

# Packer team grades: McGinn's analysis

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## **PASSING OFFENSE (B-)**

Averaged 252.7 net yards in first 10 games and 190.4 in last seven. Ranked 10th overall (226.7), worst finish since 1993. Brett Favre's passer rating was 101.7 in first nine games and 64.9 in last eight. Injuries and some bad weather were factors, but big-play production beyond Donald Driver was even more critical. Crashed from third in average yards per completion (12.5) to 27th (10.6). Terry Glenn (3.91) and Bubba Franks (2.61) offered next to nothing after the catch. Driver averaged 4.62 after the catch, an OK number but below what even aging Antonio Freeman (4.68) posted last year. According to Elias Sports Bureau, Favre completed just two of 18 regular-season passes 30 yards or more beyond the line of scrimmage. Team had just 10 passes of 35 yards or more, down from 18 in '01. Of the 10, just three were caught more than 20 yards downfield. Despite rash of injuries, offensive line was charged with only 14 of 29 sacks. Ahman Green really went downhill as a check-down receiver with 9 drops, four more than last year.

## **RUSHING OFFENSE (B)**

Ranked 12th, best showing since 1997 after finishing 21st, 23rd, 21st and 25th in last four years. Average of 120.8 yards best since '85. Moved to more of a misdirection style of run game after years of stretch-isolation-draw play emphasis. "Stutter weak," with Marco Rivera usually pulling, and "counter gap," with Mike Wahle usually pulling, became signature plays. Asthma and assorted injuries reduced Green's production from 1,567 yards (4.6 average) in 2001 to 1,274 (4.3) in '02. Also, after making 21 of 24 third-and-1's (87.5%) in 2000-'01, Green was just 10 of 15 (66.7%) in '02. Green's reduced explosiveness reflected by his seven carries for 20 yards or more, down from 12 in '01 and 10 in '00. Wild-card loss to Atlanta was only game in which ground game was completely shut down. Green trimmed his fumbles from six in 2000 and '01 to four this year. Offensive coordinator Tom Rossley and Sherman called runs on 42.6% of plays, down slightly from last year (43.1%) and the NFL average (43.3%) of this year.

## **PASS DEFENSE (A)**

Ranked third (5.2) in yards allowed per pass (opponents' net passing yardage divided by attempts and sacks) after ranking first last year (4.99). Darren Sharper allowed just 11/2 plays of 20 yards or more, and Mike McKenzie and Tyrone Williams allowed fewer (101/2) as a pair than the Packers' starting cornerbacks have from 1994-'01. Tied for third in interceptions with 24 and returned four for touchdowns, including two by Marques Anderson. Despite a slew of injuries high-energy pass rush ranked eighth. Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila had 41 sacks, knockdowns and pressures, twice as many as runnerup Cletidus Hunt (19). Coordinator Ed Donatell blitzed less than ever before, sending five or more on merely 19.7% of dropbacks and six or more on just 5.5%. Linebackers played pass better than run and had 5 interceptions. Opposing quarterbacks had regular-season passer rating of only 68.7. No 100-yard day by a receiver allowed in last seven weeks but five in first 10, led by Detroit's Az Hakim (7-143) in Week 9.

### **RUN DEFENSE (F)**

Deplorable in every way. Allowed 4.84 yards per carry, 31st in the NFL behind Seattle (4.88) and the Packers' second-worst in history since statistics first were kept in 1933. Coach Liz Blackbourn's 1956 team yielded 5.12. Gave up 124.9 per game, team's worst since '90, and then 192 more in the wild-card game (it was 210 before Atlanta lost 18 on its last four rushes). By subjective count, Anderson was worst tackler on a bad tackling team with 19 misses, followed by Hardy Nickerson and Nate Wayne with 12 and Na'il Diggs with 10. Opponents had 96 runs of 8 yards or more, including eight wide-receiver reverses for 117 yards, but only three of the 96 were for more than 35 yards. Quarterbacks carried 69 times for 349 yards (5.1). Nickerson, Wayne and Gbaja-Biamila were routinely overpowered, Gilbert Brown was available for just 30.4% of the snaps, Vonnie Holliday missed six games, Joe Johnson missed 12 games, Mike McKenzie didn't tackle as well and safeties Antuan Edwards and Anderson were wholly unreliable in run support.

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (C)**

Perceived by many as being a lot worse than they were. Finished 18th in an overall ranking of 10 special teams categories, a slight improvement from 21st last year in Frank Novak's third season as coach. Six of 12 playoff teams ranked lower than 18th. Ryan Longwell bounced back from his poorest season to make 82.4% of his field goals, eighth best in the NFL, and his kickoffs were a little better than last year. Punter Josh Bidwell had another respectable season but suffered the first block of his career in the playoffs when Matt Bowen blew an assignment. The coverage teams ranked 13th on punts and 15th on kickoffs. Darrien Gordon, J.J. Moses and Eric Metcalf didn't lose any fumbles but were worthless as punt returners, as the team's average of 4.2 will attest. That's the worst in Green Bay since '70. And the kickoff returners (20.4, 26th) were little better. Paris Lenon led in solo tackles with 16. Novak cited Lenon, Torrance Marshall, Robert Ferguson and Bowen as top contributors.

### **PERSONNEL MOVES (C+)**

Coach-GM Mike Sherman oversaw a personnel department that found five keepers in a six-player draft, made an exceptional rookie free-agent signing in Kevin Barry and a good one in Tony Fisher. The rookies, together with solid in-season acquisition Bryant Westbrook, provided the superb depth that prevented a general collapse in lieu of injury epidemic. Sherman's draft-day deal in which he gave up a second-round pick (but gained a fifth in return that turned out to be Aaron Kampman) to move up for Javon Walker at No. 20 remains highly questionable given what middle linebacker Napoleon Harris (No. 23) did for Oakland and no doubt would have done for Green Bay. Was Terry Glenn worth two fourth-round picks? Was Johnson worth a \$6.5 million signing bonus? Was Nickerson worth \$1.5 million? At this point, the answers are probably not, no and definitely not. Gutting wide-receiver corps was both aggressive and smart. Vice president Andrew Brandt's ability to re-sign Driver, Wahle and Mark Tauscher to below-market deals was skillful and significant. Letting Allen Rossum get away was bad enough but failing to replace him was a black mark on entire personnel department.

### **COACHING (B+)**

Sherman finished third in coach of the year balloting by the Pro Football Writers of America behind Philadelphia's Andy Reid and Tennessee's Jeff Fisher. To be 12-4 with so many injuries was a tribute to his resolute approach and painstaking attention to all matters, big and small. If there's a problem, Sherman thinks he can outwork it, and he usually does. The dominating victory at New England without seven starters by the second series was a tremendous feat. Consumed by job and task at hand, Sherman can lighten and brighten such as when he invited Joe Frazier and Bill Russell to address the team. The Packers had 108 penalties, their most since 1987. Let emotions get the best of him with unsportsmanlike conduct penalty in Week 4 and post-game hissing contest with Warren Sapp in Week 11. But, with home-field on the line in the Meadowlands and playoff home unbeaten mark on the line at Lambeau, his team caved. Possibly cost team a touchdown by not challenging punt-return fumble vs. Atlanta. Entire staff deserves praise for NFL-leading turnover differential of plus-17, best in Green Bay since '72. Offensive line coach Larry Beightol was voted No. 1 position coach in NFC North.

### **OVERALL (B+)**

Regular-season record of 12-4 tied for NFL best with Philadelphia and Tampa Bay. Began the season hoping to overhaul defending champion Chicago in new NFC North Division and put a stranglehold on the worst of the NFL's eight divisions five weeks into the season. Won first division championship since 1997 by a whopping six-game margin over Minnesota. NFL's only unbeaten team at home in regular season, 8-8 against the spread and 4-4 on the road after usual ugly defeats at the Metrodome and Raymond James Stadium. Besieged by injuries (a total of 14 starters missed a total of 68 starts) from Week 2 on after remarkably injury-free summer. The Packers seemed almost immune to injury fallout with winning streaks of seven and four games. However, in the regular season finale, they suffered their most lopsided regular-season defeat in 11 years by succumbing to the Jets, 42-17. And then, after a short week, the lack of enthusiasm, effort and execution led to the appallingly bad performance against the Falcons and elimination in their first playoff game for only the second time in their last eight post-season appearances.

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