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Why Lions' shootout win over Packers ranks among Dan Campbell's most special



By Colton Pouncy Dec 6, 2024

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DETROIT — Players and coaches trickled in one by one in street clothes and found their seats, gathering for a final team meeting. It was the day before a much-anticipated divisional game against their rivals. They were set to hear from their head coach. Instead, the lights shut off. A movie clip — one of a raid scene from “The Last of the Mohicans” — began playing on the projector. It would set the tone for what was to come.



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This was [Detroit](#)'s third game in 11 days. The team injury report read like a novel. Star players, key starters, meaningful depth. To fill their absence, they relied on guys still learning their way around the building, having just arrived days ago. And the simple truth is that nobody feels sorry for them. Nor should they.

That's why head coach Dan Campbell — motivator extraordinaire — began Wednesday's meeting with the scene. The [Green Bay Packers](#) expected to come here and take one in their building. To disturb their peace. Campbell wanted war. And he got it.

"You get knocked down, you keep on going and just f—ing send it," offensive tackle [Dan Skipper](#) said of the message behind the meeting, exiting the locker room after Detroit's season-defining 34-31 win over the Packers. "This one was just full send."



GO DEEPER

Lions top Packers 34-31 after gutsy fourth down conversion: Takeaways

Players and coaches, admittedly, heard the narratives coming into this one. The Lions were shorthanded. A season for the ages had a chance to be derailed. A loss to Green Bay and they would no longer control their own destiny, should others around them continue to win. To many, they were in danger of losing their grip on the NFC North, and atop the conference in general.

It's just noise to them.

"Excuse my language, but we don't give a f— about what they're saying on the outside," cornerback [Carlton Davis](#) said. "Like, it doesn't matter to us. The talk shows, the analysts, like, that's their job to stir this up, but it's our job to stay focused and do what we do."

Along came Thursday night — and a game that would prove to be one of the best of the 2024 season. The 11-1 Detroit Lions vs. the 9-3 Green Bay Packers. Two heavyweights in the NFC North who could easily meet again down the road.

It's tough to beat a team twice. The Lions got the first one, 24-14 in Green Bay. It would take everyone to get it done this time.



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break, only to see the Packers march back with 14 points in the first four minutes of the third quarter. But every time the offense needed a score to answer the Packers, they got one. Johnson dialed up some brilliant calls in the red zone when it mattered.

Two of those scores were courtesy of receiver [Tim Patrick](#). He's an easy player to gravitate to because of his story. A torn ACL in 2022. A torn Achilles in 2023. A fresh start on a Lions team with Super Bowl aspirations. They gave him a chance. He rewarded them Thursday with two huge touchdowns.

"What a great addition he's been," Campbell said. "He just continues to make plays for us in the run game and the pass game stepped up big here."



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Lions' defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn — holding his defense together with rubber bands and duct tape — got just enough from his unit. At a given moment, you could look at this Detroit defense and see the likes of [Kwon Alexander](#), [Jamal Adams](#), [Myles Adams](#), [Jonah Williams](#), [Ezekiel Turner](#) — all guys who weren't here when the season



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“It’s not the playbook that’s the most important thing for these guys to come in and learn,” Glenn said this week. “It’s the style of play that we have — and that’s easy to learn because once you see it and once we show it to them, they understand, listen, this is how we play. We can shrink the playbook down as much as we want, but it’s the way that you play that’s the most important.”

Take linebacker Ezekiel Turner, for example. He joined the team in October. He’s seen an uptick in defensive snaps for every game he’s been active out of necessity, with four linebackers on injured reserve. He was part of a makeshift defense tonight, going toe-to-toe with one of the best offenses in football.

It was far from perfect, but the Lions held the Packers to seven first-half points — giving it everything they had. Glenn dialed up the blitz when he needed to. Davis forced a fumble, recovered by linebacker [David Long](#) to set up a Lions’ field goal, in a game decided by three points. In the second half, the defense had to play without defensive tackle [Alim McNeill](#) (head), then defensive back [Brian Branch](#) (cramping) — who left on Green Bay’s final possession of the game and did not return, just as the Packers reached the red zone trailing 31-28 with minutes to go.

A touchdown could’ve put the game away. Instead, Turner proved why he’s here — bringing down [Jordan Love](#) on a scramble to force a game-tying field goal.

The Athletic Football Show

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The Lions are the NFL's m...

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“The first week of practice I got here, I’m like, ‘OK, this is different from many of — probably every organization,” Turner said of Detroit’s culture. “It’s intense, very attention to detail and you really have to prepare for every practice here like a game, really. And it shows. When the games come, and even if there’s new guys out there, the standard is standard.”

for one last crack at it.

Early in the drive, quarterback [Jared Goff](#) found receiver [Jameson Williams](#) for a gain of 19, setting up a first down near midfield. Facing a third-and-2 from the Green Bay 37, just before the two-minute warning, Goff found running back [Jahmyr Gibbs](#) on a screen for the first down.

Backed up 10 yards after a holding penalty, the offense didn't flinch. It picked up three, then 16, then a rush for no gain. Fourth-and-1. Less than a minute to go. Decision time.

This is where the value of Campbell lies. Most coaches line up for the field goal in that scenario, content with giving the opposing team a chance to tie or take the lead. But two of Detroit's touchdowns came via decisions to keep the offense on the field on fourth-and-goal. The team isn't in this one without those points. Even after a failed fourth-and-1 try deep in their own territory, Campbell's steadfast belief in his guys is why players believe they can convert against anyone, in any scenario. Just like the one in front of them.

And so, the offense took the field. Goff fell down on the handoff. Disaster in the making — except it wasn't. [David Montgomery](#) had his teammate's back, grabbing the ball and getting the first down.

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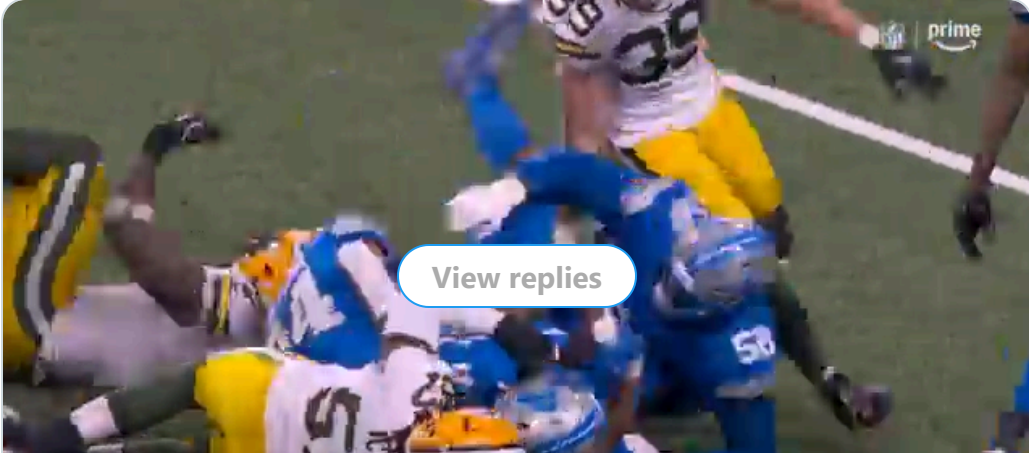
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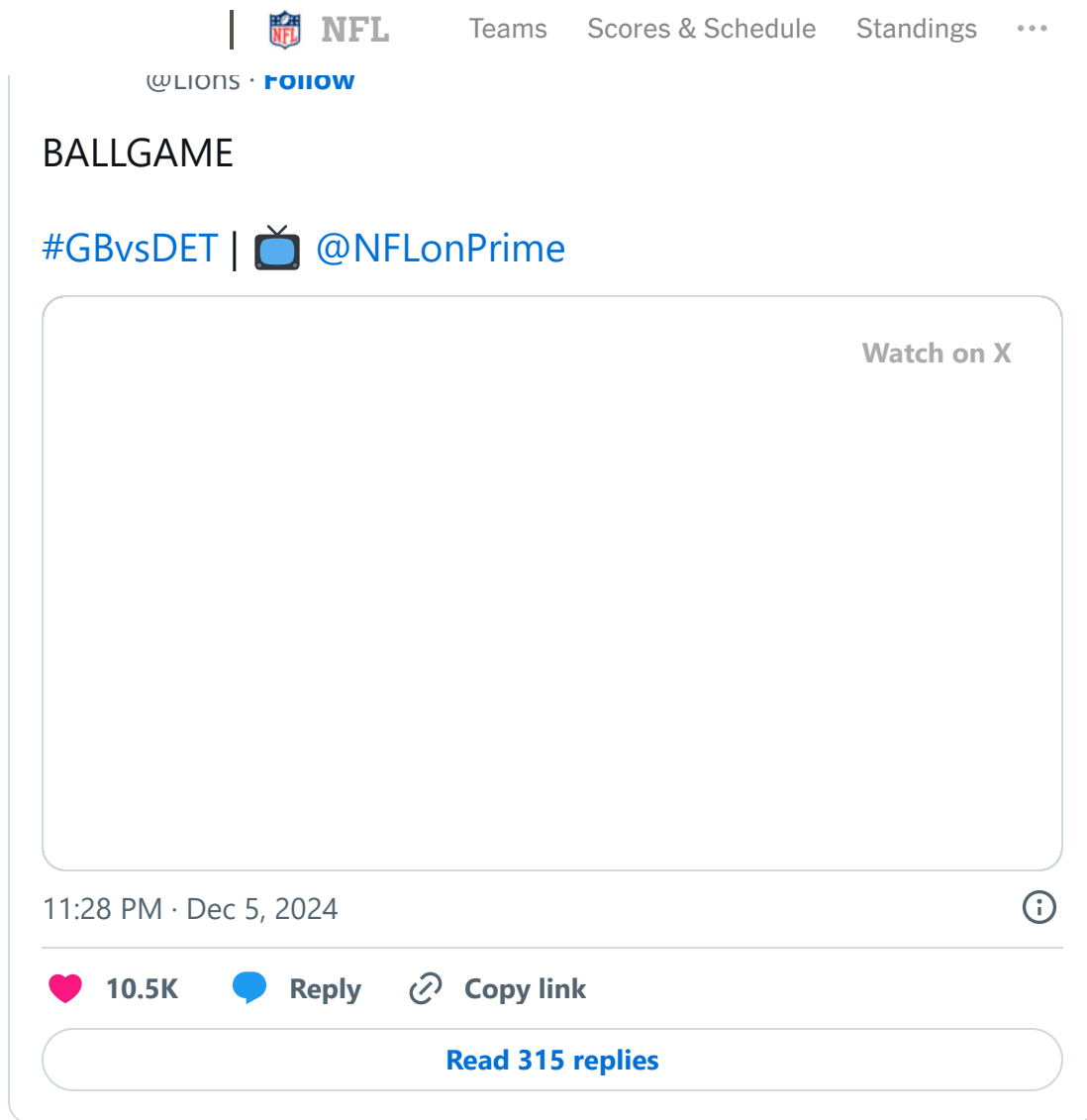
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That allowed the Lions to drain out the clock for a situation they know all too well. [Jake Bates](#) got in some practice kicks, as he often does, alone on the sideline. He enjoys being by himself in those moments. It's his way of mellowing out and getting in the right headspace.

Besides, there would be plenty of time to be with teammates. *After*, his third game-winning kick of the season.



This was a game the Lions needed to have as the regular season winds down. It officially secures a playoff spot, but also gives them some much-needed breathing room. The Lions have four games left. If they win three, they're guaranteed to secure the No. 1 seed and the NFC North — no matter what the [Eagles](#) (10-2) and [Vikings](#) (10-2) do in their final five contests. They'll now have 10 days to gather themselves before welcoming the [Buffalo Bills](#) in a potential Super Bowl preview.

Program win is a term typically used in college football to describe a defining moment, typically for a team on the rise. But this isn't college and the Lions are a Super Bowl contender. And yet, this had the feeling of one. Perhaps organizational win is a better term. It took the front office, coaching staff and players on the field to get it done.

Whatever you wanna call it, it was one of the best wins of the Campbell era. There are many from which to choose. Campbell's first victory — over the Vikings three years



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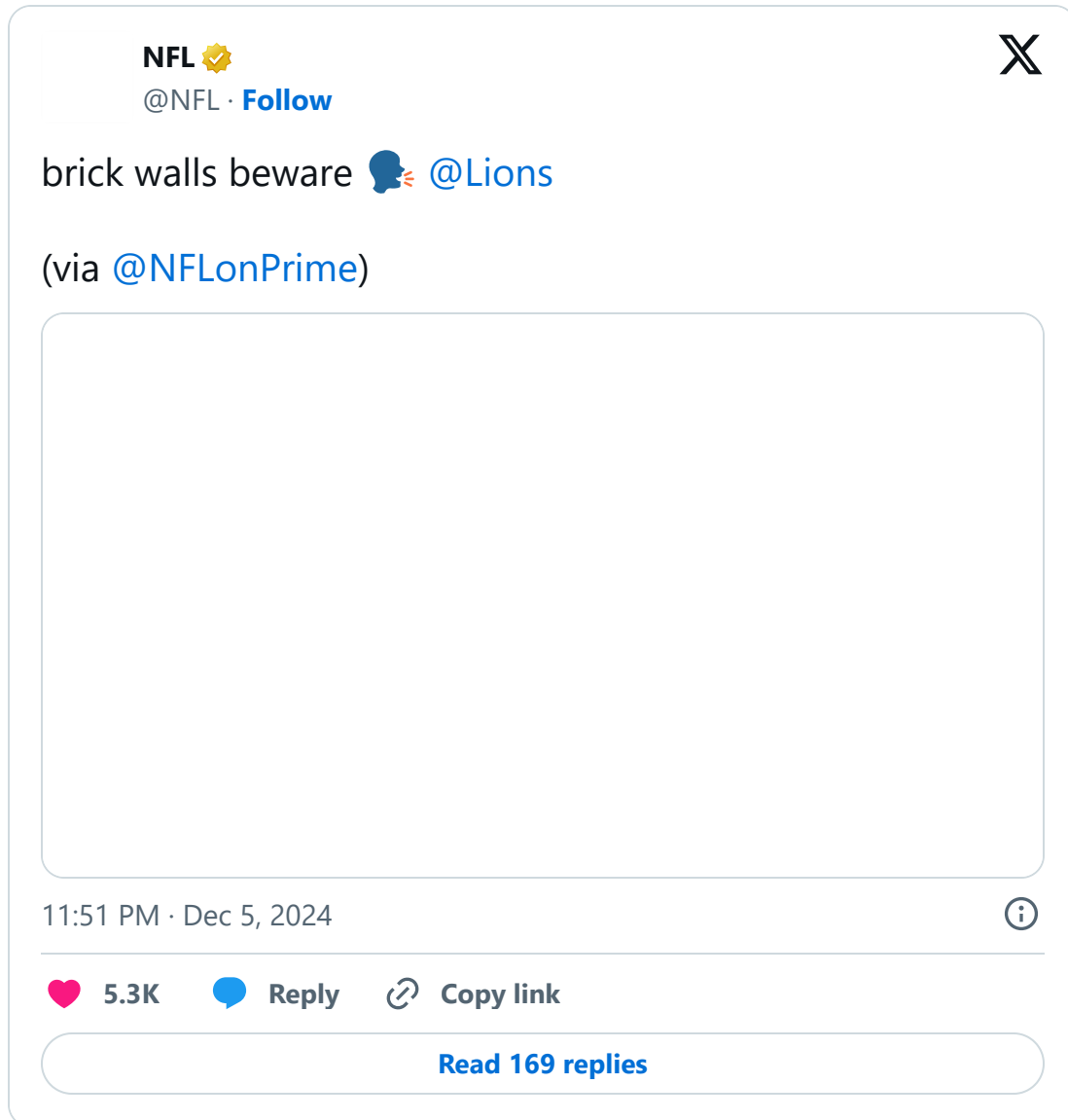
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open the 2023 season is up there. Obviously, a pair of playoff wins from this past January.



Each one has its own special place in the hearts of those who helped make it happen. Few are as memorable as this one will be for the group that accomplished.

“This is sweet,” said Campbell, pushing all the right buttons for the 12-1 Lions. “I told the team, ‘This will be one of those you never forget.’”

Hard to after a night like this.



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(Photo of Tim Patrick celebrating after scoring a touchdown: Nic Antaya / Getty Images)

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