

# Rating The Packers vs Panthers

Defense gets guilty verdict

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**Green Bay** - This was shades of the Emmitt Thomas-coordinated defense in 1999 or the Bob Slowik-coordinated defense in 2004.

Under first-year coordinator Jim Bates, the Green Bay Packers had kept the number of obvious blown assignments to an acceptable level this summer and in the first three games. That all changed Monday night, when the defense repeatedly short-circuited, leading to a 32-29 loss at Carolina.

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

## **Receivers (2½):**

Robert Ferguson and Brett Favre appear to be at odds and it has to stop. Ferguson wasn't flat enough on a slant route and then almost casually let CB Ken Lucas steal the pass right out of his hands. Favre attempted 32 passes after that but only two went to Ferguson. With the outcome at hand, the Panthers almost didn't bother covering Ferguson, who was wide open on the left just as Favre was throwing incomplete to Donald Driver on the right. Favre probably is thinking Ferguson is killing him but, like most everyone else, isn't sure why. A tough guy, Ferguson's actions just don't add up. Driver terrorized CB Chris Gamble until the final play. Despite two drops, Driver keeps playing exceptionally well. The opening sack and fumble by Mike Rucker was more the fault of David Martin than Chad Clifton. Martin blew it by getting in Clifton's way and knocking him off Rucker. Martin atoned for that by beating speedy MLB Dan Morgan to the corner and catching a 21-yard TD pass at its highest point. Backup TE Donald Lee showed tremendous concentration on his 16-yard TD grab.

## **Offensive Line (1½):**

When Mike Flanagan had to leave after two series with an abdominal injury, Scott Wells got the call over Grey Ruegamer. Once Wells settled in, the middle of the line was as firm if not firmer than it has been all season. Clifton played one more snap than Flanagan before departing with an ankle injury. Clifton had a terrible gaffe on the Packers' opening play, allowing Rucker to beat him inside and smear Ahman Green in the backfield. Without Clifton, Ruegamer played left guard and Adrian Klemm moved to left tackle. Ruegamer started poorly. He wasn't quick enough to get off a double-team with Wells and waylay backup MLB Adam Seward on Green's failed third-and-1 carry, then blew a blitz pickup on Morgan. He played OK after that. Klemm was adequate at tackle initially but appeared to tire and allowed three of his four pressures in the second half. Will Whitticker allowed two of his three pressures to DT Kindal Moorehead. The toughest matchup fell on Mark Tauscher, and Julius Peppers managed to get him for three hurries in the second half. Once again, Tauscher's wonderful balance and recovery quickness enabled him to avoid a sack.

### **Quarterbacks (4½):**

The Packers were down by 19 points and minus five key starters on offense. The run game was going nowhere. There were gobs of mistakes on routes. They had Brett Favre but little else. Once more, Favre delivered. Calling plays at the line. Sliding away from the rush. Hitting the open man. Taking just enough chances. On the late 90-yard TD drive, Carolina's pass rush intensified. Favre had people in his face almost all the way down the field but willed the team into the end zone. The lone interception wasn't his fault. Ferguson was the better choice on the last play but the pass to Driver probably would have worked if it had been lower with less chance for deflection. A weakness in Favre's game in '05 has been accuracy on the deep ball.

### **Running Backs (1½):**

Before Green left with a knee injury on the fourth snap of the third quarter, he had been on the field for 38 of 42 plays, or 90.5%. On the second series, Green played eight snaps in a row, an unheard-of figure based on previous seasons. Green had one superb carry, running through a frontal shot by SS Marlon McCree and surging ahead for 10 yards. But Green isn't nearly as consistent as he used to be. On one pass, he broke Morgan's tackle and had some room, but then all he could do was stagger forward and fall down. Green used to keep his feet moving all the time. Tony Fisher had one snap before Green's injury and then didn't even get a pass thrown to him down the stretch. In 10 snaps, Najeh Davenport showed little or nothing. Vonta Leach keeps getting the lion's share of time at fullback over William Henderson but neither one blocked all that well.

### **Defensive Line (2½):**

Adjusting to new demands asking him to be more of a catcher, Grady Jackson is getting harder to move and didn't have any of those awful snaps that were occurring when he got tired. Jackson (30 snaps), Corey Williams (35) and Colin Cole (25) stayed square and plugged up the Panthers' quirky ground game. Even Cullen Jenkins (30), the smallest of the three tackles, hung tough. He blew past Mike Wahle to halt Stephen Davis for minus-4 and then forced Wahle into a holding penalty to negate a 7-yard run. The problem was lack of interior pressure, with Jenkins posting the lone pressure. Aaron Kampman had a successful day rushing with three pressures against RT Jordan Gross, a strong young player, but was bounced more than usual against the run. The Panthers double-teamed Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila on 52% of drop-backs but the big defensive play came when he outran a double team for a sack and fumble.

### **Linebackers (1½):**

Nick Barnett should make a ton of tackles. The "over" defense is designed for him to flow freely, and it's almost impossible for the big boys to reach given his 7-yard depth. On Davis' 11-yard TD run, Barnett can't permit himself to get tied up with C Jeff Mitchell and not hold it to a 5-yard gain. In coverage, Barnett kept leaving the middle open and offensive coordinator Dan Henning exploited it. Fast, instinctive Robert Thomas has been a plus against the run. But for the second time in three games, he couldn't cover a marginal tight end in the end zone and gave up an easy TD. Paris Lenon continued to demonstrate that he is a reliable technician in coverage.

**Secondary (1):**

Nobody did much right. The safeties, Mark Roman and Nick Collins, each missed two tackles and were incapable of sorting out Henning's many looks. Roman ended up 5 yards off TE Michael Gaines on a 19-yard touchdown pass when he didn't fight through a pick and then went underneath it instead of over the top. Collins was in position to finish off DeShaun Foster after a 15-yard gain but reacted poorly. The play then ruptured when it took Earl Little 31 yards to push Foster out of bounds. Collins spent considerable time over the top of dynamic Steve Smith, enabling Al Harris to contain him underneath with aggressive press coverage. Smith's only big play came when he ran right past Ahmad Carroll and drew a 26-yard interference penalty. Because "KGB" was stoned at the point of attack, Harris looked surprised to see Davis on top of him on his TD run.

**Kickers (3):**

B.J. Sander's five punts had averages of 45.4 yards (gross), 42.0 (net) and 4.31 seconds (hang time). Ryan Longwell's five kickoffs averaged 66.8 and 3.81.

**Special Teams (2):**

The winning touchdown was set up by Rod Smart's 60-yard kickoff, longest against Green Bay since Week 16 in 2003. Longwell's boot was high and to the corner, but when Henderson ended up on the ground Smart saw it and steamed through that vacant lane. Unlike some others, Jenkins doesn't view extra-point block as a time to relax. He blew through Mitchell and blocked John Kasay's placement with his right hand. The only reason Terrence Murphy even had the ball when he suffered a neck injury was his alert recovery of a brutal fumble by Davenport.

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