

2004 Offensive Report Card

Grades by Bob McGinn

Posted: Jan 16, 2005

Receivers

Antonio Chatman

Ranked 18th on kickoff returns (22.6-yard average) and 19th on punt returns (7.7). Gutter little guy who lacks that certain something the great ones have. Don't ever knock his soft hands, which are crucial in this climate. Counting exhibition games, he has fielded a total of 222 kickoffs and punts with only two fumbles, but one on a reverse this year wasn't his fault. Went from a non-factor to a legitimate receiver but lost some focus down the stretch and began to regress on offense.

Grade: C-

Donald Driver

Appeared to be in semi-decline last season but rebounded sharply to rank 10th in receiving yards (1,208), tied for 12th in receiving touchdowns and 14th in receptions (84). As trim and taut as an athlete can be but will sell out at a moment's notice. Actually enjoys the gritty work inside but sometimes will play too big for his body. Broke a bunch of tackles early but in the end had to settle for just 2.69 on average after the catch, a career low. Also dropped nine of 146 targeted passes, a drop rate of 6.2% that was a bit too high but seldom messed up the offense. Turns 30 on Groundhog's Day but still should play well in 2005.

Grade: B

Robert Ferguson

Seemed to be hurt almost all the time and missed the final three games after absorbing illegal clothes-line from Jaguars S Donovin Darius. Inspirational, almost charismatic figure in locker room that has come light years from the clueless rookie of '01. Still, he has just 92 receptions for 1,270 yards and 10 touchdowns in four seasons. Averaged 25.0 on kickoffs when healthy but wasn't used much in kick coverage.

Grade: C

Andrae Thurman

Undrafted rookie free agent who spent time with the Giants and Texans before surfacing on practice squad Sept. 8. Replaced Ferguson down the stretch but didn't know where he was going on some routes in the playoff game.

Grade: D-

Javon Walker

Worked like a fiend during the off-season and watched it pay off with Pro Bowl berth and league-wide respect. Big, powerful player with the raw speed to run by any cornerback who squatted on his routes and a lot of cornerbacks who turned and tried to go with him. Improved from eight catches of 20 yards or more as a rookie to 15 in '03 and 20 this year, most by a Green Bay receiver since Antonio Freeman had 25 in '97. Eight of the 20 were for more than 35 yards, although only two came in the final 10 games after defenses began shading a safety toward him. Moreover, he enjoyed the finest drop ratio (1.35%, two of 148) of any Packers' No. 1 receiver in the West Coast era. More than willing to work inside but even better on the edges. Battles for extra yardage but had career-low 3.7 average after the catch.

Grade: A

Tight Ends

Bubba Franks

Earned every penny of his original five-year, \$6.45 million deal that now is expiring. Has never missed a game, became a much more consistent back-side blocker in '04 and added eight touchdowns, giving him 31 in all. Averaged a career-best 10.9 yards, including 3.7 after the catch. Had too many drops (5) and too many penalties (4). Uncharacteristically got open down the seam for catches of 27, 29 and 22 yards in last eight games to enhance his value. Good character player. Likes Green Bay and wouldn't mind returning, but will have unrestricted offers if he reaches the market.

Grade: B-

David Martin

Developed a cyst behind his left knee and was shut down after nine games. Hurt a lot over the years, will be unrestricted and club appears ready to move on.

Grade: D

Sean McHugh

Played fullback at Penn State before Tennessee drafted him in seventh round in April and converted to tight end. Inactive for last three games but staff is excited about his gung-ho attitude, size (6 feet 5 inches, 262 pounds) and receiving skills.

Grade: Incomplete

Ben Steele

Third on club in special-teams tackles (17) and made special-teams play of year by clawing away Ferguson's fumbled kickoff return from Vikings CB Derek Ross in Week 9 to set up winning field goal. Missed four tackles on special teams but also showed an aggressive demeanor. Needs big off-season in weight room to figure in '05. Strictly a position-type blocker at this point, and not a very good one. Supposed to be a receiving threat but dropped four of 11 targeted passes.

Grade: D-

Offensive Linemen

Kevin Barry

Wasn't as dominant in "U-71" package this season. Conditioning not as sharp and eventually got hurt, suffering a significant quadriceps tendon strain in Week 12 and sitting out three games. His inability to execute the goal-line block on LB Brian Urlacher in Week 2 resulted in Ahman Green's fumble and a 95-yard touchdown return that was the biggest reason for the shocking setback against Chicago. Responsible for 4 1/2 "bad" runs, same as last year.

Grade: C-

Brad Bedell

Came in handy in December, replacing Barry as second tight end in "U-71." Acquired from Cleveland in September for seventh-round pick in '06. Plays tackle and guard on both sides almost equally well. Not nearly as physical as Barry but will have a shot to stick again in '05.

Grade: D

Chad Clifton

A premier pass-blocking left tackle who missed fewer blocks in the run game this season. Not as good as Seattle's Walter Jones but more consistent than St. Louis' Orlando Pace and Philadelphia's Tra Thomas, the NFC's other Pro Bowl tackles. Massive, graceful and quick. Makes pass protection look easy. Indianapolis' Dwight Freeney, the NFL's sack leader with 16, didn't get one against Clifton, although that was about the only time all season the Packers gave him some help. His only holding penalty came against Freeney. Did have eight false starts. Not a destructive type but did have best season as a run blocker, slashing "bad" run total from 17 to 6.

Grade: A-

Brennan Curtain

Underwent reconstructive knee operation performed by Florida surgeon John Uribe on Sept. 27. Won't be 25 until June. Showed sufficient improvement in '04 training camp to be legitimate contender for right-tackle job if Mark Tauscher must move inside.

Grade: Incomplete

Mike Flanagan

Responsible for almost as many "bad" runs (6) in three games this season as he was in 18 games last season (9). Tried to play on a bad left knee but could barely make it on and off the field and spent rest of season on injured reserve. Now 31, he will be entering final year of contract. Started just 50 regular-season games in career and is bound and determined to start a lot more.

Grade: C-

Steve Morley

Spent the first four weeks of training camp and the first two exhibition games with the No. 1 offense at left guard for an injured Mike Wahle. Baby-faced Canadian with adequate athletic ability and exceptional size. Only 23. The demands and speed of the NFL game shocked Morley initially. His tools give him a chance at guard.

Grade: Incomplete

Marco Rivera

Started for seventh straight season and elected to third straight Pro Bowl, second in a row as a starter. Broad-shouldered muscle man with a great temperament. Looks to finish every run block and will punish defenders if given the opportunity. Tied for third on line in total of sacks, knockdowns and hurries allowed with 13 ½, up from 5 ½ in '02 and 9 in '03. Tied for second on line in "bad" runs with 12 ½, up from 8 in '02 and 9 ½ in '03. And was second on line in penalties with 7, including 5 holds. Well-liked team leader. Finished the season in good health but will be 33 in March, when his contract expires. Both sides have decisions to make.

Grade: B+

Grey Ruegamer

Replaced Flanagan in Week 4 and, after a rough start, played reliable, winning football until damaging an ankle in Week 12. Back in the lineup three weeks later but was never quite the same. Limited athlete but maximizes what ability he has and plays to the whistle. Allowed just 1 sack, 3 ½ knockdowns and 2 ½ hurries, but led club in number of "bad" runs with 13 ½. Wasn't quite as sharp on blocking assignments as Flanagan and definitely not as quick to the linebacker level.

Grade: C-

Mark Tauscher

Overshadowed by more athletic players like Wahle and Clifton but a highly effective top player in his own right. Didn't allow a sack despite facing Murderer's Row of left ends in Julius Peppers, Adewale Ogunleye, Michael Strahan, Kevin Carter, Leonard Little and Jevon Kearse. However, allowed more knockdowns (6) than any lineman and allowed second-most hurries (7 1/2). Was a stronger, more efficient run blocker another year removed from reconstructive knee surgery and reduced number of "bad" runs from 14 1/2 to 8. Tremendous student of the game who possesses a near-quarterback's understanding of protections. Only two penalties were false starts.

Grade: B+

Mike Wahle

The best guard in the NFC North and, according to some scouts, the best guard in the NFC. Shows terrific speed on screens and bootlegs. A gifted athlete who breaks down exceptionally well in space. Goes hard and for the throat as in-line run blocker, especially on "Power-O" counter play. Can be bull-rushed now and then but that's mostly nit-picking. Allowed second-fewest total of sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 9 1/2 and had 12 1/2 "bad" runs. Barring unforeseen developments, he'll be reluctantly waived in late February shortly before a \$6 million roster bonus is due. Then he might break the bank as a free agent.

Grade: A

Scott Wells

Only four players were selected after him in the '04 draft but he played as well if not better than any of the Packers' six picks. Started two games and played the equivalent of 3 1/2 games. Wasn't nearly as effective against Jacksonville's massive front as he was against Detroit's but bounced back with stellar second half in Chicago. Quick to block linebackers and, in time, should do a better job against bulk.

Grade: D+

Quarterbacks

Brett Favre

This was the fourth time in the last seven seasons that he failed to make the Pro Bowl. However, in early December, 11 of 13 personnel men gave Favre the nod when asked if they would want Donovan McNabb, Daunte Culpepper, Michael Vick or him to win a big playoff game. Favre was soundly outplayed by Culpepper last Sunday, giving him a brutal 52.1 passer rating in playoff losses since 2001 and a 2-6 mark in his last eight post-season games. In all, Favre posted a 17-game passer rating of 89.7, played six exceptional games on the road and kept delivering in the clutch down the stretch. When he's good, he's good. But when he's bad he is bad. The good in '04 was his surprising accuracy on sideline go routes, his outstanding ball security (five fumbles and one lost, but two of the fumbles were Ahman Green's fault, including the one that was lost) and getting the ball out even faster. The focus on offense went back to the pass and Favre was more than capable of keynoting the attack. The bad included the diminished running dimension, even fewer occasions when he'd burst through the pocket escaping from pressure and make big downfield completions on the move and the 21 interceptions, 18 of which were strictly his fault and three of which were partially his fault.

Grade: B+

Craig Nall

After a lackluster, injury-abbreviated training camp, he barely made the team over Tim Couch and Scott McBrien. Four months later, his star has never burned brighter. In three extensive mop-up stints and a one-play, 24-yard completion cameo in Week 4, Nall compiled a passer rating of 139.4 in 33 attempts. He looked composed and in complete control of the offense, threw with authority and his accuracy was better than in the past. He's in the equation now.

Grade: C

J.T. O'Sullivan

If not re-signed by March, he becomes a restricted free agent available for a sixth-round pick. He's smart, moves around well and was well-coached in New Orleans by Mike McCarthy. The Packers would like another look.

Grade: Incomplete

Doug Pederson

Turns 37 in two weeks and might have a shot to join the Packers' coaching staff as an offensive assistant, but in a surprising development he recently disclosed plans to play again, here or elsewhere. If Favre's back, his close relationship with Pederson perhaps makes Pederson's return a possibility. His season ended in Week 4 with rib and back injuries.

Grade: D

Runningbacks

Najeh Davenport

A formidable figure with a football under his arm but he runs too high and takes a fearsome pounding. Limited to 12 of 17 games by hamstring, rib and shoulder injuries in '04. It was the third straight season that he has had to miss time. Played merely 12.4% of snaps this year, down from 14.7% in '03. Averaged 4.9 and gained 371 yards, including 178 (9.4) in outburst against St. Louis. Some teams, including Miami, regard him as a starter but the Packers decided against accepting the Dolphins' offer in August of a first-day draft choice. Crude as a receiver, he has dropped five of 24 targeted throws in three seasons. Despite having just 223 career touches from scrimmage he has fumbled seven times, losing two.

Grade: C-

Tony Fisher

Had to play 30.3% of the downs, almost double his 16% from '03. That's too much for a back of his moderate ability. Showed lack of patience on some runs as well as minimal speed to the outside. Number of "bad" runs increased from none in '03 to 6 ½ in '04 because his reads weren't as sharp. Average per carry dipped to 3.46, down from 4.36 in first two seasons. His value is versatility, receiving, pass blocking and special teams.

Grade: C-

Ahman Green

Merely mortal in '04 after a breathtaking effort in '03. Dogged by Achilles' tendon, knee and rib cartilage injuries, his average crashed to 4.46 from 5.22 a year ago. Turns 28 in a month and has carried a heavy load since '00, so with one year left on his contract new GM Ted Thompson has a major decision to make. Green's per-game average fell from 116.9 to 77.7 but so did his playing time from 71.2% to 54.9%. He didn't have a 100-yard game after Week 9. Still ran fast and hard but his reads suffered, reflected by the increase in his number of "bad" runs from 1 to 9. Officially had seven fumbles and four lost, but should have been 9-5 because two bad handoffs that were his fault were charged to Favre.

Grade: B

William Henderson

Played even less (33.9%) than in '03 (38.4%) but made the Pro Bowl and was named all-pro. Caught 37 of the 43 passes thrown to him without a drop. Always a physical blocker but this year was more reliable, too. His number of "bad" runs dropped from 10 in '00 and '01, 13 in '02 and 7 1/2 in '03 to 5 this year. A committed, get-the-job-done veteran who has never shirked his leadership or special-teams duties. When the heaviest hits occurred on special teams, it usually was Henderson applying the wood.

Grade: B

Vonta Leach

Summoned from the practice squad in late December and got in seven games, including 14 plays at fullback. Packs a punch as a lead blocker and wedge crusher but needs technique work. Will be back in '04.

Grade: Incomplete

Nick Luchey

Battled a dislocated shoulder but didn't miss a game and played 22.6% of the snaps, up from 17.9% in '03. Started out playing more than Henderson but that lasted only two games. One of three hard-nosed blocking fullbacks on the roster but value suffers because he isn't deemed effective covering kicks. Not much of a receiver but a much better ball carrier than Henderson.

Grade: C-

Walter Williams

Looked good carrying six times for 42 yards in seven-play stint against Houston before suffering a high-ankle sprain that landed him on injured reserve. Gained 28 yards on a strong-side counter, more than Green gained on the familiar play all season. A no-name who made a name for himself with a no-frills, never-hurt training camp.

Grade: Incomplete

2004 Defensive / Special Teams Report Card

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Linemen

Colin Cole

This much we know: he's a much better football player than RG Steve Edwards, the Bears' two-year starter who was abused by Cole for three knockdowns in Week 16. He's a squatty 325-pound shock absorber with better movement than Gilbert Brown had in recent seasons. He looked pretty good in 60 late-season snaps and might be even a better fit if the Packers go to a 3-4 defense.

Grade: D+

Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila

Didn't do diddly through seven games before surging for 12 of his 13 ½ sacks (third in the NFL) in the final 10 games. Four did come against overmatched Bear LT Marc Columbo, but seven of the final 11 were registered in less than 3 seconds. In other words, "KGB" remains about as fast off the ball as anyone other than the Colts' Dwight Freeney. The rest of his numbers weren't as impressive. He had fewer knockdowns and hurries than Cletidus Hunt. Yes, he led the team in combination of sacks, knockdowns and hurries for the fourth straight year, but his total of 36 ½ was down from 41 in '02 and 42 ½ in '03. "KGB" led the unit in playing time at 76% (down from 87% in '03) but was corkscrewed too many times at the point of attack and showed almost no feel for bootlegs, reverses and other misdirection plays. He was double-teamed on 33.5% of dropbacks, a greater percentage than the last two seasons but less than in '01 (38.1%).

Grade: B-

Cletidus Hunt

Second on the team in total of sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 28 ½ a career best, and led unit in tackles for loss with 5 ½. Has never reached his potential and, at age 29, probably never will. Still, the flashes are good and make him a respectable starter. Played out of position at nose tackle for a month when Grady Jackson was out. Third on the line in playing time at 72.1%. Lacks re-direct in his charges and can be fooled on traps and misdirection. Had the third-most penalties (5) on defense but led the team in batted passes for the third straight year.

Grade: C+

Grady Jackson

Soon will undergo surgery on the left knee that he dislocated on the third play of Week 1. Turns 32 on Friday and had arthroscopic surgery on the other knee last February. Couldn't practice much over the last two months and his play wasn't as good. Still averaged 40 snaps a game but tended to tire in the second halves of games and was silenced by double teams more easily. Didn't have a turnover play and had 13 sacks, knockdowns and hurries, four fewer than last year. The Packers can't replace him yet but really don't know how much more he has to give.

Grade: B-

Cullen Jenkins

Third on the club in total of sacks, knockdowns and hurries with 24 ½ despite averaging only 30.7 snaps. Did most of his damage from tackle in the dime defense. Quick off the ball, times it well on stunts and seems to give superior effort. On the small side and was buried and/or walked backward on a consistent basis against the interior run. A tremendous worker who lets his playing talk for him. Kris Jenkins' little brother did the family proud.

Grade: C+

Aaron Kampman

Ranked fifth on the team in tackles with 82, highest finish by a Packers D-lineman since John Thierry also was fifth in '00. Easily the club's best player in short-yardage. Better taking a side than taking people on and will get washed away by double teams. But doesn't stay blocked at the point for long and halted numerous plays 3 or 4 yards downfield by scrambling into running lanes. Second on the unit in playing time (73%) and tackles for loss (4 ½). Lacks speed, takeoff and dominant moves as a pass rusher; ranked fourth in total of sacks, knockdowns and hurries with a career-best 20 ½. Missed one tackle and had one penalty. Can be fooled once but almost never twice.

Grade: B-

James Lee

Registered a sack, a knockdown and 10 tackles in 135 snaps spread over nine games. Underwent arthroscopic knee surgery for torn cartilage after Week 2, sat out four games, served as Jackson's backup for seven more games before the knee acted up to end his year. Gave it his all during '04 off-season and training camp but tended to stand up too high in games and struggled finding the ball. Worth another look.

Grade: D-

Kenny Peterson

Playing time increased from 144 snaps in 10 games as a rookie to 203 snaps in 10 games in '04. Left a decent final impression by hustling and chasing against the Bears and Vikings. It's not that he's bereft of talent. The problem is, he might not be fast enough to play outside or powerful enough to play inside.

Grade: D

R-Kal Truluck

One NFC North scout acclaimed his Sept. 5 acquisition from the Chiefs for fifth- and sixth-round picks as a solid move by Green Bay. He was as wrong as the Packers. The coaches determined quickly that his run defense was so weak that they didn't dare put him in at all for Gbaja-Biamila. Thus, he became a designated rusher, playing left end in the dime after lining up exclusively a right end in Kansas City. In 237 snaps he had 3 ½ sacks, 3 knockdowns and 5 ½ hurries. It wasn't a washout, but the second hell-bent-for-election edge rusher envisioned by Mike Sherman and his people never materialized.

Grade: D

Donnell Washington

The Packers traded a fourth-round pick to move up 14 notches in the third and take this underachieving junior from Clemson. Washington had impressed nobody when, on the fifth day of full-squad practices, he suffered a partially torn plantar fascia in his left foot that ended his season. Having been paid \$710,000 in signing bonus, he will get every chance to succeed.

Grade: Incomplete

Corey Williams

He and Peterson traded off one game-day berth on the 45-man roster nine of the last 11 weeks. Williams is promising. He's a 310-pounder who might be physical enough to play three-technique tackle and could have enough agility and speed to play power end. Ideally, he looks like an end in a 3-4. Even played extensively at nose tackle in the final two games and wasn't blown out. Green as grass coming out of Arkansas State and led the line in missed tackles (5), but he's an eager individual who could improve substantially in his second season.

Grade: D+

Linebackers

Nick Barnett

One of the most disappointing players on defense. In base, he was semi-soft at the point, erratic on his run fits against off-tackle and counter plays and a mediocre blitzer. In dime, he did a decent job covering running backs one-on-one but was out of position too often in zone drops and against screens and struggled getting off blocks against quick hitters and draws. Barnett goes hard each week. He wants to win. His heart appears to be in the right place. Playing virtually every snap, he led the team in tackles with 173 but precious few either were punishing or behind the line. Four of his 7 ½ tackles for loss came after the score was 35-3 in Philadelphia. He also led the team in missed tackles with 19, 11 more than he had as a rookie and seven more than Hardy Nickerson had in '02 and Bernardo Harris had in '01. His total of five turnover plays in '03 dwindled to two in '04. He led the linebackers both in plays of 20 yards or more allowed (5 ½) and touchdown passes allowed (3 ½).

Grade: C

Na'il Diggs

He was the only man on defense with an attitude. Diggs didn't just get people down. He went after 'em. Led the club in tackles for loss for the fourth year in a row with a career-high total of 12. Missed 11 tackles, allowed the least number of touchdown passes (1 ½) among the linebackers and yielded 4 ½ plays of 20 yards or more. Just a so-so blitzer. One of the few NFL starters on the weak-side who doesn't stay in on third down. Has lost some flexibility and change

of direction over the years and gets mismatched fairly easily in coverage. A return to the strong side might suit him best.

Grade B-

Steve Josue

Green Bay's seventh-round pick in '03. Advanced to the last cut each of the last two summers before being waived. Signed off the 49ers' practice squad Dec. 9. Played 31 snaps at both outside positions in Week 16 but made little impact. Not bad on special teams.

Grade: D-

Paris Lenon

Completed fourth season in Green Bay, third as a backup linebacker and special-teams regular. Probably drew more double-team blocks than anyone else on the kickoff cover team. Replaced an injured Diggs in Weeks 13-14 but failed to distinguish himself. A blue-collar battler with limitations in speed and instincts.

Grade: D-

Torrance Marshall

The Packers have been talking about starting from scratch at backup linebacker and Marshall ought to be the first to go. Has been hurt off and on throughout his career, was suspended for four games in '03 and has been generally ineffective since former LB coach Bo Pelini recommended him in the third round four years ago. Maybe somebody else will take him on the unrestricted market.

Grade: D-

Hannibal Navies

Expected to undergo major surgery this month to repair the shoulder that he injured in Week 1. Didn't play as well as last year. As an unrestricted free agent, the Packers must weigh the effect of the shoulder in determining whether to bring him back. Wasn't involved in a turnover-producing play all season and incredibly didn't break up a pass until the playoff game. OK shoving off on tight ends from the strong side but almost never makes a play unless it comes to him.

Grade: D+

Defensive Backs

Ahmad Carroll

Didn't become a starter until Week 6 but still gave up 6 ½ touchdown passes and 7 ½ plays of 20 yards or more. Measures a shade under 5-10 and played poorly in the red zone. Kept lining up wrong and blew assignments on a weekly basis. Penalized 13 times on defense (nine accepted) because he wouldn't take coaching and refused to accept the fact that he couldn't grab receivers if they got a step on him. Irritated some teammates with his know-it-all approach and had problems getting along with people. There was no doubt about his speed after he accelerated past everyone to the end zone on a 40-yard fumble return against St. Louis. His exceptional high-point interception in front of Isaac Bruce was his only pick of the year. Thickly built and isn't a coward, but takes the easy way out too often and settles for lame block-down tackles in contact situations.

Grade: D

Al Harris

A one-dimensional cornerback who competes favorably in bump-and-run but gets lost in zones. Essentially, he's an overrated player. Matched up against many No. 1 wide receivers. He did well against Steve Smith, Roy Williams and Randy Moss once, got whipped by Jimmy Smith, Marvin Harrison and Moss once, and broke even against Andre Johnson and Torry Holt. In the end, he gave up 14 ½ plays of 20 yards or more, most by a Green Bay cornerback since Doug Evans allowed 17 ½ in '95. Also yielded 8 ½ touchdown passes, most by a Green Bay cornerback since Craig Newsome gave up 10 ½ in '95. Drew 13 penalties (10 accepted). Flashed surprising speed in open-field chases and isn't a bad tackler. Made too many mistakes for a seven-year veteran.

Grade: C

Michael Hawthorne

Green Bay might have given up 1,000 points if he had remained a starting cornerback beyond Week 5. Allowed 6 ½ plays of 20 yards or more hopelessly trying to play outside in a blitzing scheme. Moved to safety near mid-season and played from the slot in dime. Led club in special-teams tackles with 21.

Grade: D-

Jason Horton

Wasn't ready for Peyton Manning as the dime back in Week 3. Got turned, burned and maybe learned, although he really wasn't heard again from scrimmage the rest of the season. Gave great effort as a gunner on the punt team. The coaches experimented with him at safety in end-of-season practices but quickly junked the idea when he whiffed grasping the big picture. Has the speed and size teams want.

Grade: D

Chris Johnson

Promoted to the 53-man roster in Week 9 but was inactive for last nine games. He hasn't tackled anyone since mid-August 2003. If knee and leg injuries check out, he'll get a long look in '05.

Grade: Incomplete

Bhawoh Jue

Started three games at mid-season for injured Darren Sharper and did some good things. When Sharper returned, there was no reason not to give some of Mark Roman's time in base to Jue but the coaches never did. Jue makes mistakes. He misses tackles. He might not be fast enough for cornerback or tough enough for safety. Still, his play at safety down the stretch in '01 was better than Roman's in '04. And his over-the-top deflection of a bomb behind Carroll to Houston's Corey Bradford on what would have been a 61-yard touchdown pass demonstrated more range than any other Packers safety showed all season. Expected to depart as unrestricted free agent.

Grade: D+

Mark Roman

Just about everyone thought he was the answer in August, a second-tier free agent (\$700,000 signing bonus) from Cincinnati with moxie, toughness and ball skills. What a mirage that turned out to be. In the end, he was the worst starter on one of the worst defenses in club history. Started 17 games. No interceptions. No forced fumbles. No recovered fumbles. Four passes defensed. Allowed a total of 9 ½ plays of 20 yards or more. Yielded 4 ½ touchdown passes. Missed 18 tackles, second highest on the team. Besides never making a play on the ball, Roman blew almost as many coverages as the rookies. Wasn't a bad blitzzer and OK in the box. Awful open-field tackler.

Grade: F

Darren Sharper

Easily his poorest season since '99. Used to range sideline-to-sideline and chase down ball carriers from behind. In '04, he struggled getting over to the boundary and many times failed to close the gap on wide receivers or even backs in the open field. Suffered a partially torn posterior cruciate ligament in Week 7 and wasn't the same for more than a month, but his speed deficiencies were evident before that. Allowed 9 ½ plays or 20 yards or more, way more than 1 ½ in '02 and 6 in '03. Also missed 14 tackles, including a scene-setter on Moe Williams' 68-yard touchdown three plays into playoff defeat. Had missed just 34 tackles in previous four seasons combined after missing 18 in '99. Played more recklessly in the past. Basically just ran into people on blitzes, settling for ½ sack, no knockdowns and no hurries. Led the team in interceptions for the fourth straight season, and three required sensational anticipation and hands. With three touchdown returns, he was the team's only defensive playmaker.

Grade: C

Joey Thomas

Early in the season he was a jumble of emotions and his play and behavior reflected it. However, more so than Carroll, he began to act more professionally as the year wore on and his play reflected that, too. Served as the nickel back from about mid-season on and didn't get beat deep after Week 9. Struggled with tight coverage rules and played too soft. At times, he almost looked to be turning down tackles.

Grade: D

Specialists

Bryan Barker

Ranked 28th in gross average (40.1) and was 29th in net average (33.4). It was the worst net by a Green Bay punter since Paul McJulien had 30.2 in '92. Average hang time of 4.09 seconds in first eight games wasn't good but his average of 3.86 in last nine was just plain awful. For 69 punts his average hang was 3.96. Josh Bidwell's average hangs were 4.13 in '00, 4.22 in '01, 4.10 in '02 and 4.08 in '03; his last three net averages ranked tied for eighth, 10th and 15th. Barker excelled as the holder for final 13 games.

Grade: D-

Rob Davis

No bad snaps on punts or placements for another season.

Grade: C

Ryan Longwell

In his first seven seasons he kicked just five game-winning field goal. Then, in a span of seven weeks in November and December, he won three games as time expired and a fourth with 2 seconds left. Tied for seventh with 85.7% in the regular season but missed from 28 in the playoffs. Philadelphia's David Akers edged him as the NFC Pro Bowl kicker, perhaps because he had 12 touchbacks compared to Longwell's two. Asked to kick off directionally all season, Longwell averaged 60.85 yards, his poorest distance in last five seasons. His hang time of 3.72 was exactly the same as '03.

Grade: A-

B.J. Sander

The club says he practiced well all season.

Grade: Incomplete