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'On my terms'

Favre says it's hard, but retirement is the right decision

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Green Bay - After his voice began to crack, after his eyes began to succumb to the moment, after he put his head in his hand trying to choke back the tears Thursday, Brett Favre said he could no longer hold up his end of the bargain.

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Carrying on his shoulders for more than a decade the expectations of the Green Bay Packers and their innumerable fans was part of being a three-time MVP, a touchdown-throwing machine and the most recognizable face in the National Football League.

But it came with a price, and when Favre's retirement after 16 years in Green Bay was announced Tuesday, it was proof that the burden had become too great to bear for a gray-bearded quarterback seven months shy of his 39th birthday.

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Claiming it was his decision and no one else's to retire, Favre said something told him he couldn't do it anymore.

"I've given everything I possibly can give to this organization, to the game of football, and I don't think I've got anything left to give," Favre said Thursday. "And that's it. It's been a great career for me, and it's over. As hard as that is for me to say, it's over."

Favre initially had resisted the Packers' urgings to conduct a news conference Thursday, joking that he would have preferred to do something later - "which, to me, 'later' meant they'll forget about it and it will be over and done with."

But after driving his daughter Breleigh to school in Hattiesburg, Miss. - "we were late as usual" - he took off on a private jet at 8:30 a.m. and arrived at Austin Straubel International Airport in Green Bay around 11 a.m. The news conference was pushed back a half hour to 11:30 a.m., and at 11:35 a.m., Favre entered a fourth-floor meeting room in the Lambeau Field Atrium, where he was greeted by a dozen still photographers snapping as fast as their cameras would allow.

Sporting a heavier-than-normal beard, Favre was dressed in jeans, a light-blue cotton shirt with the sleeves folded up to his elbows and a pair of brown hiking boots. Below to his left as he sat at the podium were his wife, Deanna, general manager Ted Thompson and coach Mike McCarthy, all seated in a row on chairs facing the gathered reporters and photographers.

Soon after the words *officially retiring* left his mouth, Favre began to choke up.

He curled his left hand in a fist and lightly hit the table, trying to gather himself so he could complete his opening statement. Tears came to his eyes, and he paused seven or eight times as he said how blessed he was to play the game so long and be associated with people such as Ron Wolf,



Photo/Mark Hoffman

Brett Favre makes his retirement official Thursday at a news conference at Lambeau Field. Fighting back tears, Favre said he believed he has given just about all he can to the game of football and to the Packers.

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At the end of his opening statement, he tried to shed light on his decision.

"I'm not going to sit here like other players maybe have said in the past that I won't miss it," Favre said. "Because I will. But I just don't think I can give anything else, aside from the three hours on Sundays.

"And in football, you can't do that."

Favre mentioned several times during the question-and-answer period that he felt he could still play the game at a high level. He denied that the

Packers - particularly Thompson - had not done enough to urge him to play on, and if deep inside he was feeling that way, he didn't show it.

But he admitted he might have given it more thought if pushed about it.

"I've questioned my decision," Favre said. "I believe it's the right decision. And there's nothing that they can do or say to change that.

"They can make me wonder. But that's part of it. I think it's the right decision. Don't think I won't question it. But that's life. I made it, and I have to be at peace with that."

During the 67-minute news conference, Favre touched on many subjects, including his appreciation for being a Packers player, his lack of a plan for life after football, the yearlong sabbatical he and Deanna are going to take from appearing at fund-raising events, and the inspiration he drew from fans and those who received help from his charity foundation.

Could he change his mind?

Asked about the possibility that he could change his mind, Favre said his thoughts on retirement were different this year from those of previous years. He said his annual flirtation with retirement before this was his concern that he couldn't play at a high-enough level to satisfy himself.

After having one of the best years of his career in leading the Packers to a 13-3 record and the NFC title game last season, he proved himself capable of winning games. He just couldn't see himself studying tape until 8:30 the night before a game or hours after he had gotten home from playing.

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As he got older, being the Packers' quarterback got tougher.

"Brett Favre got hard to live up to," Favre said. "It's only gotten tougher, and something told me 'It's gotten too hard for you.' I could probably come back and do it, suck it up, but what kind of a toll would that take on me, my family or my teammates?"

"At some point, it would affect one of those, if not all of them. Maybe it has already."

The all-time leader in attempts, completions, touchdowns, interceptions and just about every other passing record said he left the gamewith no regrets. He would have liked to have won more Super Bowls and have thrown fewer interceptions and beaten more teams, but he said that regardless of how the past season ended, his career was a success.

He said he hoped his style of play, the enthusiasm with which he played and his commitment to the game would be things that fans will remember about him.

Some might feel that Favre was nudged out before his time.

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But Favre said this: "As I walk away, I'm walking away on top, my head high, chin up. And it is on my terms. It is on my terms, which is a good way to go out."

World

About 12:42 p.m., after answering the last question, Favre walked out of the news conference and was led to a conference room where he spent less than an hour speaking to a handful of team employees and a player or two. At roughly 2 p.m., he was on a plane back to Hattiesburg.

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Brett Favre is definitely retired.

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