

THE WEEK AHEAD

Sporting events this week, June 9-15

Sunday, June 9

One for the road

Salt Lake Bees vs. Sugar Land Space Cowboys

1:05 p.m. at Smith's Ballpark

Watch: KMYU

The Bees close out a homestand before heading to Las Vegas for six straight days.

Thursday, June 13

Former Cougar in the field

U.S. Open

All day

Watch: USA Network, Peacock

Former BYU golfer Zac Blair will be at Pinehurst after qualifying on golf's "longest day."

Friday, June 14-Saturday, June 15

Ramping it up

Tony Hawk Vert Alert

2:17 p.m. at the Huntsman Center

The two-day skateboarding competition is free to attend.

Saturday, June 15

Soccer without borders

Real Salt Lake at Montreal

5:30 p.m.

Watch: Apple TV

The West's best team returns from the international break with a trip to Canada.

THE GAME PLAN

Saturday at Montreal 5:30 p.m. TV: Apple	June 19 at Kansas City 8:30 a.m. TV: Apple	June 22 at LA Galaxy 7:30 p.m. TV: Apple	July 3 at Houston 7:30 p.m. TV: Apple	July 6 at Atlanta 7:30 p.m. TV: Apple
June 16 at Bay City 6 p.m.	June 21 at Washington 4 p.m.	June 29 at Portland 8 p.m.	July 7 at Las Vegas 4 p.m.	Aug. 23 at Las Vegas 7:30 p.m.
Sunday Sugar Land 10:30 p.m.	Tuesday at Las Vegas 10:30 p.m.	Wednesday at Las Vegas 8:05 p.m.	Thursday at Las Vegas 8:05 p.m.	Friday at Las Vegas 8:05 p.m.

Champions Cup final food poisoning leaves Crew with questions

By PABLO MAURER

Days after his team lost the CONCACAF Champions Cup final to Pachuca in Mexico, Columbus Crew SC president and general manager Tim Bezbatchenko suggested the Crew's performance could've in part been the result of "subtleties."

In the moments after the Crew's 2-0 loss last weekend, Columbus head coach Wilfried Nancy told reporters that many of his players had spent the two days leading up to the final suffering from an illness. The Crew's team doctor later determined that food poisoning had been the likely culprit.

"My players gave everything knowing that they were sick," said Nancy. "All the team had diarrhea since yesterday, the staff also."

Asked whether he could rule out the possibility that the team's food had been intentionally contaminated, Bezbatchenko told the Columbus Dispatch's Michael Arace that he couldn't "rule out subtleties." To the best of his knowledge, Bezbatchenko went on to say, nobody else at the hotel fell ill. Only those associated with the Crew.

When reached for comment on Wednesday, a Crew spokesperson said the Club has no clear indication of misconduct and that the timing of the occurrence was unfortunate. A representative for Pachuca did not respond to multiple requests for comment. A representative at the hotel the club used did not respond to messages seeking comment.

A source within the Crew locker room who was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter said on Thursday morning that there was some suspicion that the club's food was tainted but that "none of us have given it too much thought." That source described the illness as having been "brutal" and agreed with the assessment given by

Crew players and coaches that the outbreak had affected the Crew's performance on June 1. The crew arrived in Pachuca on May 30 and ate at their team hotel that evening. Several players fell ill that same evening, according to the Dispatch, and on Friday the outbreak became widespread, with the number of affected "in the teens," according to Bezbatchenko, who the Crew announced that Bezbatchenko is leaving the club for a position with Black Knight Football.

MLS teams generally have team meals mapped out thoroughly on road trips, particularly ones that involve international travel. The team's front office works with hotels and restaurants to accommodate their needs, often providing specific requests in terms of ingredients and preparation. The Crew's trip to Pachuca was no different, said Bezbatchenko. "Getting food right shouldn't be that hard," he told the Dispatch.

Beyond the scoreline, examining data from the Champions Cup final does indicate that certain members of the Crew's previous CCC matches, Morris had averaged less than a goal a game. Against Pachuca, he committed five potential indicators of fatigue and lagging behind. His passing accuracy also took a significant hit, dropping from 91% to 83%.

The Crew may have also been hampered by altitude, with the game being played at some 8,000 feet over sea level. Columbus did extensive altitude training in the weeks leading up to the match and the Crew's physician, Bezbatchenko said, determined that the widespread illness that affected the club's players and coaches was unrelated to altitude sickness.

Green Bay Packers wide receiver Jayden Reed celebrates with fans after scoring a touchdown against the Los Angeles Chargers on Nov. 19, 2023, in Green Bay, Wis. Reed led the Packers last season with 64 receptions and 793 receiving yards.

Strength in numbers

No WR1, no problem for Jordan Love and Packers' promising offense.

By MATT SCHNEIDMAN

Football

Green Bay » The Packers don't have a No. 1 wide receiver.

On the surface, that may seem like a hindrance to an offense with Super Bowl aspirations. The two guys calling the shots disagree.

"I personally don't think it matters," head coach Matt LaFleur said. "I think you don't have to have a No. 1 receiver," quarterback Jordan Love added.

In 2019, Davante Adams played only 12 games and still had 48 more catches, 520 more receiving yards and two more touchdown catches than any other wideout on the team. In 2023, Adams was named a first-team All-Pro with 115 catches, 1,374 receiving yards and 18 touchdowns. The next-highest on the team were 33 catches, 690 receiving yards and six touchdown catches. In 2021, his second consecutive first-team All-Pro season, Adams led Packers wide receivers in catches by 83, in receiving yards by 1,040 and in touchdown catches by three.

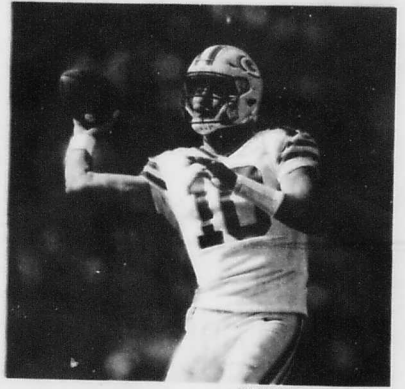
Let's make one thing clear. Nobody is saying they don't want Adams or a receiver like him, a bonafide No. 1. That's a good thing. But the Packers see value in having five No. 2s and 3s, each of whom can play like a true No. 1 on any given day.

Last season alone, Jayden Reed led the team with only 64 catches as a rookie and Romeo Doubs had just five fewer. Reed led the team with only 793 receiving yards and Doubs was second with 674. Love, the former Utah State standout, ranked seventh in the NFL with 4,159 passing yards, so it's not like those receiving yards were due to a quarterback who didn't sling it. Reed and Doubs each caught a team-high eight touchdowns.

Then there's Christian Watson, perhaps the closest thing to a true No. 1 when healthy, who missed eight games and still flashed No. 1 potential against the Chiefs and Lions during the Packers' resurgent second half. Dontayvion Wicks showed that potential less so as a rookie fifth-round pick, but he'll still be an integral piece of Green Bay's offense capable of taking over a game. And don't forget about Bo Melton, technically the Packers' No. 5 wideout who authored the team's first 100-yard receiving game last season in Week 17 against the Vikings and also caught a touchdown in the Divisional Round against the 49ers.

"I think if you just look at throughout the course of a season — and every season's going to be a little bit different — but all those guys during their moments where they were the leading receiver in a game," LaFleur said. "I feel really good about the collective unit. The hardest part is to feel so good about them. It's hard to get everybody the amount of touches that you'd like to get, but that's a good problem to have."

Tuesday's practice served as a microcosm for the Packers' receiving depth since it was the speedster Melton hauling in a 75-yard touchdown pass from Love during 11-on-11 work on a perfectly thrown bomb down the middle while Melton ran



Green Bay Packers quarterback Jordan Love passes during the first half of a game against the Chicago Bears on Sept. 10, 2023, in Chicago.

a post route past the entire defense. "It's a lot of guys making plays," Melton said of Green Bay's wide receiver group. "We have a great staff who can draw the best plays up. When you have a lot of guys who do different things — speed, route-runners, physical guys — it could be dangerous for sure."

"We've got so many guys in our room, man, you never know what could happen," Reed added. "Somebody could go for a hundred every week, in my opinion."

Only three teams last season had a leading receiver with fewer receiving yards than Reed's team-high 793: the Broncos, Patriots and Giants, who ranked 24th, 28th and 31st in passing yards per game, respectively. The Packers, conversely, ranked 12th. Their lack of a dominant receiver isn't for lack of a passer, as was the case with those other three teams, but rather a testament to their depth at the position and not having a guy like Adams whom you should probably throw it to whenever you can.

Some would accuse Aaron Rodgers of locking in on Adams "too much, like when he aired it out to a tightly covered Adams (and incomplete) on fourth down late in the fourth quarter of a 2021 Divisional Round loss to the 49ers when Allen Lazard appeared wide open underneath for a first down. Again, it's not a bad thing to have a player like that, one that your natural instincts take you to more often than not, but there might be something to be said for simply running the play that's called and being able to equally trust whoever's on the other end.

"I think that's one thing that I've always tried to do is just play the play," Love said. "Play the play, go through my reads and find who's open. Don't try and force it because I feel like once you try and lock in on a guy and force it, not great things happen and then you might miss somebody who might

be open on the play ... play dependent, if there's a certain guy I might want to look at matchup-wise and things like that. I'll go to him, but I just like to play it out."

At times, three defenders would be dedicated to Adams on a given play. He once counted them out with finger points after a play against the Bears. There's nothing at that extent facing the Packers offense, though passing game coordinator Jason Vrabie said teams doubled Doubs in the red zone early last season because of how many touchdowns he caught and doubled Watson in 2022 after his consecutive multiple-touchdown games. It's a win-win for the Packers because if teams single up every guy, there are five receivers capable of taking over. If defenses double someone, the Packers can throw it to others who can look like a No. 1 for a game or run the ball into a tight box with a guy in Josh Jacobs who would welcome that.

"The receiving corps is crazy, man," Jacobs said. "I'm so excited just watching them. Any one of them can go at any moment."

Will someone emerge as a true No. 1 wide receiver this season? It's certainly possible. Watson might if he stays healthy and Reed could if his rookie season was any indication of the boom to come in Year 2. The Packers would love that, too, but they're just fine with their receiving corps operating in relative anonymity while keeping opposing defenses guessing who they'll need to worry about most in any given week.

"I think it works out well when you can spread the ball out and you got different guys making different plays and you can put 'em in different areas," Love said. "I think it puts a lot more stress on the defense and the calls that they can get in, so I think in the long run it helps us not having No. 1 guy, a true No. 1 guy, but I think all those guys can step up and be the one any given day."