

Rating The Packers vs Bengals

Underdog fights until the end

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Green Bay - The 9-point spread Sunday in Cincinnati was the largest that the Green Bay Packers have faced in a regular-season game since Week 5 of 1995, when they also were a 9-point underdog in Dallas.

Despite a 5-1 deficit in the turnover ratio, the Packers were in the game until the last play before succumbing, 21-14, to the twice-beaten Bengals.

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

Receivers (3)

Injuries have forced everyone into a different role. As No. 1, Donald Driver has to cope with the double teams that used to go Javon Walker's way. As No. 2, Antonio Chatman has to be Driver. As No. 3, Andrae Thurman just tried to survive. And, as a tight end with decent speed, Donald Lee was asked to make clutch catches on third down from a split-receiver position. Together with Bubba Franks, the group made some great catches. It was amazing watching Chatman running good routes against good cornerbacks (Deltha O'Neal, Tory James), sneaking into tight windows and catching everything in sight, even one-handed. Franks did some excellent things in the passing game. Driver showed blazing speed on a reverse. The only negatives, and they were considerable, were the long passes misplayed by Driver and Lee that might have been touchdowns.

Offensive Line (3)

The toughest matchup fell on Mark Tauscher against DE Justin Smith. Tauscher continued his strong play, holding the Bengals' best defensive lineman to 1 solo tackle and no pressures. The other tackle, Chad Clifton, was equally as reliable until the fourth quarter. Then, in the span of 24 plays, he gave up a hurry on the final interception, was beaten inside by DE Duane Clemons on a run for minus-2, jumped offside and mishandled a stunt that led to a sack by Clemons with 30 seconds left. Clifton needs to be way better than that. This might have been rookie RG Will Whitticker's best game. He allowed two pressures but wasn't responsible for a bad run. Whitticker is getting more comfortable and his aggressive nature is starting to show. Adrian Klemm ended up off his feet on the stunt leading to Clemons' sack, missed his block on two runs for minus-1 and struggled in the screen game. Even if Mike Flanagan wasn't 100%, he held up fine and was a valuable addition.

Quarterbacks (3)

Judge Favre by what he did with a skeleton crew, not by the number "5" under the interception column that so many can't get past. If Driver and Lee catch those beautifully thrown balls, it's a victory. Just by his sheer personality, Favre inspired all those backups and, after a while, they began playing better than anyone should have thought possible. Carson Palmer might be a steady young quarterback but put him in Favre's cleats Sunday and he wouldn't have had a prayer. Yes, Favre threw some bad balls but there were a lot more good ones. Given the odds, he had no choice but to take chances. Otherwise, it's a 28-0 loss and a long flight home. The first interception wasn't his fault and the other tipped pick was thrown slightly behind Driver. On the three downfield interceptions, Favre fell victim to cornerbacks with fabulous hands making fabulous plays. Balls like that usually fall incomplete and life goes on. Favre did make a mistake by not putting more air under the long ball to Driver. He didn't make a good read on the sideline shot to Driver. He avoided two sackers on the scramble bomb to Tony Fisher but just didn't get enough on the throw. If he had, it would have been a touchdown. Favre has had far, far worse performances than this. He tried hard to win the game, and almost did. Nobody else in the organization would have had any idea how to even go about doing that in this trying situation without Favre.

Running Backs (2 ½)

The Packers got just what they bargained for from Fisher in his first start for Ahman Green. When Bengals coordinator Chuck Bresnahan blitzed (17.5% on passes), he picked them up. He vaulted into the end zone for a 1-yard touchdown. When Scott Wells sent a snap sailing 16 yards toward the rear, it was Fisher who alertly made the recovery. At times, he broke a few tackles and generally got what was there. Fisher made a bad read on one of his 17 carries, veering to the sideline when there was a lane inside. His two backups, ReShard Lee and Samkon Gado, ran well in their three-play cameos. After missing LB Landon Johnson on a run blitz early, William Henderson settled in and blocked effectively.

Defensive line (2 ½)

The Bengals made significant shifts in their run game to attack Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila. Normally, LG Eric Steinbach does all their pulling. However, with "KGB" on the weak side at right end, the Bengals kept pulling RT Willie Anderson to lead power plays at him. It wasn't pretty. Even at the end, when everyone knew the Bengals were just trying to run out the clock, "KGB" took himself out of position and became easy prey for a 17-yard toss around his side. Even though Palmer is a classic drop-back passer, the Bengals almost never helped LT Levi Jones or Anderson against "KGB." He couldn't get anything going. Jim Bates had to blitz 33.3% on passes because the four-man rush was almost worthless. Aaron Kampman played 64 of 66 snaps but didn't get a sniff against Anderson. Cullen Jenkins (36) wasn't a factor, either, even though oafish RG Bobbie Williams was opposite him quite a few times. Colin Cole (26) was more consistent staying square than Corey Williams (25).

Linebackers (3 ½)

Everybody played hard, holding a good running back (Rudi Johnson) to a 3.3-yard average. Nick Barnett and Robert Thomas diagnosed runs quickly and filled holes with purpose. Chris Perry might have gone 25 yards on a shovel pass at the 2-minute warning that would have put the game out of reach if Barnett hadn't made a tremendous read and tackled him for a 1-yard gain. Barnett has worked hard to become more of a factor this season. On the strong side, Paris Lenon closed hard for a sack on one of Bates' rare zone blitzes. However, he also was late reacting on some other plays. Rookie Brady Poppinga didn't do much in seven snaps as a standup rusher in a 3-2 nickel package but looked good in a final-series stint on the strong side.

Secondary (2)

Al Harris did extremely well shadowing Chad Johnson on first and second downs but was far less effective from the slot against T.J. Houshmandzadeh. Rookie Nick Collins smashed Johnson a few times and kept trash-talking at the Bengals. When it came time to make plays, Collins wasn't up to it. He was out of position on the winning TD pass and then overran the tackle, missed another tackle, dropped one easy interception and had a decent chance for another but couldn't come up with it. This has happened often. Either his hands or eyes are questionable. Mark Roman hit hard against his old team but once again looked miscast trying to cover out of the slot. Ahmad Carroll's terrific interception fueled the comeback but he also had four more penalties as the Bengals really went after him deep. Dime back Joey Thomas was so bad in the first 1½ quarters that he was yanked for Mike Hawkins.

Kickers (2)

Ryan Longwell averaged 64 yards and just 3.6 seconds (hang time) on three kickoffs. Cincinnati's Kyle Larson, a rookie free agent in 2004, easily out-punted B.J. Sander, who had averages of 41.7 yards (gross), 34 (net) and 3.9 (hang time).

Special teams (3 ½)

There isn't much doubt that ReShard Lee is a better kickoff returner than anyone else the Packers have tried this season. He really ran hard. Asking Chatman to return punts while playing receiver all day was beyond the call of duty. He had a season long of 18 yards.

Overall (2 ½)

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