

# Rating The Packers vs Vikings

## Packers lack fire, desire in loss to Vikings

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**Green Bay** - What a horrible way to end a season.

Facing the downtrodden Minnesota Vikings, the Green Bay Packers were humiliated, 31-17, Sunday in an NFC wild-card playoff game at Lambeau Field.

As amazing as it might seem, the Vikings were the more inspired squad despite a 3-7 record in their final 10 games that was the worst of any playoff team in National Football League history.

They outhustled the Packers. They were the more physical team. And coach Mike Tice, together with coordinators Scott Linehan on offense and Ted Cottrell on defense, made more meaningful adjustments in the 16 days since the Packers' victory at the Metrodome than coach Mike Sherman and his staff did.

For their tepid efforts, the Packers received merely one-half football. In Sherman's three previous elimination games, the Packers got 1 football against St. Louis in 2001, one-half football against Atlanta in 2002 and 3 1/2 footballs against Philadelphia last season.

It was the second time this season that the Packers received the lowest possible football total. They also got one-half for their 48-27 defeat against Tennessee in Week 5 at Lambeau Field.

For the ninth time in the 11-year history of The Journal Sentinel's "Rating the Packers" feature, the quarterback position dominated by Brett Favre was awarded the most footballs. The quarterbacks had 60 footballs in 17 games, or an average of 3.53.

Following, in order, were: receivers, 56 1/2 footballs (3.32 average); offensive line, 56 (3.29); kickers, 53 1/2 (3.15); special teams, 53 (3.12); running backs, 51 1/2 (3.03); defensive line, 46 (2.71); secondary, 36 (2.12); and linebackers, 35 (2.06).

The kickers had the most footballs in 2000, and the offensive line led in '03.

Only two positions, quarterbacks and receivers, sported improved averages from last season.

As an overall team, the Packers received 51 footballs for an average of 3.0. The average last season was 3.36.

Wide receiver Donald Driver, guard Mike Wahle, defensive end Aaron Kampman and Favre each won player-of-the-week honors twice.

The only five-football awards went to the receivers in Houston and in Minnesota; the offensive line against St. Louis; the quarterbacks in Houston and in Minnesota; and the defensive line in Chicago.

As an entire team, the Packers didn't receive five footballs in any game but did have 4 1/2 in Carolina, in Detroit and in Houston. The only five-football game for the Packers since 1997 came at the Metrodome in 2000.

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

### **Receivers ( 1/2 )**

The personnel department and coaching staff spent a lot of time with Andrae Thurman but now you wonder why. Forced to play with Robert Ferguson inactive and Javon Walker (shin) out for the entire second half, Thurman ran a sloppy route on Favre's third interception and ran the wrong way on the bootleg that Favre threw back to Tony Fisher for minus-4. Antonio Chatman, who moved up to No. 2, also left a lot to be desired. He just wasn't as dependable down the stretch. Walker dropped only his second pass of the season and it should have been intercepted. Bubba Franks dropped one as well but beat backup SS Willie Offord on an over route for 28 yards and on a 4-yard touchdown. Franks got lucky with a mid-air recovery of Najeh Davenport's fumble on a red-zone carry that went for minus-1 because he failed to block the middle linebacker. The Vikings played four-across coverage after Walker's departure but Driver kept getting open along the sideline against CB Antoine Winfield, whose ankle still isn't 100%.

### **Offensive Line (2)**

Chad Clifton was nearly flawless in the first 44 plays before leaving with an ankle injury. He was hurt on Favre's third interception when LB Dontarrious Thomas beat Mark Tauscher and deposited Favre on the back of Clifton's leg. Tauscher also missed LB Chris Claiborne on a third-quarter carry for no gain by Ahman Green and didn't sustain well on tosses against SLB Keith Newman. Marco Rivera had DT Kevin Williams over him about 75% of the time and didn't hold up as well as in their first two meetings. On the third play of the game, Rivera didn't recognize a six-man blitz that required him to take Williams one-on-one. When Rivera lost Williams outside, Green had to cut Williams and there was no one left to stop Claiborne from sacking Favre. Rivera allowed one-half sack to rookie DE Darrion Scott when he tried to be too aggressive and Scott spun away. C Grey Ruegamer played much better at center than in recent weeks but struggled in space when pulling as the left guard in the second half. Rookie Scott Wells was sharp in four second-half series. Wahle had to move to left tackle and gave up one-half sack, but overall played well.

## **Quarterbacks (1)**

It was all downhill after Favre took that hard shot early from Claiborne. He was responsible for two interceptions and partially responsible for two others, made a junior-high mistake by crossing the line of scrimmage on a scramble at a critical juncture and didn't make a great play all day. He was outplayed convincingly by Daunte Culpepper. Driver's adjustment to a bump by S Brian Russell was proper; instead of staying with the slant, Favre should have just gone to TE Ben Steele in the flat. On the second interception, Favre should have just gone in the flat to William Henderson but instead went deep to Walker, who deviated on his route and wasn't able to impede Russell on the interception. Favre threw his third interception behind Thurman but the rookie was too far inside and the protection broke down, too. Favre didn't step into his throw and the ball hung on the fourth interception. Cottrell kept Favre off balance with a blitzing game plan (five or more on 37% of dropbacks, six or more on 18%).

## **Running Backs ( 1/2 )**

With Davenport clearly not himself and suffering from a separated shoulder, the coaches wanted to play Green more than 61.5%. But he kept coming out, first with a wrist and later with a knee problem. So Davenport played nine snaps, which was nine snaps too many. That's just poor judgment by the coaching staff, which had Tony Fisher also available. Davenport fumbled on two of his five carries, but fortunately for the coaches the ball bounced to Franks and Tauscher. Another fumble by Green on an exchange with Favre bounced to Green as well. Green averaged 4.0 yards in 20 carries. Almost nothing was blocked cleanly but he broke just one tackle all day. Henderson blew a blitz pickup against Claiborne, allowing him to leap into Favre's vision on the final interception. Fisher dropped two passes, equaling his number of drops over his first three seasons.

## **Defensive Line (2)**

Grady Jackson (41 snaps) started out well but began to fade in the second half. His flush against C Matt Birk led to a garbage sack for Kenny Peterson. Actually, Peterson (23) did some decent things for a change and pursued hard. Corey Williams (14) got the call as Jackson's backup over Colin Cole and also gave good effort. Cletidus Hunt (43) was back in the starting lineup, got some penetration and registered two hurries against G Chris Liwienski. Despite mere 25% double-teaming, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (35) had just one hurry against so-so tackles, blew containment as usual and was roughed up at the point of attack. Cullen Jenkins (25) set up R-Kal Truluck's sack with a flush against G David Dixon and beat him for another hurry. The super-steady Kampman had the most snaps (52) and the most tackles (six).

## **Linebackers ( ½ )**

Nick Barnett hasn't learned that you're either in coverage or you're rushing. RB Moe Williams was Barnett's guy man-to-man but he left him to charge at the scrambling Culpepper and saw the 68-yard touchdown pass lofted over his head. That's almost on a par with his fourth-and-26 gaffe last January. He also overran two or three cutbacks by Michael Bennett. Despite meriting a bravery medal for playing one-armed for months, Hannibal Navies still closed with a terrible performance. He blew it on Randy Moss' 34-yard touchdown by not following through on a call designed for him to blitz into Culpepper's face. He missed Culpepper at the line on a 27-yard scramble. He had Onterio Smith trapped three yards deep in the backfield on a third-and-1 naked pitch but couldn't get him down. Plus, he wasn't as physical as normal and was late reacting at times in coverage. Na'il Diggs' run fits were up and down.

## **Secondary ( ½ )**

Two touchdowns on fades to Moss ruined a respectable performance by Al Harris. On the first, Moss played the ball better in the end zone, but he does that to a lot of people. On the second, Harris was expecting the all-out blitz by Navies but that still doesn't absolve him for playing in front of him. His responsibility is man coverage on Moss and not giving up the big play. The other cornerback, Ahmad Carroll, never even knew what hit him on Nate Burleson's 19-yard touchdown. Carroll offered no jam and got eaten up by Burleson's quick post move. Later, Carroll resorted to holding Burleson twice for penalties on the Vikings' clinching touchdown drive. Williams gained the final 46 yards on his long touchdown when Darren Sharper missed with a pathetic duck-and-dive tackle and Carroll stayed blocked forever downfield. Sharper took his best kill shot at an unsuspecting Burleson over the middle in the fourth quarter but the wide receiver bounced right back up. Michael Hawthorne timed his first-quarter sack perfectly but also joined Mark Roman in missing tackles on a hitch that Burleson turned into 29 yards.

## **Kickers (1)**

Ryan Longwell beat the Vikings twice on field goals but blew one here from 28 off a muddy surface. His kickoffs were short (55.5 yards) and low (3.7 seconds of hang time). Bryan Barker had averages of 39.7 (gross), 37.3 (net) and 4.1 (hang time).

## **Special Teams (3)**

Great coverage by Bhawoh Jue forced a fumble on a punt return by Burleson but none of his teammates were hustling enough to be in position to recover. The missed field goal by Morten Andersen actually was kicked into the backside of Liwienski. Neither team had much luck on returns. Nick Luchey got beat by Rushen Jones on a kickoff return and compounded his mistake by pulling him down for a penalty.