

# Rating The Packers vs Lions

## No apologies for subpar victory

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**Green Bay** - Winning in the National Football League means never having to apologize.

At the same time, the Green Bay Packers understand they'll have to play much better down the road than they did Sunday in a 16-13 victory over the Detroit Lions. It was the Packers' third sweep in the series in the last four years; that hasn't happened for them against Detroit since 1944-'47.

Joey Harrington delivered just one really good pass on a cold, windy late afternoon at Lambeau Field but it was the final ball he threw and it was dropped by Tai Streets. If the Lions had a legitimate quarterback and a real passing game, the Packers probably still would be tied with Minnesota atop the NFC North.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Lions, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

### **Receivers (2)**

The Lions matched CB Dre' Bly on Javon Walker in the base defense but used him against whomever played the slot in their nickel. With Walker all but neutralized, Donald Driver made the two biggest plays either team made in the air. His 23-yard touchdown catch on a seam route between CB Keith Smith and S Bracy Walker was a portrait in courage and concentration. Last week, Brett Favre didn't see Bubba Franks open deep on a bootleg. This week, the same play was reconfigured with Driver running the over route and Favre delivered a strike for 39 yards. This was the first game since the playoff game in Philadelphia last season that the Packers had as many as four drops. They were by Bubba Franks (in the end zone), Antonio Chatman, Ben Steele and Driver. Franks usually catches more against zone than man coverage, and with the Lions playing mainly zone Franks had the most balls (six) thrown to him since the '03 opener. He caught four for 29. Neither tight end blocked very well.

### **Offensive line (4)**

The Lions' front four is outstanding. That's why defensive coordinator Dick Jauron felt compelled to blitz on just three of 41 dropbacks. The Lions' lone sack was the responsibility of Franks on a bootleg. They had no knockdowns (discounting one in which DT Shaun Rogers was penalized) and only three hurries. Rogers spent about 65% of the game across from Mike Wahle after generally playing against Marco Rivera in Week 6. Wahle had a bad play or two but otherwise hung tough in a duel of Pro Bowl talents. Even more consistent was Mark Tauscher against LE Cory Redding. RE James Hall, a much-improved pass rusher and hustler extraordinaire, couldn't get a sniff against Chad Clifton. The Packers were down to their third-string center but Scott Wells gave a good account of himself. The rookie didn't mess anything up, helped out decisively in protection and got out fast on linebackers. His first start was more impressive than Grey Ruegamer's in Week 4. Wells is a high-character player with excellent balance. His holding penalty on the 79-yard screen pass would have been hard not to call. Former Brown Brad Bedell made his debut subbing for injured Kevin Barry in the "U-71" set. In 13 snaps Bedell didn't always sustain in the run game but was more of a plus than a minus.

### **Quarterbacks (4)**

It was a tough day to be a quarterback. Gusty winds made almost any pass requiring touch an adventure and rendered the deep passing game almost impossible. Unable to find any rhythm in the first half, Favre started throwing the ball hard in the second half and played great. His far superior arm strength to Harrington made that a mismatch. Favre had no turnovers, but the two sideline routes at the end of the first half each could have been returned for a touchdown. It was Walker's fault on the first for not coming back more for the ball but the second that bounced off Keith Smith's hands was just a bad decision by Favre. His finest moment came when he absorbed a painful cheap shot from Rogers on an offside penalty and then retaliated with a six-play, 70-yard touchdown march. Favre looked off Bracy Walker just enough to preserve the narrow window through which he fit the scoring strike to Driver.

### **Running Backs (4)**

Ahman Green played more snaps (50) than he has in any game since Week 5 after having played merely 45 the last three weeks. He appeared to tire. On the play before the winning field goal, Green probably would have had a 6-yard touchdown instead of a 1-yard gain if he would have stayed inside and not bouncing it. Green ran so low at times that all a tackler could grab was his shoulder pads. His recent rib damage didn't seem to affect his recklessness but he did fail to convert third-down runs with 3, 3 and 2 yards to go. Green hasn't fumbled as a rusher since Week 5. Tony Fisher and Najeh Davenport, who played much tougher this week with his rib damage, slammed through trash and were effective. William Henderson played 28 snaps compared to 12 for Nick Luchey. A dislocated left shoulder has made Luchey more of an engulfing type blocker than a punishing striker. Henderson pancaked S Brock Marion on the final series but certainly wasn't as explosive against linebackers.

### **Defensive Line (3)**

The unit's only sack was by Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila on an inside charge against LT Jeff Backus in 2.6 seconds. In the first meeting, Backus won their matchup. This time, the Lions paid for double-teaming "KGB" on just 13% of dropbacks when he applied consistent edge pressure while playing 84% of the snaps. On the other hand, "KGB" blew the tackle on Kevin Jones' run for 31 on a split-belly play and missed Jones at the 15 on his 24-yard touchdown. Those were costly miscues, to say the least. The Lions ran at Grady Jackson (44 snaps) early and then had success sealing him off with down blocks and running outside. Cletidus Hunt (53) and Aaron Kampman (55) played the run OK but didn't threaten Harrington. Each week, Cullen Jenkins (26) follows the design of the defense, hustles and makes plays. He had two of the three knockdowns. Kenny Peterson (11) probably was the most effective of three others in the eight-man rotation.

### **Linebackers (3)**

Nick Barnett blew his gap responsibility on a double-cornerback blitz, enabling Jones a wide avenue enroute to the end zone. Despite that inexcusable error, this still might have been his finest game as a pro. He played more aggressively. He attacked the line of scrimmage. He stuffed lead blockers. He was hard to block. One time, when C Dominic Raiola cut Barnett down, he bounced right back up and tackled Jones for a short gain. He still must keep better leverage on the ball against the wide stuff. His blitzing needs work. But this was a most impressive outing. On at least three plays, Barnett and Paris Lenon didn't flip-flop when the tight end shifted and Barnett actually wound up getting a look on the weak side. Lenon played through various injuries and had 10 tackles.

## **Secondary (4)**

The margin of difficulty wasn't high because Harrington doesn't have much arm strength to begin with and the wind diminished it even more. Rookie Roy Williams didn't seem mentally prepared for the cold and being shadowed by Al Harris all day long weakened his resolve even further. Most of Harrington's six passes to Williams never had a chance. Ahmad Carroll basically owned washed-up Tai Streets. With Carroll's advantage in talent, there was no reason for him to draw three penalties (two were declined) in the first quarter. He has got to start playing smarter. Darren Sharper and Mark Roman took turns creeping into the box and each made their share of crisp tackles. Sharper, however, didn't always resist blocks and was sealed on a pair of outside runs. Joey Thomas spent extensive time covering quick little Az-Zahir Hakim from the slot and looked pretty good. Michael Hawthorne took a bad penalty when he hit a sliding Harrington.

## **Kickers (4½)**

Ryan Longwell mastered the treacherous conditions, hitting from 36 into the wind and from 28 and 23 with the wind. His four kickoffs averaged 53.5 yards and 3.0 seconds of hang time. Punting four times with the wind and three times against it, Bryan Barker had averages of 40.1 (gross), 36.7 (net) and 3.2 (hang time). Six of the seven punts hit the ground, rolling a total of 29 yards. His 64-yard shot with 13 minutes left was vital in the victory. Barker's veteran savvy paid dividends.

## **Special Teams (2)**

A spate of injuries at linebacker hurt the cover units. Fortunately for the Packers, it was Reggie Swinton returning and not injured Eddie Drummond. Swinton had two good returns. On a day when nothing was automatic, LS Rob Davis and H Barker were on the money. Bedell's false-start on a field-goal attempt could have been costly.

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