

# Rating The Packers at Texans

## Ugly memories fade as triumphs pile up

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**Green Bay** - They're winning in domes. They're winning with defense. They're winning by coming from behind. And they're winning without Ahman Green.

Six weeks ago, the Green Bay Packers ranked as the biggest flop in the National Football League. Today, they're playing like a full-fledged Super Bowl contender.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 16-13 victory Sunday night over the Houston Texans, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

### **RECEIVERS (5)**

The wide receivers and tight ends combined for 28 receptions and 345 yards against a secondary that included top-notch cornerbacks Aaron Glenn and rookie Dunta Robinson. The only dropped passes were by Antonio Chatman and Ben Steele. Donald Driver caught 10 of the 12 balls thrown to him whereas Javon Walker nabbed nine of 15. With the single safety occupied elsewhere, Driver ran by Robinson after a momentary fake of a slant and made a finger-tip catch deep in the end-zone corner for a 24-yard touchdown. He also set up a field goal by taking a 50-yard pass away from FS Marcus Coleman in the deep middle when the other safety bit up and covered Bubba Franks. The timing now between Driver and Brett Favre is sensational. Walker used his big body to pound away in the short zones. Both Walker and Ferguson had to leave with injuries but later returned. The Packers trailed by 10 in the fourth quarter when Ferguson sold out on the sideline against classic Cover 2 coverage to make a 23-yard catch. That was guts personified. Franks was open down the seam for 27 when the safety cheated away from him.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (2 1/2)**

Not only did the 3-4 front require adjustments but so did the thickness of the Texans' five defensive linemen. Even without LE Gary Walker (foot), who still is a solid starter, the Texans mustered a surprising degree of pass rush without blitzing (five or more rushers on 20% of passes, none with six or more). Backup Junior Ioane made two big plays against Grey Ruegamer. Mark Tauscher had trouble moving wide body Jerry Deloach, Walker's backup. And Chad Clifton wasn't as firm as usual against bull rushes. The group also was called for three holding penalties that negated 24 yards in rushing. Marco Rivera was called for throwing down NT Seth Payne on a toss the other way. Mike Wahle was called for holding SILB Jay Foreman on two of the team's signature "Power-O" counter plays. He was guilty on the first, less guilty on the second. There were no false-start penalties even though the roof was closed.

## **QUARTERBACKS (5)**

This was the way it often used to be for Favre in the 1990s before Ahman Green came along to balance the offense. With three running backs out and the Texans leading, the Packers rushed only six times in the second half compared to 32 dropbacks. The Packers used spread formations to open up the defense and then Favre cut loose like he was on a turkey shoot. Time after time, he made clutch throws and decisions on third and long. He remained under control despite the oppressive noise. His first interception should have been thrown elsewhere when the middle safety stayed home and was double-covering Walker to the post. Chatman was open on the second interception but the pass was a little too much inside. To make interceptions, Glenn and Robinson had to make sensational individual efforts. Favre was absolutely dynamite on the move, just in case the young whippersnapper (David Carr) or anyone else didn't think he could still do that. He found the open man, flung darts and even scrambled for 17 on a third and 7 in the fourth quarter.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

Green (ribs, 12 snaps), Nick Luchey (shoulder, 4) and Walter Williams (ankle, 7) didn't last long due to injury. Green was tackled by LB Kailee Wong on the first play of the game and Luchey was smashed hard by LB Jamie Sharper on his lone carry eight plays later. Williams carried the ball on six of his seven plays and exercised better patience with each attempt. He stiff-armed Coleman in the open field, turning an eight-yard counter play into a 28-yard breakout. Green hasn't broken many tackles by safeties on that same play this season. The injuries forced Tony Fisher to play all but one of 33 second-half snaps and William Henderson to play 20 (33 total). Fisher was penalized for holding on one blitz and then whiffed on Sharper to ruin another pass. Otherwise, Fisher stepped up and stymied the Texans' linebackers, all of whom rushed hard and punished blockers. Henderson's blocking wasn't as good as it has been. That might have been due to different running backs, unfamiliarity with the 3-4 scheme and fatigue.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

The Texans' offensive line had been overrun the last two weeks against Denver and Indianapolis. That didn't happen Sunday but Cletidus Hunt (40 snaps), Grady Jackson (48), Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (50), Cullen Jenkins (23) and Aaron Kampman (43) all had their moments. RG Zach Wiegert was supposed to be Houston's best blocker but he wasn't close to being strong enough or quick enough to block Hunt on about five running plays. With the exception of a 24-yard scramble by Carr on which he got pushed too far outside, Hunt had a big day. Jackson didn't do much early but as the game wore on he had his way with C Steve McKinney and the guards. When Hunt and Jackson are playing like this, it's not easy to run inside. When the game was on the line, Jackson found the stamina to play the final 17 snaps. Gbaja-Biamila came off LT Seth Wand so fast on his first sack (3.5 seconds) that LG Chester Pitts, who was supposed to pick him up inside, couldn't get there in time even with a desperate lunge. His other sack was of the fortuitous variety when Carr scrambled toward him to avoid the onrushing Jenkins. Corey Williams, who had been the No. 3 end, was replaced for the first time by Kenny Peterson (10). The Packers need more out of all the backups, especially R-Kal Truluck (13).

## **LINEBACKERS (4)**

Na'il Diggs probably played as well as he ever has. The Texans' offensive linemen couldn't get to Diggs on wide plays because he reacted so fast. When Diggs got there, he did some serious head-hunting on Domanick Davis. Part of the reason why Diggs looked so impressive was the fact that Davis is a step slow for a featured back. Still, he tackled him twice for no gain and twice for gains of 1. Hannibal Navies held the fort on the strong side but was fooled completely on the man coverage he was supposed to have on Davis' 6-yard touchdown reception. Nick Barnett didn't get much chance to rush with the Packers blitzing on merely 15% of passes and his play against the run was mediocre at best.

## **SECONDARY (4 ½)**

The Packers shaded one safety toward Andre Johnson's side of the field, effectively neutralizing him as a deep threat. The underneath coverage of Johnson was up to Al Harris, who matched up with him across the field. Carr completed five of nine passes for 106 yards to Johnson with Harris covering. With the exception of a 20-yard slant on which he opened up his hips, Harris stayed square in the bump zone and contested every yard. The short crossing pattern to Johnson that ruptured into a 49-yard gain was the fault of Harris. He was too far off in man coverage, resulting in his collision with Michael Hawthorne. For some reason, Carr didn't go after Ahmad Carroll or dime backs Joey Thomas and Hawthorne. Thus, Jabar Gaffney and Corey Bradford were shut out. Bradford beat Carroll cleanly on a potential 61-yard touchdown but Bhawoh Jue displayed great range in a single-safety coverage to bat away the pass. Carroll tackled better than has been, too.

## **KICKERS (4 ½)**

Nerveless Ryan Longwell somehow got the game-winner just barely through from 46 after a shaky snap from Rob Davis. A superior hold by Bryan Barker gave Longwell a chance. He also hit from 23 and 39 besides missing from 49. Longwell averaged 59 yards and 3.9 seconds of hang time on four kickoffs. Barker's three punts had averages of 40 (gross), 27.3 (net) and 4.0 (hang time).

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (2)**

Carroll and the other holdup blockers were destroyed by their Texan counterparts but Chatman never flinched. He's a gutsy, resilient and dependable punt returner. Steele almost got one of Barker's punts blocked but then almost blocked one of Chad Stanley's. Torrance Marshall drew two major penalties for senseless plays and Truluck was flagged for mouthing off at J.J. Moses. Where's the discipline? Moses made the Packers miss six tackles, including three by Nick Rogers.