One player said he believed the shower incident was done primarily for attention.

Could Daniels have gotten away with the outburst as a lesser player?

"Hell no," one player said. "There's no way. There's no way he could. There's no way. He's just a different character, man. He's just different. One thing he does is he goes out there and plays his ass off, so you can't really say nothing to him about that. (The yelling) is just something you've got to deal with. You don't have to listen to it. He's going to say what he wants to say though."

Center Corey Linsley and one defensive player view the yelling in a different light. Linsley, who is now the starter, said Daniels is staying within the confines of his personality. He is a rah-rah guy by nature, so the outbursts don't feel out of context.

"We kind of need that," said the defensive player. "He's the only person that's really giving us that. I'll take the good with the bad when he does that."

Added kicker Mason Crosby: "He's one of the few that will definitely get in someone's face and get loud."

A year ago, frustration boiled over for the Packers in the fourth quarter against the Carolina Panthers. The trigger was a touchdown from quarterback Cam Newton to rookie receiver Devin Funchess, an error charged to the secondary.

During the ensuing break, television cameras filmed a heated argument between Peppers and Clinton-Dix along the sideline. The two players came together, screamed at one another and were ultimately separated by defensive linemen Mike Pennel and B.J. Raji, who removed Clinton-Dix with a two-handed shove.

Tempers flared in reaction to a comment Peppers made about pass coverage, according to a source who witnessed the incident. The secondary was frustrated after giving up a score, and Clinton-Dix took exception. He fired back about the lack of pass rush. (The Packers did not register a sack of Newton.)

Peppers and Clinton-Dix continued jawing at each other and finally agreed to worry about their respective responsibilities.

"They kind of barked back and forth or whatever, but they had an understanding, they agreed to something," the source said. "Ha Ha and Peppers agreed on something. Then B.J., all he saw was Ha Ha addressing a veteran player. He didn't know exactly what was going on. That's all it was. It was just two players that wanted to win going at it. Sometimes you need that in the locker room."

The incident earned Clinton-Dix more respect in the eyes of his peers, according to the source, and this was due in part to its origin.

Where Daniels ranted in the aftermath of a loss, the quarrel with Peppers and Clinton-Dix occurred organically during the course of a game. Multiple players said conflicts are often helpful as long as the confrontations aren't forced.

"Things like that, those types of leaders you need," the source said, "someone that is not afraid to say something when it needs to be said. ... You don't want to get into a competition with somebody and then they see you're not doing anything to hold up or you're doing nothing but barking. People get tired of hearing that, man."

On their two Super Bowl-winning teams, the Packers were stocked with veteran leaders. The 1996 team had Reggie White, LeRoy Butler, Eugene Robinson, Santana Dotson, Sean Jones, Don Beebe and Frank Winters, all of whom could speak their mind without anyone dismissing it.

The 2010 team featured cornerback Charles Woodson, safety Nick Collins, defensive end Ryan Pickett, receiver Donald Driver, tackles Mark Tauscher and Chad Clifton and linebacker Desmond Bishop. Most led by example, but Woodson knew exactly what to say and when to say it.

"Wood led by example, but he always understood the right time to step up and talk," Burnett said. "When there was an opportunity to stand up and talk to the team he would, but he was talking at the right time so you knew it was genuine, that it was coming from the heart."

Burnett is considered a leader in the secondary because of his experience and dedication to the game. But he's not going to speak his mind the way Woodson did. It's not his style.

Guard T.J. Lang has been known to speak out in locker room settings, but his contributions are infrequent. He picks his spots. Guard Josh Sitton, who was released at the end of training camp, was more likely to command the room on a regular basis.

Ten-year veterans are a rarity in the draft-and-develop philosophy of general manager Ted Thompson. If the mixture isn't quite right, a handful of veterans are left with a roster

composed mostly of first-, second- and third-year players. It means every veteran becomes a leader, whether they're suited for the role or not.

When the Packers take the field Sunday in Tennessee, most of their veterans will lead by example. They are tenured members of a successful franchise, one for which Super Bowls are the expected prize.

But the true test arrives when a game goes south and the Packers could use a jolt. That's when someone must take the lead, when actions are momentarily softer than words.

"Nothing can be pre-determined," Burnett said. "I think it's just raw emotion that has to come out."