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# After up-and-down season, Jimmy Smith finishes strong in Super Bowl

## Ravens cornerback makes two crucial plays on 49ers' last drive

By Aaron Wilson, The Baltimore Sun

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NEW ORLEANS —

Imposing cornerback **Jimmy Smith** capped a rough season in the best way possible, flashing his potential with two pivotal plays that preserved the Ravens' [Super Bowl](#) victory over the San Francisco 49ers.

Following a regular season where he missed five games after undergoing sports hernia surgery, losing his nickel back job and being limited to 31 tackles and no interceptions, the 2011 first-round draft pick from Colorado registered an impressive performance in the final seconds of the fourth quarter. It was Smith who broke up a pass intended for 49ers star wide receiver **Michael Crabtree** on third down near the Ravens' end zone.

On the ensuing play, Smith jammed Crabtree and disrupted his pass pattern in what was a borderline illegal play that wasn't flagged by the officials.

"The fact that I made a couple of plays made me feel great," Smith said. "It propelled us to win the game. It's a great feeling. The first one, Crabtree motioned across the ball and I had watched that on film all week. That's one of their go-to red-zone plays. I left my guy and took Corey Graham's guy and made that tackle. The last one I knew they wanted to get their best receiver on me. I just took away the inside. I was actually calm."

If Smith allows either of those receptions, the Ravens might have lost the football game Sunday night.

"I'm sure it will be a springboard for Jimmy, but how does it get any bigger than the [Super Bowl](#) on the last drive?" Ravens coach **John Harbaugh** said. "I think he made the two plays at the end of the game to win the game. He played great. Jimmy has been practicing very well."

"He finally got healthy at the end of the year there. He was at his best in the last couple weeks. Jimmy is going to

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be, like we said all along, a great player in this league. I love him. He's really special."

At 6 feet 2, 205 pounds with a strong upper body, Smith is unusually big for his position, with the requisite size and speed of a shutdown cornerback. Smith, though, has lacked consistency.

"That's just what Jimmy does," said cornerback **Lardarius Webb**, who finished the season on injured reserve with a torn anterior cruciate ligament. "He's just been battling through injuries and a lot of people get on top of him and want to bring him down, but Jimmy is going to be one of the greatest corners when he gets his chance."

Much more had been expected initially of Smith, who has 49 tackles, two interceptions and 11 pass deflections in two NFL seasons. Perhaps this game will trigger more playing time in the future.

"It's been an up-and-down career so far," Smith said. "To be able to make those plays makes everything better. It makes everything feel great."

### **Ngata update**

Although he won't undergo magnetic resonance imaging exams on his left knee until Tuesday, the prognosis for Pro Bowl defensive tackle **Haloti Ngata** appears to be promising.

Ngata wasn't on crutches at the team hotel Monday and was moving quickly.

According to sources with knowledge of the situation, they would be surprised if Ngata has any major ligament damage and are hopeful that it's just a sprained medial collateral ligament.

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Packer Plus Overview: Special teams

# Mason Crosby looks to straighten things out

## Middle of season was nightmare for kicker

By [Rob Reischel](#), for the Journal Sentinel  
Feb. 5, 2013

**Green Bay** - Late during Super Bowl week, San Francisco kicker David Akers bemoaned the fact he was asked to answer question after question about his 2012 struggles.

Can you imagine if Mason Crosby was in New Orleans?

Crosby, Green Bay's much maligned kicker, made just 21 of 33 field goals during the regular season, a miserable 63.6%. Of the NFL's kickers with at least 10 field-goal attempts, Crosby's percentage ranked 35th.

To digest how much Crosby struggled this season, consider this: Eight kickers connected on at least 90.0% of their attempts and another 18 made at least 80.0%. Only six teams had their main kicker below 80.0%, with Green Bay bringing up the rear.

Does this mean Packer general manager Ted Thompson drafts a kicker in April to at least challenge Crosby?

"I don't know," Crosby said at the end of the season. "I can't answer that."

Crosby, who just finished the second of a five-year, \$14.75 million contract, isn't known as one of the NFL's more accurate kickers. The Packers like him, however, for his strong leg and levelheadedness.

During Crosby's first five seasons (including playoffs), he made 139 of 175 field goals (79.4%). He ranked 24th in field-goal accuracy his rookie season of 2007, then 26th, 23rd, 22nd and 10th.

Even with those numbers, no one saw this type of slide coming.

Crosby began the season connecting on his first five kicks. He also ended the regular season going 4 of 4 and made both of his kicks in the playoffs. In between, Crosby was a disastrous 12 of 24 and went 11 consecutive games with either a miss or no attempts.

The last time Green Bay had its main kicker connect at a clip worse than Crosby was Max Zendejas in 1988 (56.3%). But Crosby believes his struggles will only make him stronger.

"The adversity that I dealt with this year is something that's definitely the most I've dealt with in my kicking career," Crosby said. "Yeah, I think I showed my character, showed how hard I work and my passion and love

for this game. I was happy at the end of the year.

"Tried to be accountable for my teammates and this organization and do my job and be consistent. Finishing strong was important. As far as the adversity that I went through this year, it could have broken me but it didn't, and I think I've gotten stronger because of it."

Packer special teams coach Shawn Slocum agreed that the adversity should make Crosby stronger.

"I was impressed with Mason overcoming some adversity to finish strong at the end of the year," Slocum said. "It indicated what kind of character he has. He kept his head down and continued to work and finished on a good note."

"I think dealing with adversity can help you grow as a player and as an individual. He just needs to put it together and have a good year."

Despite Crosby's woes, Green Bay finished 12th in the Dallas Morning News' annual ranking of special teams units. The Packers accomplished that despite ranking 32nd in field-goal accuracy.

NFC North rival Minnesota finished first overall, Chicago was ninth and Detroit was 30th.

In Slocum's four years as Green Bay's special teams coach, the Packers have climbed from 31st overall in 2009, to 29th in 2010, 13th in 2011 and 12th this season. The Packers' best finish since Mike McCarthy took over as head coach in 2006 was a seventh in 2007. Green Bay's average finish in special teams under McCarthy is 21.4.

"Special teams has been our most consistent unit from the start of the season to the end of the season," McCarthy said near the end of the season. "Really, the only negative performance we had as a whole special teams unit was our second game down in Chicago."

"I've been very pleased with the consistency of our coverage teams. . . . I thought the blocking has really improved over past years and we have a dynamic returner in Randall Cobb."

Cobb is a big reason the Packers ranked as high as they did. The second-year return man helped Green Bay finish 10th in kickoff returns (25.0) and eighth in punt returns (11.0).

The Packers replaced Cobb with rookie Jeremy Ross late in the season to keep Cobb healthy. The move backfired, though, when Ross had a critical fumble against San Francisco in the NFC divisional playoffs.

"There was no reason for me to believe he was going to mishandle that ball," Slocum said. "I have confidence in Jeremy Ross. I think he has the potential to be a very good player."

Punter Tim Masthay had another terrific season. Masthay ranked 21st in net average (38.9), 27th in gross (43.5) and sixth in inside-the-20 percentage (42.9%). Masthay's net average was Green Bay's best in 39 years.

"I think it was a really good year as far as consistency," Masthay said. "I was pretty happy with that."

Green Bay also ranked 18th in opponent kickoff return average, eighth in punt return average and tied for seventh in punts inside the 20. Long snapper Brett Goode was a rock.

While most of Green Bay's units are solidified, the Packers must make a tough call on Crosby.

"That's not anything that's even going to be on my mind," Crosby said. "I'm going to get back to work and do what I normally do in the off-season and just focus on that. All I can control is what I do, and my process and that's kind of where I'm at."

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