

# Individual Final Report Card

Journal Sentinel beat writer Bob McGinn hands out final grades for the Packers:

## Offense

### WIDE RECEIVERS (6)

**Corey Bradford:** Second season of promise turned to dust with cracked fibula in August and damaged quadriceps tendon in Nov. Both injuries occurred on special teams. Underwent surgery Wed. and should be running within a month. Deep threat who gets 1 more chance in 2001.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Donald Driver:** No more than a No. 4 WR on a good team. Shows toughness catching in crowds and was most explosive and fearless receiver on club after the catch. Too small for steady workload. Left horrible last impression by dropping the ball three times in 1<sup>st</sup> career start.

**Grade:** D-plus.

**Antonio Freeman:** Just another run-of-the-mill receiver the last two years. Almost never caught a pass when he was isolated wide by himself on one side of the field. Needed coaches' scheming (motion, slot, multiple receivers) just to get open, and even then didn't separate easily against better cornerbacks. Deep dimension disappeared. Displayed a me-first attitude off the field that repeatedly disrupted the team and began to affect some young players. Basically was telling his coaches and teammates to butt out and had to be benched for crucial last game after pulling one last brazen stunt. Returns for one reason: He's too expensive to dump.

**Grade:** D-plus.

**Charles Lee:** Should get every chance to start in '01 based on his ratio of size to speed and spectacular deep catches in exhibition season. At times, the regular-season game seemed a little too big for him, but with maturity his talent should show. Proved his moxie in Detroit by returning punts well when called upon for the first time in his career.

**Grade:** D.

**Anthony Lucas:** Had knee-ligament surgery Aug. 1 and never was seen again. He couldn't be with a better team, given how weak this corps of wide receivers is. A deep threat at Arkansas with an unorthodox running style.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Bill Schroeder:** Turns 30 next week. Clearly, the Packers would prefer not having to start him despite his catching 139 of Brett Favre's passes for 2,050 yards in last 2 years. By NFL standards, a low-level No. 2 receiver who would fit nicely as a No. 3 and on special teams. Improved hands to adequate level through repetition and hard work. Shows burst with ball in the air and a knack on shallow crossing patterns, but isn't a natural after the catch or courageous venturing into no-man's land.

**Grade:** C-plus.

### **TIGHT ENDS (3)**

**Tyrone Davis:** Coaches don't seem prepared to get rid of him and market value at an all-time low, so expect his return at minimum salary after having had rotator-cuff surgery last week. Gentle giant who had worst drop ratio (12.5%) on team. Played 14 games and had merely one catch for more than 20 yards. Probably staff's wishful thinking to expect much more in terms of development from him.

**Grade:** D-plus.

**Bubba Franks:** Won't turn 23 until next week and played like a beginner all season. Sky's the limit, especially considering the dearth of tight ends in the NFC. Prototype size and pretty good speed, but hands were a disappointment and his blocking was so-so. Needs off-season in Green Bay's weight room for more lower- and upper-body strength.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Ryan Wetnight:** Former Bear is 30 years old. Probably won't be back unless Davis leaves as unrestricted free agent and coaches want at least one veteran in the mix.

**Grade:** D.

### **OFFENSIVE LINEMEN (11)**

**Chad Clifton:** Figured to be a 1<sup>st</sup> year dud after signing a week late and missing 3 weeks of camp with sprained knee. Thrust into lineup when Mike Wahle collapsed in middle of sixth game and played as well if not better the rest of the way than Ross Verba did as rookie left tackle in '97. Massive, yet light on his feet. Poised, yet has a mean streak. Works to finish. Moves well enough to play guard. Allowed one sack in 10½ games. Unlimited potential.

**Grade:** B.

**Scott Curry:** Sat out season on injured reserve with shoulder and knee injuries. Sixth-round pick in '99 faces uphill battle in crowded tackle corps.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Mike Flanagan:** If the Packers aren't ready to cut the cord with Frank Winters they should be. Flanagan, 27, enters final year of his contract with \$935,000 cap salary and almost has to play. Made first 2 starts of 5 year career for an injured Winters and fared well. Ability to pull, a la Jets' Kevin Mawae and Buccaneers' Jeff Christy, would provide another dimension for run game.

**Grade:** C.

**Earl Dotson:** Faces uncertain future with post-operative back and cap salaries of \$3.55 million in '01 and \$4.1 million in '02. Might have been rendered obsolete by performances of rookie tackles. Just turned 30. An aging warrior who played all of '99 with a bulging disc and had to shut it down in September when disc popped again.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Richard Mercier:** Late waiver claim from Broncos, where he spent five weeks under the tutelage of famed offensive line coach Alex Gibbs. Tough, squatty rookie who started for four seasons at Miami. When Craig Heimburger was signed by Bengals Dec. 14, he became the new young guard prospect for camp.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Marco Rivera:** Allowed just 10½ sacks, knockdowns and hurries, which represented immense improvement from team-high total of 25 in '99. Continued to find ways to get better in 3<sup>rd</sup> season as starter. Rugged, no-nonsense kind of player has overcome athletic deficiencies with nose-to-the-grindstone approach. Was used much more than Verba to pull on a successful counter play because staff preferred how he hit on the move.

**Grade:** B.

**Barry Stokes:** Fun-loving journeyman who backs up equally well at either tackle or guard. Not good enough to be a starter but ought to be in the league.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Mark Tauscher:** Stunning success story. Seventh-round pick with one year of regular duty at Wisconsin who was drafted as a guard but ended up as the starting right tackle for almost 15 full games. Near midseason one opposing defensive line coach said Tauscher simply wasn't a starting offensive lineman after playing the Packers. Proved the naysayers wrong by never getting embarrassed and playing Reggie White, Robert Porcher and Chidi Ahanotu to a standstill. Looks like a plodder but performs with excellent balance, strength and toughness. Just a football player.

**Grade:** B-minus.

**Ross Verba:** Made an unwelcome move from left tackle to left guard and really struggled in first half of season. Was responsible for 11 ½ "bad" runs in first eight games but only 5½ in second half. Criticized early by coaches and the press for lacking toughness, then reacted beautifully and had a tremendous last month. Performances against Miami's Daryl Gardener and Tampa Bay's Warren Sapp the second time around increased his free-agent market value and, to the Packers' dismay, probably priced him out of their range. Still figures as a left tackle in the minds of some scouts.

**Grade:** C-plus.

**Mike Wahle:** Has played three seasons but won't turn 24 until March. At this point, a much better run blocker than pass blocker. Is more than athletic enough to neutralize rushers, but showed almost no stopping power early and had to be benched as the left tackle after six games. If Dotson and Winters depart, he's the next best lineman and gets first shot at left guard. Didn't play well at guard in '99 and has said his preference is tackle. Still needs to grow up.

**Grade:** D-minus.

**Frank Winters:** Played one-armed for last 3½ games with biceps injury and really had problems, which affects him in eyes of scouts who watch tape and don't know he was playing hurt. Regarded by personnel men as the poorest center in the division but not by Packers, who still value his unflappability on calls and his uncompromising nastiness. Cap salary jumps from \$830,000 to \$1.89 million in '01, and if he digs in his career in Green Bay likely is over. Given the shortage of centers in the NFC, however, he still might surface elsewhere for a 15<sup>th</sup> season.

**Grade:** C-plus.

## QUARTERBACKS (3)

**Brett Favre:** Missed most of training camp with "tennis" elbow, started poorly and then settled in to recapture old glory against the Vikings twice, Indianapolis and Chicago. Ranked 17th in passer rating (78.0) and 20th in completion percentage (58.3%), but made conscious effort to reduce interceptions and did. Wear and tear has robbed him of the ability to make astounding plays and throws on a consistent basis, but still does it at times and ranks among the game's top four or five quarterbacks. An all-time competitor whose spirit for the game and thirst for victory refuses to ebb.

**Grade:** B.

**Matt Hasselbeck:** To trade or not to trade? He's obligated to the Packers for two more years, and it's not like an Aaron Brooks is waiting to move up behind him. Replacing him adequately would take money or a fairly high draft choice, plus luck. GM Ron Wolf might turn down an offer of a No. 1 pick from 20 on down for "Mr. August," but probably not one 18 and higher.

**Grade:** C.

**Danny Wuerffel:** Has too little physical ability and needs to be replaced.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

## RUNNING BACKS (7):

**Herbert Goodman:** A spring season in NFL Europe probably would do him a world of good. Green as grass and still a liability in pass protection, but runs fast and can run hard.

**Grade:** D.

**Ahman Green:** Mike Holmgren's loss was the Packers' immense gain. Ranked 15th in the NFL with 1,175 yards even though he had just 90 yards in the first three games and didn't become the guy until Week 9. No showboating in this young man. Just hit the hole hard, take on tacklers with a punishing fury and hand the ball to the official after 13 touchdowns. Played in a knee brace for 10 ½ games. Fumbled six times (losing four), dropped 10 passes and had some assignment errors, but most of that cleaned up down the stretch and he dominated against Colts, Lions and Vikings. Well coached by Kippy Brown, who will be sorely missed. Had 12 runs and receptions for 20 yards or more, the same number Dorsey Levens had in '97 and '99. Won't be 24 until February.

**Grade:** B-plus.

**William Henderson:** Played special teams for the first time since '95 and performed well. Perhaps it put him in an even more physical mind-set because his blocking picked up this year, too. Carried only twice (for 18 yards) but often broke tackles on his 35 receptions, gaining 149 of his 234 yards after the catch. Reliable and durable, having not missed a game since '95 opener.

**Grade:** B-minus.

**Dorsey Levens:** Sandwiched by Dolphins Derrick Rodgers and Patrick Surtain on 2-yard burst in Week 8, bruised his right kneecap and didn't play again. Earlier, patellar tendinitis in left knee required arthroscopic surgery and constant treatment. Turns 31 this spring and is finished as a big-money back. His cap salary of \$7.4 million for '01 must be slashed or he's long gone. A resourceful runner-receiver-blocker who lacks Green's acceleration but still has value if healthy. It's a big if.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Rondell Mealey:** Looked like a player in second half of exhibition opener before suffering season-ending ligament damage in left knee and spending the year on injured reserve. Built along the lines of Edgar Bennett and might double as a fullback.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**De'Mond Parker:** Played about five plays a game in the final eight weeks after returning from January 2000 knee-ligament surgery. Didn't look like the same player until overtime of the final game, when he replaced an injured Green and spearheaded game-winning drive. A small but relatively tough speed back that didn't regain his speed this year and will have to in '01.

**Grade:** D-plus.

**Matt Snider:** Showed marked improvement on special teams in his second season and became a student of the game under assistant coach Frank Novak. Played even less from scrimmage this year than last year but visions of his 66-yard touchdown catch in the exhibition finale continue to pique interest.

**Grade:** D.

## Defense

### DEFENSIVE LINEMEN (10)

**David Bowens:** Fourth on the team in sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 10½ but most of his damage came in the first two months. Weighed 266 pounds in early August but was below 250 by the last game and struggling to hold up against the run. Possesses some natural pass-rush skills but isn't overly fast and doesn't always play the defense correctly. Did a respectable job in "spinner" role in the dime defense.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Santana Dotson:** Is 31 years old and lugs a 2001 cap salary of \$4.8 million. Rated by scouts as fourth best at his position in the NFC Central. Coming off a serious quadriceps tear and might not be ready for the first game. Nevertheless, the Packers view him as an integral part of their plans for next season and beyond. Third in sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 19 but sixth among defensive linemen in tackles for loss with 1 ½.

**Grade:** B-minus.

**Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila:** Averaged 15 snaps in seven games as a right end on passing downs. Classic "tweener" who added 12 to 15 pounds during the season and then it wasn't so easy for tackles to shove him off course. Left positive final-game impression by thoroughly outplaying Tampa Bay tackle George Hegamin. Really goes all out.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Vonnie Holliday:** Started four games, sat out three with a hamstring injury, started two, sat out another with a sprained ankle and then turned in probably the best performances of his three-year career in the final month. The team's finest defensive lineman. Second in sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 26. Will need prodding and isn't always the toughest of players. An end all the way, not a tackle. Can stack the point and sort through bodies to find the ball.

**Grade:** B.

**Cletidus Hunt:** Wound up starting 11 games, including seven at "power" end and four at tackle. Shared lead among linemen in tackles for loss with 5½, four more than last year. An intriguing 300-pounder with quickness, power and an ability to slip blocks and make plays. Still, too often allows himself to get wired to blocks and then doesn't always fight to get off. Best when used inside, but plays too much like Dotson to start alongside him.

**Grade:** C-plus.

**Billy Lyon:** Eighth in snaps this season (217) compared to fourth in '99 (586). Didn't have nearly as much impact as last year, for several reasons: He had to play mostly end, and tackle is his best position; the one-gap scheme isn't best-suited for him; and a mid-September knee injury limited him all year. Ideal for 15 to 20 snaps a game inside when his knee's right.

**Grade:** D.

**Russell Maryland:** Salt-of-the-earth nose tackle began finding the football in the last three games after doing little more than absorbing shock for three months. All-world hustler, worker and dignified role model. Better athlete than most men in the middle but tends to wear down. Played 61.3% of the snaps, compared with 48% for Gilbert Brown in '99, and didn't knock the quarterback down even once. Club would like him back but perhaps not as a starter or at his \$1.95 million cap number, up from \$1.3 million.

**Grade:** C.

**Austin Robbins:** Arrived with 2 games left and was on the field for 11 plays, pressuring the passer twice. Former Raider and Saint turns 30 in March and isn't expected back.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**John Thierry:** Led the club in sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 31 and the linemen in playing time (76%). Enjoyed most productive year of his unfulfilled career even though he had to play hurt (knee, shoulders) for 16 games. Couldn't lift weights during the season and was manhandled at times at the point of attack, but never just caved in. Will never be a polished, instinctive rusher but accelerates like a linebacker and will punish quarterbacks because of it. Cap figure increases by about \$1 million but figures to return for what the Packers hope is a diminished role.

**Grade:** B-minus.

**Steve Warren:** Thick, squat rookie who averaged 17 snaps in the first 13 games before blowing out his quadriceps tendon in Chicago. Uses quick feet to stay off the ground and scramble into throwing lanes. Didn't show starter's ability but should be a contributor.

**Grade:** C-minus.

### LINEBACKERS (8)

**Na'il Diggs:** Started 14 games on the strong side as a rookie, missed just one tackle, allowed only one touchdown pass and one pass of 20 yards or more, and didn't have a penalty. Didn't make nearly enough plays, but has the athletic ability to do that in a year or two. A smart, confident, with-it individual. Needs strength but not necessarily more weight for improvement at point of attack:

**Grade:** C-plus.

**Chris Gizzi:** Former Bronco who was claimed in late August because he knew Ed Donatell's system. Middle linebacker only. Gets by more on smarts than ability.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Bernardo Harris:** Led team in tackles for third time in four years. Fit better in one-gap system and was No. 1 in tackles for loss with 8 ½ after being shut out in '99. His play-by-the-numbers mentality lends itself to dependability but not necessarily big plays. Runs well for the position but doesn't exhibit much feel in coverage (allowed six plays of 20 yards or more, four touchdown passes).

**Grade:** B.

**Eugene McCaslin:** A seventh-round draft choice who spent most of year on the practice squad. Room to grow because this was just his second season as a linebacker. Needs to add 5 more pounds and be 230-plus.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Mike Morton:** Good special teams player who can swing easily among all three linebacker positions. Has lost some athleticism in six seasons and is a fringe player now.

**Grade:** D.

**Nate Wayne:** Special-teams-only performer for two years in Denver who played almost every snap in 13 games and made 126 tackles. Undersized tough guy who plays with just the right temperament. Fast, fly-around type who overpursued early but then stayed home. Has the speed to excel in coverage but tends to blow assignments. Missed a team-leading 24 tackles, but part of that is he's so instinctive and gets to plays others don't.

**Grade:** C-plus.

**Brian Williams:** Due a \$1 million roster bonus Feb. 13 that would swell his cap salary to \$3.9 million in '01. Nettled some within the organization by going to California for second surgery on torn patellar tendon. Didn't play well at all in four games before knee infection ended his season. A better player than Wayne but also more expensive and possibly a medical risk, too.

**Grade:** D-plus.

**K.D. Williams:** High-energy trade acquisition who led special teams in tackles with 17. Strictly a backup, only on the strong side. Needs to be more reliable.

**Grade:** D-plus.

### **DEFENSIVE BACKS (10)**

**Chris Akins:** Late-round pick by Packers in '99 who arrived on waivers from Cowboys Nov. 1 but got in only two games. Is not the good young safety that the club badly needs.

**Grade:** Incomplete.

**Gary Berry:** Struggled in coverage against Buffalo as emergency dime back, played two more games and then suffered season-ending neck injury on opening kickoff Oct. 1. His career in Green Bay appears finished for medical reasons.

**Grade:** D.

**LeRoy Butler:** Maybe not an elite player anymore but still a very good one. Adapted well to more time in center field and helped free Darren Sharper to find the ball. Bedrock leader who cares deeply about winning and helping young players become pros. Already accepted a paycut and plans to start at strong safety for two more years. Superior instincts and toughness.

**Grade:** B.

**Antuan Edwards:** Sat out four games early with a knee injury and spent balance of year as dime back. Can't cover outside and hasn't demonstrated the capacity to intimidate from safety. Average tackler. Best part of his game is sorting out formations, being in the right place and breaking on the ball.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Tod McBride:** Had to start six games at cornerback and was burned for six plays of 20 yards or more and 3½ touchdowns. Has better deep-cover ability than Edwards but isn't nearly as polished or alert. Possesses excellent size and tackles crisply. Dropped almost 10 pounds to play cornerback and finished close to 195.

**Grade:** C-minus.

**Scott McGarrahian:** Rated by scouts as one of the two best special-teams players in the NFC Central. A pleasure to watch covering kickoffs. Doesn't seem to grasp the full picture on defense and probably isn't equipped to be a starting safety.

**Grade:** C-plus.

**Mike McKenzie:** Needed arthroscopic knee surgery to repair cartilage damage Sept. 4, sat out five games and came back to start eight at left cornerback. Allowed more 20-plus plays (seven) than any defender and led the defense in penalties (five). Was more vulnerable to deep speed than as a rookie, perhaps because of the knee. Also didn't tackle as well or compete as hard, inexplicably loafing at times. NFC Central scouts continue to speak highly of him.

**Grade:** C.

**Allen Rossum:** NFL's fourth-ranked kickoff returner (25.8-yard average) and 17th-ranked punt returner (8.6). Fumbled four times, losing one. Filled in for about 10 games as the dime back and was responsible for only one play (a screen pass at Chicago) of more than 20 yards. An outstanding gunner on the punt team, too. A tough little man who knows no fear.

**Grade:** B-plus.

**Darren Sharper:** Completely turned his sagging career around and deserved to make the Pro Bowl, which he did. Played the ball as he did at William & Mary (9 interceptions, 23 passes knocked down) and missed only nine tackles compared with a team-leading total of 18 a year ago. Worked hard to improve his weaknesses and it paid off handsomely. Had more sacks, knockdowns and hurries (8) than any other defensive back or linebacker, covered well in the flat and downfield and delivered some punishing hits.

**Grade:** A-minus.

**Tyrone Williams:** Slowly but surely is gaining respect as one of the better cover cornerbacks in the NFL. Pattern reading gets better all the time, almost always in the right place and loves to compete. Still could be more physical with receivers but tackled a bit better this year and improved adjustments to the ball. An example of a player who took the big money and was inspired to new heights.

**Grade:** B.