

Rating the Packers vs. Bears:

Packers miss a golden opportunity

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers were a chip-shot field goal away Sunday from having a 10-6 lead at halftime and being in the driver's seat against the punchless Chicago Bears at Soldier Field.

Instead, coach Mike Sherman took the ball away from Ryan Longwell, got a little greedy and called a shovel pass, one of his pet plays that seldom fools anyone because he has tried a dozen of them already this season. Brett Favre did the rest by committing an unforgivable blunder and the Bears went on to win, 19-7.

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

Receivers (1½)

The Bears are vulnerable in the secondary but this group was unable to exploit them. Green Bay ran 84 plays and had merely one gain longer than 18 yards. That was a 27-yard post to TE Donald Lee, who stretched out to beat FS Mike Green. Donald Driver drew a 36-yard interference penalty against Green but caught just eight of the other 14 passes thrown his way for 64 yards and did next to nothing (3 yards) after the catch. Driver did show amazing courage going inside against LBs Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs for a 6-yard catch on third and 2 to set up the TD. Robert Ferguson and Antonio Chatman were OK. Other than the sack that Lee gave up to CB Charles Tillman on a blown assignment, the blocking by the tight ends was excellent. In particular, David Martin was effective both on the play side and back side.

Offensive Line (3)

The Bears' front four dominated Carolina and Tampa Bay the last two weeks but coordinator Ron Rivera had to blitz much more than usual (28.1%) to generate pressure Sunday. Probably the best player was Mike Flanagan. He was the only lineman not to allow a pressure or "bad" run, did well sorting out the Bears' extensive use of stunts and blitzes and was dogged getting to the linebacker level. Mark Tauscher's poor decision led to SS Mike Brown's sack / fumble but otherwise he stayed in front of Adewale Ogunleye, a talented left end. The other tackle, Chad Clifton, prevented RE Alex Brown from terrorizing Brett Favre but also was responsible for three "bad" runs and 2½ pressures. Right guard remained a void after Grey Ruegamer debuted with three pressures and two "bad" runs and Will Whitticker allowed two pressures in two series. The deleterious effect that this position has had on the entire offense is incalculable. Ruegamer is what he is, a tough guy and limited athlete. Massive Kevin Barry was dominant at times in "U-71."

Quarterbacks (1½)

Favre's lousy day began on the first play when the big blister on his right foot made him look clumsy throwing a ball into the dirt on an open bootleg. He kept limping around so his footwork was even worse than usual. On the TD return by Nathan Vasher, Favre's pass sailed so far inside because he wasn't even close to being square to his target. It's almost impossible to throw in the flat against Cover 2 but Favre did anyway. His absolute refusal to take a sack led to the first killer interception and eventual defeat. Favre was hit hard three or four times, but that would have been a day at the beach for him in the 1990s before the league really began protecting quarterbacks. Against a defense as good as the Bears', the protection was adequate. He completed 31 mostly short passes and had 12 incompletions that were well off line, including four that easily could have been intercepted. At times, he's just throwing the ball out there rather than passing. Favre kept slinging to the bitter end. It was the fifth or sixth time this season that he was unable to engineer a comeback victory.

Running Backs (3½)

Samkon Gado uses his keen intelligence to his advantage. He takes coaching and improves. On Sunday, he consistently covered up with both arms in traffic but loosened up with one arm in the open field. Running the same four or five plays that he did a month ago, Gado showed greater patience and less indecision. He gave Alex Brown fits running to daylight both under and around him. By unofficial count, Gado broke seven tackles and gained 38 of his 75 yards after contact. When NT Ian Scott blew by Ruegamer, Gado danced away and down the sideline for a 23-yard gain that was shortened to 6 by Driver's holding penalty. It was his hardest-hitting game, according to Gado, and he didn't fumble. He should have had more than 20 carries. Fisher caught seven of the 11 balls thrown to him for 69 yards and rushed effectively, too. Gado had 44 snaps compared with Fisher's 43.

Defensive Line (3)

The Packers have had a series of garbage sacks but the three Sunday were legitimate: Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila beat LT John Tait in 4.0 seconds, Mike Montgomery beat Tait with a bull rush in 4.1 seconds and Cullen Jenkins split LG Ruben Brown and C Olin Kreutz in 3.0 seconds. That was excellent production against a club that max-protects and gets the ball out quickly. Montgomery didn't even play in the first half but had 14 snaps in the second when the coaches elected to lift "KGB" against the run. Aaron Kampman was partially at fault on Thomas Jones' 27-yard run when he didn't get enough depth on the back side. However, Kampman, Grady Jackson and Cullen Jenkins all pursued and played hard. Despite hardly being on the field all day, the defense was whipped at the point of attack on the Bears' 11-play, 63-yard drive for an insurance FG. Jackson trashed the undersized Kreutz at times but there were instances when the combative Kreutz walled him off.

Linebackers (1½)

Jim Bates blitzed as often on passes (47.4%) as he has all season but nobody from this unit got home. The Packers really need a linebacker with disruptive ability as a rusher. Nick Barnett recovered a fumble and made a great read on a screen but dropped the pass. He struggled getting off blocks more than usual. Neither Robert Thomas nor Paris Lenon was much of a factor. When Lenon exited with a finger injury on the second play of the third quarter, rookie Brady Poppinga had his longest stint yet. He's fast, active and aggressive but gets caught peeking in the wrong holes.

Secondary (3)

Al Harris basically matched up with Muhsin Muhammad and prevented him from catching any of the four passes thrown to him, including three fades. The Bears clearly planned to attack Harris with Muhammad but accomplished nothing. It's hard to evaluate the group because QB Kyle Orton can't do anything starter-caliber other than hand off. Still, Orton found a way to beat Ahmad Carroll on a 34-yard fade and Mike Hawkins on an 18-yard fade. Mark Roman had to wait until his 29th game in Green Bay to make his first interception on a routine deflection, then dropped what should have been No. 2 on an overthrown bomb. On Jones' 27-yard run, Roman got sucked inside and then didn't even hustle in chase. Nick Collins did give great effort and knocked Jones out of bounds at the 3. Playing more in the box than he probably has all season, Collins had several strong face-up tackles and one bad miss when he ducked his head.

Kickers (1)

The punting duel between struggling B.J. Sander and Brad Maynard cost the Packers on average 13 yards in gross and 13.8 in net. Inept in the first half but then much improved in the second, Sander had averages of 35.7, 27.7 and 3.94 seconds (hang time) in seven punts. Ryan Longwell's two kickoffs were below average.

Special Teams (2)

Bears PR Rashied Davis fumbled two punts but CB Jerron Wishom blew the recovery on one and Davis reeled in the other himself when no Packer was within 15 yards of him. Carroll isn't the answer on kickoffs but at least he didn't go down easily.