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LEROY BUTLER, HALL OF FAMER



MARK HERTZBERG, SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL TIMES

LeRoy Butler is surprised early on the morning of Jan. 27 when a fellow former Green Bay Packer, Charles Woodson, came to Butler's in-laws' house in Mount Pleasant to tell him he had been selected for induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Butler played for only one NFL team, the Packers, in his career from 1990 to 2001.

The Knock came in Mount Pleasant

Packers great was at his in-laws' home when another great knocked

MARK HERTZBERG
Special to The Journal Times

MOUNT PLEASANT — The Knock on the front door came as scheduled at 8 a.m., with stealth

and military precision. It came as LeRoy Butler was being interviewed in the kitchen of his in-laws' house in Mount Pleasant early on Jan. 27. The Green Bay Packers safety did not know that the interview was part of a ruse to keep him occupied until The Knock. No one in the family moved to answer the door, telling him to do it.

One of Butler's clothing choices that morning — a Pack-

ers sweatshirt — was a good one, because when he answered the door, he saw Charles Woodson, a fellow former Packer. Woodson had flown in from Orlando, Florida, to deliver the news that Butler would be named a 2022 inductee into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, in a nationally broadcast show on Feb. 10.

Woodson, who was wearing his gold Pro Football Hall of

Fame blazer, like the one Butler will be wearing during enshrinement ceremonies this summer, was not alone. Four SUVs also

Please see BUTLER, Page A4

■ **More inside:** Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers named NFL Most Valuable Player for the fourth time and second year in a row. **Sports, Page C1.**

TRICIA HANSON

DA won't charge election officials

But district attorney agrees with sheriff that WEC likely broke the law

ADAM ROGAN
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Saying she didn't have jurisdiction over the matter, Racine County District Attorney Tricia Hanson is declining a request by Sheriff Christopher Schmalzing to file charges against five of Wisconsin's six elections commissioners for advising clerks in 2020 not to send election workers into nursing homes.

But in a letter dated Thursday and released Friday, Hanson agrees with Schmalzing that the state Elections Commission likely broke the law in telling clerks they could skip the mandatory step of sending in the elections workers after several nursing homes banned them out of concerns about spreading COVID-19.

According to an investigation led by Racine County Sheriff's Lt. Michael Luell, eight residents of Ridgewood Care Center, a Mount Pleasant nursing home, submitted absentee ballots even though



Schmalzing



Hanson



Luell

Please see DA, Page A6

■ **More inside:** Trump backer, 4 others charged with voter fraud in Wisconsin. **Local, Page B1.**

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Butler

From A1

brought Jim Porter, president of the Hall of Fame; reporter Steve Wyche of the NFL Network; and film, lighting, and sound crews, all standing in the driveway in the early-morning cold, waiting to surprise Butler.

A handful of people were in on the ruse, which Julia Burney Witherspoon of the Cops 'N Kids Reading Center, a family friend, helped arrange. Butler's wife, Genesis, had kept the secret for a week.

Butler said his mind was "blank" when he opened the door and saw Woodson: "I didn't wrap my head around why he was there. When I saw everybody, that was shocking."

Woodson addressed him by his team nickname: "Roylee, welcome to the Hall of Fame!"

He had been a finalist in past years. "You never know how you'll react when you get news you've been expecting," Butler said. "It can be compared to if a young lady wanting a certain guy to marry her and he finally asks. I know what it feels like now ... the longer you're dating ... then all of a sudden, you give up, and then it happens. It's pretty remarkable!"

Member of the All-1990s team

Butler played for the Green Bay Packers from 1990-2001. A member of the NFL's 1990s All-Decade Team, he was the first player in league history to have 20 interceptions and 20 sacks in a career. Named to four All-Pro teams, he finished his career with 38 interceptions and 20½ sacks in 181 regular-season games.

He also invented the Lambeau Leap on Dec. 26, 1993, when he jumped into the stands in the south end zone of Lambeau Field after scoring a touchdown against the then-Los Angeles Raiders.

Butler, 53, grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, a Dallas Cowboys fan from the age of 5. "When I was drafted (in 1990 as a second round pick from Florida State), I had to learn about the (Packers) fan base and history. It was the best decision they ever made, and I made. I like that the fans are shareholders. I like that kind of history.

"It is truly amazing, the fabric of the state and the fans. In Green Bay they don't have (professional) basketball or baseball. It's almost like a college football town, like a university. It's just the Packers. They wear it year-round."

A difficult childhood

On Jan. 26, 1997, he helped bring a Super Bowl championship to those Packers fans. He reflected on his journey to the Vince Lombardi Trophy that



MARK HERTZBERG PHOTOS, SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL TIMES

LeRoy Butler reacts after his wife, Genesis, tells him that she has known for a week about the plan to surprise him with the Pro Football Hall of Fame news.



Former Green Bay Packers football star LeRoy Butler tries on fellow former Packer Charles Woodson's Pro Football Hall of Fame ring. Later this year, Butler will have a Hall of Fame ring of his own.



Former Green Bay Packers football star LeRoy Butler wipes his eye on Jan. 27 in Mount Pleasant upon learning he's being inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.



Former Green Bay Packers football star LeRoy Butler reacts as he is filmed by the NFL Network and Pro Football Hall of Fame after he was surprised early Thursday January 27, 2022 when his former teammate Charles Woodson came to Butler's in-laws' house in Mount Pleasant to tell him that he was selected to be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

night in New Orleans.

"Oh my goodness. An African-American kid, poverty, the dream of one day getting out of the projects. I remember telling my mom I want to play in the NFL when I was a special-needs kid." The Pittsburgh Steelers beat his beloved Cowboys in 1976 and 1979. "I was so upset, I was crying like a baby. My mom (Eunice Butler) said, 'One day you can win a Super Bowl,' and that is the only thing that made me feel better. I stopped crying."

He was racially tormented in school. "I opened my locker and there was a noose in it or a KKK mask, something ev-

"Why are you all here? Players don't do that. We would just drive by a church and just go in there. No one knew. We just sat in the back. Then they started to notice (after seeing a check for \$5,000 in the collection plate). Our teammates thought it was crazy, but you can be a normal person and be saved. Just be yourself."

Leroy Butler, former Green Bay Packer

ery day." He felt he could not react to it. "God was navigating my ship in these waters." Then came that victorious Super Bowl XXXI game. "I just remember saying this is what heaven is like. There is no way I should beat the odds, living in the most crime riddled projects in Jacksonville, wearing hand-me-downs ..."

Butler was moved at Super Bowl XXXI by a poster alluding to 30 years of "misery" for Packer fans waiting for another championship.

"I waited my whole life and these people ... 1968, the year I was born (and the year of the Packers last Super Bowl win) ... this is what heaven is like. I don't think people really believed what I went through. People think because you have a jersey on, you grew up in a mansion with Rolls Royces.

"To win a Super Bowl, that was amazing. It's like

a lottery ticket. They give it to you. What's this for? You can cash it in 25, 30 years from now. Adversity can strike but I know I have that ticket. I can only lose it if I get arrested. As long as you do exactly what God wants you to do, you can cash that ticket. Every year you get closer." And then, "eureka! January 26 (1997) I get a chance to cash that ticket and win the Super Bowl! Those waters smoothed out like it was pavement. I went through all the waves!"

The late Reggie White is the teammate he admired most for his off-field contributions to society, he said.

"He wanted everyone to know that you could be saved and be a normal person," Butler said of White, an ordained minister. "You can hang out. You can even drink a beer. You can do normal stuff. You don't have to walk around with your Bible all the time.

He's the most impactful person I ever knew. Reggie taught me how to do that."

They enjoyed dropping by a Salvation Army shelter or a church with no advance notice, "just pop up on them," perhaps once a month. People were surprised.

"Why are you all here? Players don't do that! We would just drive by a church and just go in there. No one knew. We just sat in the back. Then they started to notice (after seeing a check for \$5,000 in the collection plate). Our teammates thought it was crazy, but you can be a normal person and be saved. Just be yourself."

Butler said he never felt racial animosity in Green Bay, contrary to what he was told to expect. "No one ever called me the N-word," he said. He shopped at Pick 'n Save: "I always wanted to be the person that people could walk up to and

be approachable. I stayed 10 minutes from the stadium."

When Butler was young, his mother took him to the Salvation Army for a toy giveaway. He told her he didn't want any toys, he only wanted a new shirt, one that he could rip the sales tag off of. Vicki Durham, his sister, found him a new white T-shirt. It was too big for him, but she tied it around him so he could wear it.

That was 50 years ago. His wardrobe has evolved since then, to a No. 36 green and gold Packers jersey, and, soon, to a gold Pro Football Hall of Fame blazer.

Editor's Note: This report and the accompanying photographs were held for publication until after Thursday night's televised NFL Honors awards show under an agreement with the Pro Football Hall of Fame.



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