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'We're going there to win a game'

The Gophers settled for a lot less sun and fun this bowl season than last, but gameday brings the same goal: victory. **C5**

Quick Lane Bowl: Gophers vs. Central Michigan • 4 p.m. today (ESPN2)

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SPORTS

VIKINGS 49, N.Y. GIANTS 17
Week 17: 7:30 p.m. Sunday at Green Bay (Ch. 11)

STILL IN IT TO WIN IT



Photos by JEFF WHEELER • jeff.wheeler@startribune.com

Vikings defensive tackle Tom Johnson celebrated his sack of Giants quarterback Eli Manning for an 8-yard loss in the second quarter of a 49-17 victory Sunday night.

Vikings head into title showdown confident after crushing Giants

INSIDE THE GAME
MATT VENSEL



The real Vikings showed up Sunday night. Now they are headed to the playoffs.

For the first time in three prime time games this season, the Vikings on Sunday night showed the football-watching American public their preferred style of football, relying on a fast, smothering defense and a careful, calculated offense to defeat a New York Giants team that had nothing to play for but pride at frigid TCF Bank Stadium.

With the 49-17 win, the Vikings secured their first playoff berth since 2012. They will head into the regular-season finale at Lambeau Field next weekend with a two-game winning streak and a chance to win their first divi-

sion title since 2009 in another Sunday night spotlight game.

"I'm tired of watching Green Bay win it ever year, so [beating the Packers is] our No. 1 goal right now," guard Brandon Fusco said.

The Vikings could have clinched a playoff berth before kickoff on Sunday, but the Atlanta Falcons handed Carolina its first loss and Seattle lost to already-eliminated St. Louis, keeping alive the possibility of a three-way tie with those two teams that would keep the Vikings out.

But the Vikings, specifically their defense, took care of it themselves Sunday night.

"I would have took it the other way," coach Mike Zimmer said. "But you know, it's always better when you do something yourself as opposed to relying on somebody else. That's the opportunity we

See **VIKINGS** on C9 ▶



Vikings cornerback Captain Munneryn took a bow for the fans after intercepting a pass in the third quarter and returning it 32 yards.

THEY'RE IN; WHAT'S NEXT?

The Vikings (10-5) clinched a playoff spot by winning Sunday. Depending on what happens next week, they can be the NFC's No. 3, 5 or 6 seed.

If they win at Green Bay (10-5), they will clinch the NFC North, the No. 3 seed in the conference and a home playoff game against Seattle.

If they lose to Green Bay and Seattle (9-6) loses at Arizona, the Vikings will be the No. 5 seed and open the playoffs at Washington.

If they lose to Green Bay and Seattle wins, the Vikings will be the No. 6 seed and begin the playoffs with another game at Lambeau.

If the Vikings and Packers tie — hey, it's happened before — the Vikings will be the No. 5 seed and play at Washington.

As the air gets colder, this team continues to warm as a contender

After three hours of watching their sweat freeze, the Vikings linebackers made the long trek from the elements into the warmth of the locker room. Chad Greenway, their leader, exhibited veteran savvy by grabbing a hot cup of coffee before leading the younger linebackers back onto the frigid field for a photo.

"It was a year-end thing," Greenway said. "We might not play here again."

Greenway said that moments after his team made a return to TCF Bank Stadium a possibility. Instead of grabbing a chunk of turf as a souvenir, the Vikings seized a little confidence, as well as a playoff berth, with their widest victory margin since the last game of the 2009 season.

At the end of a tumultuous day in the NFL, the Vikings established that they can win



Jim Souhan

predictably and professionally, in prime time and under pressure. They beat the New York Giants 49-17, meaning they could see their playoff future as clearly as their breath.

"This was one of our goals, getting into the playoffs," tight end Kyle Rudolph said. "We still want to go win our division and hope we have another game here. I think we can beat anybody on any Sunday when we play our game."

When they lost by 31 points to Seattle in the first game in December, the Vikings looked discomfited and vulnerable.

See **SOUHAN** on C7 ▶

More from Week 16: Jones' 70-yard TD catch helps Falcons deal Panthers their first loss; Cardinals return two Rodgers fumbles for TDs in thumping Packers. **C12**