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Bentley, Packers make perfect landing at Resch

Other country acts have brought Green Bay Packers players out during their Resch Center shows, but never from an airplane parked onstage.

Score one for Dierks Bentley.

The country star made a perfect landing on Friday night when not only he climbed out of the cockpit of a life-sized replica of an airplane for his smash “Drunk on a Plane” during the encore, but his opening acts Randy Houser and Drake White, too. And then minutes later a whole stream of folks filed out, including several Packers players and their spouses.

Who was who in the mass of people onstage for the hard-partying finale was hard to distinguish (Josh Sitton, I miss you; always easily recognizable at concerts), but Packers long snapper Brett Goode’s wife, Monica, posted an Instagram photo of the couple onstage during the song, writing “Best husband ever.”

Bentley teased earlier in the night that he had 15 guests at the show who played for some little Pop Warner team before revealing they were Packers players.

“They’re backstage drinking all my, um, water,” Bentley joked.

The crowd took that as its cue to break into a round of “Go Pack Go!” — not the first one of the night.

A few other favorite moments from the show:

» **“Up on the Ridge” as the opener.** Recent radio smashes “Somewhere on a Beach” and “Drunk on a Plane” have shot Bentley to the next level, but the rousing title track off his 2010 bluegrass album was a reminder of how good he has been for so long before he started singing party anthems. The dueling fiddle and banjo to open the 90-minute concert was far better than any dramatic entrance.

» **A sold-out crowd.** Twelve years after playing his first show in Green Bay as a newcomer at the Brown County Fair, Bentley returned to show what he can do as an arena headliner armed with eight albums' worth of material. That a sold-out crowd of about 7,500 was there to greet him wasn't lost on him. He talked about playing nearby in Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Milwaukee and Stevens Point over the years. After the roar of approval for "Different for Girls," he said the night — the second on the fall leg of dates — felt special and that he needed a moment. "Something about tonight, y'all ..." he said, later lightening the mood by adding. "You're just tailgating really early, aren't you? I don't care. I'll take it."

» **Pressing the flesh with the fans.** When he wasn't high fiving fans or grabbing their cell phones or taking a swig from their beers while onstage, he was out among them off of it. He crowd surfed during "Somewhere on a Beach," prompting two security guards to hop onstage really, really fast. Rather than traveling overhead on some kind of flying apparatus to get to a secondary stage at the back of the arena, the guy who is still driving the same 1994 Chevy truck he had when he moved to Nashville did it the old-fashioned way: on foot. It was a crowded path to get there (and back). "I think I made it one piece," he said.

» **His softer side.** It was a rowdy finish as Bentley unleashed "What Was I Thinkin'" and "Sideways" before returning for the encore, but on the flip side, two of his most thoughtful performances came just before from the small in-the-round stage out in the crowd. He sang an emotional and inspiring "Riser." Rather than simply dedicating "Freedom" to those in the military, he talked poignantly about troops in camouflage and face paint and the significance of the American flag patch on their uniforms, searching out the flag in the Resch Center before he started to sing. The woman in front of me was in tears.

» **Speaking of tears** ... Video of his family and fans accompanied "Every Mile a Memory." It ended with a series of black and white photos of his equally famous dog, Jake, who died earlier this year, and Bentley turning away from the crowd to look up at the images. Gulp.

» **His title as beer shotgunning champion stands.** Known for hauling a fan onstage to shotgun a beer with him, he chose the fan who flashed a sign early in the night asking for a chance. "You know I do this for a living, right?" Bentley said, as they each stood with a beer in hand. It was no contest. Bentley had his can crushed while his challenger was still chugging.

» **Houser gets taken aback.** It wasn't just Bentley who was floored by the reception at the Resch. Randy Houser, who has a cannon of a voice, belted out "Like a Cowboy" solo on acoustic guitar. When the crowd broke into lengthy applause mid-song, Houser had to step back for a minute and appeared emotional. "I got lost for a minute," he said. "Hell, that was awesome." He said that must be what it feels like at Lambeau Field on a game day.

» **Dressing like it's a home game weekend.** Houser's band, who disappeared from the stage during "Like a Cowboy," returned to play the "Go Pack Go!" music, each musician wearing some

kind of Packers garb, including jerseys, a Cheesehead top hat with a feather in it and the keyboard player in a bathrobe. Points for originality on the latter.