

Rating the Packers vs. Vikings

Driver can't save day

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers now have lost four games by a total of nine points after they succumbed Sunday to the Minnesota Vikings, 23-20, at the Metrodome.

After a sublime first-half showing, the Packers ran aground on offense, were exposed for the first time this season on defense and hurt themselves badly on special teams. Not only that, but the injury list probably was their longest of the year.

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

Receivers (4½)

A one-handed TD catch behind tight coverage by Antoine Winfield that drew a penalty flag. A 40-yard reception that was the result of four broken tackles and 28 yards after the catch. Running routes oblivious to the proximity of menacing linebackers. What isn't Donald Driver doing these days? The Vikings minimized Driver in the second half with Fred Smoot shadowing him at the line and a safety over the top. Maybe the Packers should have kept going to Driver, anyway. He was on fire. Robert Ferguson sold out to catch a long bootleg pass for 44 yards against SS Corey Chavous but had to depart with a sprained knee. The offensive staff is so high on Donald Lee that he was the featured receiver on the second play of the opening script. He really moves fluidly in the open field. Playing on a bad knee, Bubba Franks caught better than he blocked.

Offensive Line (3)

Kevin Williams, one of the game's premier defensive linemen, never made a play against Mark Tauscher. He didn't have a pressure and wasn't a factor against the run. The third-and-2 shotgun counter in the final minute that lost a yard, a suspect call to begin with, still might have worked if Tauscher had been able to get to LB Napoleon Harris before he stuffed Tony Fisher. Few, if any, opposing linemen in the Larry Beightol era have had a field day like NT Pat Williams. The first quarter was a nightmare for Scott Wells in the run game. Williams was too big, too strong and too motivated for Wells and the guards. Wells regained his equilibrium as the game wore on but then gave up two knockdowns to Darrion Scott on the final drive. Will Whitticker was late out of his stance in the third quarter and Pat Williams shot past for a minus-7 hit on Fisher. He's also late to the linebacker level and lacks body control when he does get there. At this point, Whitticker just isn't good enough. Adrian Klemm held LB Raonall Smith on a seven-man blitz and also had some early misses against linebackers. Others have dominated Erasmus James but the rookie managed to draw a holding call on Chad Clifton.

Quarterbacks (4½)

Brett Favre continues to play exceptional football. Vikings coordinator Ted Cottrell threw caution to the wind, rushing five or more on 46.5% of drop-backs after blitzing 32.1% and 15.9% in two games last season. Until the end, the protection was good and Favre stood firm in the pocket on 11 five-step drops and five seven-step drops. His TD passes were beautifully thrown and he was adept on five bootleg passes. Disdaining the noise, the Packers put Favre in the shotgun 16 times. Despite Wells' erratic snaps and the shakiness of the guards, Favre made the shotgun work. With his supporting cast eroding week by week, Favre just keeps doing his job to the best of his ability.

Running Backs (2)

Late in the third quarter, Ahman Green broke tackles by ILB E.J. Henderson and Pat Williams at the line and charged ahead for 13 yards. He also showed good burst to the sticks on a second-and-14 screen pass for 15. Otherwise, Green just looked exceedingly common. Henderson and ILB Sam Cowart kept belting him high, dishing out far more punishment than they received from Green. But it must be said that Green's thigh tendon wasn't quite 100% before he blew it out with 8 minutes left. Fisher picked up the blitz nicely and eluded the blitzing Cowart before completing a 14-yard option pass. The blocking by the fullbacks wasn't very good.

Defensive Line (2½)

In the first half, Jim Bates' four-man pressures consistently collapsed the pocket and left Daunte Culpepper with little room to run. The unit was playing run and pass across the line of scrimmage. In the second half, the pressure went to pot. LT Bryant McKinnie, who has given up three sacks over the years to Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila, owned him this time. Despite merely 17.7% double-teaming, "KGB" had just one pressure against the much-improved McKinnie and too often gave up on rushes. He also got washed down inside on weak-side runs and kept getting faked out by Culpepper. The other end, Aaron Kampman, played all but one snap but didn't accomplish nearly enough rushing against suspect RT Mike Rosenthal. Two of the three sacks by defensive linemen were the result of Culpepper running right to them. The third came on a powerful bull rush by Colin Cole against RG Adam Goldberg, but then Cole grabbed Culpepper's facemask.

Linebackers (2½)

Paris Lenon marked his return as a starter with an impressive outing. On two occasions, LG Chris Liwienski pulled right on a counter play but was stopped dead in his tracks. Lenon also blew up lead blocker Richard Owens on some lead plays. He's able to play in a rage yet not lose sight of his assignments. Robert Thomas filled hard at times against the run but continued to get beat in key coverage assignments. First, he was too deep on the short flat pass that Mewelde Moore turned into a 29-yard gain when Thomas and Nick Barnett blew the tackle. Second, he should have been up challenging Moore on the 14-yard TD pass instead of playing soft and peeking at Culpepper. Barnett stripped Moore on a play that Lenon forced and also did well in man-to-man coverage. The bye-week blitz concoction with Brady Poppinga tucked in behind Grady Jackson was outstanding and deserving of an extended look.

Secondary (2)

When Culpepper needed a play, he picked on Ahmad Carroll for seven completions in nine attempts for 99 yards. On his 27-yard TD catch, aging Marcus Robinson surprisingly ran right past Carroll. Generally, Carroll had tight coverage, then would either lose the ball or fail to finish. Al Harris and Joey Thomas switched places in substitute packages. From the slot, Harris blitzed a lot, which isn't one of his strengths. Thomas didn't even compete on the decisive 12-yard sideline toss to Robinson. The safety play was uninspired, especially Mark Roman's poor coverage on slow-footed TE Jermaine Wiggins and Nick Collins' two missed tackles. Marviel Underwood doesn't appear comfortable.

Kickers (2)

Ryan Longwell is a realist, not an excuse-maker. He estimated that one of his misses in each of the last six seasons was the fault of the holder. The holds of B.J. Sander, a concern all season, became a major problem during the latter portion of pregame warmups and played a part in Longwell's misses from 53 and 42. At the same time, Sander held properly on bull's-eyes from 53 and 39. Longwell's five kickoffs averaged 60 yards and 3.9 seconds of hang time. Sander's three punts had averages of 45.3 yards (gross), 42.3 (net) and 4.15 (hang time).

Special Teams (1)

The coverage was extremely late arriving on Longwell's boot of 4.07 seconds that was returned 72 yards by Koren Robinson. What proved more costly was the feeble missed tackle by Mike Hawkins and another miss by Lenon on Robinson's 25-yard return in the final seconds that should have been about 15. Jamal Jones screwed up a kickoff return for the second straight game but was saved a lost fumble by a lucky bounce to Kenny Peterson.

Overall (2)

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