

Former college walk-on Jordy Nelson has biggest game of career in Packers' Super Bowl win

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ARLINGTON, Texas — Jordy Nelson strolled through the bowels of a stadium that would hold his entire hometown city limit to city limit and tried to explain how he felt about being a Super Bowl champion.



Green Bay Packers' Jordy Nelson (87) reacts with Aaron Rodgers (12) after scoring a touchdown during the first half of NFL Super Bowl XLV football game against the Pittsburgh Steelers Sunday, Feb. 6, 2011, in Arlington, Texas. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

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"It's ..., " he said, stopping, then starting again. "It's not ... "

Still wearing his [Green Bay](#) uniform, he searched for words, then gave up.

"I don't know, honestly. It doesn't seem real or right or I don't know. I think it's going to take time to sink in."

Green Bay 31, Pittsburgh 25.

On a night that the [NFL's](#) most storied franchises staged a Super Bowl that fit their lofty status, there were plenty of great story lines. [Aaron Rodgers](#) making those teams that passed on him in the draft look silly. [Donald Driver](#) winning a ring for the first time in his grand career. [Clay Matthews](#) claiming the prize that neither his father nor his uncle could claim in nearly four decades combined in the league.

Still, you won't find a better story than Nelson.

The former college walk-on scored the first touchdown of the night and set up the Packers' final touchdown with a 38-yard catch. He had the biggest game of his career in the most momentous game of his life. He had nine catches for 140 yards, career highs both.

He even broke the Packers' record for receiving yards in a Super Bowl, a mark set by [Max McGee](#) in [Super Bowl I](#).

Not bad for a farm kid from Small Town, [U.S.A.](#)

Nelson was born and raised in Riley, [Kan.](#), population 886. It's a town with no stoplights. It's a hamlet with no [McDonald's](#) and no [Wal-Mart](#). It's a place where most folks slow down but never stop.

It's a place I know well.

Riley is half an hour from my hometown of [Clay Center](#). It's actually less than that if you take Highway 82 and avoid the speed trap through [Leonardville](#).

I went through Riley hundreds of times as a kid because it was half way to [Manhattan](#).

Even though Riley is within spitting distance of Manhattan, Nelson wasn't recruited by [Kansas State](#). He refused to let that stop him and ended up going there as a walk-on. He became an all-conference receiver for the Wildcats.

I know how he did it, too — hard work.

That's his family's way. See, the [Clay Center Carlsons](#) and the [Riley Nelsons](#) go way back.

It started with my dad, who used to haul cattle for the Nelsons. Our fathers eventually played slowpitch softball in the summer together.

More than a decade later, my younger brother David played basketball and baseball with Jordy. They teamed for five years until the end of middle school, then played against each other off and on throughout high school.

So often in the wide world of sports, we get wrapped up in the bigness of it all. The big stakes. The big money. The big stage.

We forget that all of these guys start somewhere small.

For Nelson, somewhere was a farm in the middle of Kansas.

"It started in the backyard playing around," he said of his Super Bowl dream. "You don't realize it then. You're just playing."

As Nelson talked, his wife, Emily, walked beside him carrying their young son. The Nelsons were sixth-grade sweethearts in Riley.

"Dada!" the toddler in the mini Nelson jersey said.

"What?" his dad finally said, smiling at his son. "You got something to say?"

The Nelsons laughed and smiled some more.

What a country.

A kid who grew up on a farm can become a Super Bowl champion. A guy who wasn't offered a Division-I football scholarship can make some of the biggest plays in the grandest game of them all.

"Maybe kids ... can look and say, 'I can do whatever I want,'" Nelson said. "Not just playing sports. Anything. If you want to do it, if you go for it, things can happen for you.

"You're never limited."