

Rating the Packers vs. Lions

Gado runs off Lions - His alert play, 171 yards lead way

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers were swept by the Minnesota Vikings and will find out on Christmas Day if they're going to be swept by the Chicago Bears. But at least they didn't suffer the ultimate indignity of being swept by the Detroit Lions during the Matt Millen era.

On Sunday night, Samkon Gado saw to that. Rushing for 171 yards and throwing perhaps the Packers' most vital pass of the season, the rookie running back was a revelation in the 16-13 overtime victory at Lambeau Field.

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

Receivers (3)

Based on how David Martin is playing, the Packers hardly miss Bubba Franks. Martin had five catches Sunday, including a nifty 16-yarder when he leaked out of the protection into an empty flat at the last second. He hasn't dropped a pass all year. His blocking might not be punishing but it is consistent and effective. Down in and down out, he is developing into a dependable player. The Lions matched Dre' Bly against Donald Driver while at the same time providing safety help over the top in base and linebacker help in the slot. Instead of forcing the ball to Driver, Favre threw nine times to Robert Ferguson, his highest total since Week 3. Ferguson had slow-footed R.W. McQuarters beat deep and Antonio Chatman had Bly beat deep but Favre's passes were woefully off-line. Ferguson ruined one long drive with a bad illegal-block penalty but set up the overtime field goal by running an exquisite sideline route against an unusual zone coverage for 17.

Offensive Line (4)

DTs Shaun Rogers and Dan Wilkinson didn't run wild this time, a huge reason why the Packers won. Rogers played 31 snaps on Will Whitticker's side, 19 on Scott Wells' side, one over Mike Flanagan and another 20 on the bench. Rogers destroyed Wells with an inside move for a sack, set up another for DE Hall with a spin move against Wells, had one hurry against Flanagan and Whitticker and blew up one run against Whitticker. Wilkinson beat Wells on one "bad" run in overtime but otherwise didn't do a thing. Flanagan was terrific overall, stout in-line and extremely quick getting out on MLB Earl Holmes. Flanagan doesn't always look pretty but never quits and generally gets a piece of his man no matter how difficult the assignment. The first 14 snaps that Rogers was on the field all came against Whitticker. When the rookie used his beef to stand up to him, Rogers moved over against Wells. As so often happens, Whitticker later lost his edge and had two false starts and two "bad" run blocks down the stretch. Chad Clifton owned Hall on pass plays but was beaten by him on three "bad" runs totaling minus-6 yards. For the third week in a row, Kevin Barry was a real force. LE Cory Redding was tough for everyone else to move except for Barry in "U-71."

Quarterbacks (3)

Favre appeared to make a conscious effort not to lose the game this week, and it paid off. After fumbling in the pocket without being hit to hand the Lions an early field goal, he generally was content to manage the offense. On two occasions, he caught himself at the last instant and wisely took the check-down instead of gunning away downfield. His long completion was a 19-yard deep out to Driver against Bly. Only Favre can throw that route on a frigid night. His accuracy on the deep ball, a negative most of the season, haunted the offense on the misfires to Ferguson and Chatman. He's got to complete one of them but neither was even close.

Running Backs (5)

Gado prevented a critical safety on two successive plays in the fourth quarter. On the first, he had the presence of mind to flip the ball forward as he was being tackled in the end zone for what became a safety-saving incompleteness. After a stoppage of more than 5 minutes, Rogers was rested and cranked for the next play. It was supposed to be a run off left guard with Gado following Vonta Leach. By the time Gado took the handoff, Rogers had slanted hard between Mark Tauscher and Whitticker and was ready to swallow him up for 2 points. The blitzing Holmes was in the backfield just behind Rogers. Seeing trouble, Gado made a quick cut to his right, avoided the pair and burrowed his way out to the 3. Gado has fresh legs, guts, a good brain and fine ability. His backup, Tony Fisher, played tentatively. Fullbacks William Henderson (20 snaps) and Leach (26) were outstanding. Detroit defenders in the flat didn't seem to want any part of Henderson on his four key receptions. Leach still needs to adjust better on the move but five or six times he really lowered the boom. He pancaked both Holmes and FS Bracy Walker on Gado's 64-yard TD run.

Defensive Line (3)

Grady Jackson (35 snaps) and, to a lesser extent, Colin Cole (30) were the major players in three goal-line stands. Jackson is immovable over center in a five-man front. At times, RG Damien Woody went nose-to-nose with Jackson and blocked him in non-short-yardage plays. But Woody is one of the few guards who has the muscle to match up. On the outside, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila never got a sniff of Jeff Garcia even though struggling LT Jeff Backus almost never had help against him. Once again, Mike Montgomery (14) substituted for "KGB" in the second half and showed good awareness. Aaron Kampman (51) made some plays in the running game but also seemed somewhat out of control on the back side and gave up cutback lanes too easily. Teams are handling the quickness of Cullen Jenkins (28) much better than early in the season.

Linebackers (3)

Jim Bates blitzed on 32% of drop-backs but the only decent rush was by Paris Lenon early. Lenon played with a cast on his damaged hand, Robert Thomas (thigh) was inactive, Na'il Diggs (knee) played only in goal-line and Brady Poppinga, making his first start, suffered a season-ending knee injury early in the fourth quarter. Nick Barnett played every snap, as always, and was at his normal level of play. Lenon takes on blocks with toughness and precision but lacks the speed and reactions to make a lot of plays. Poppinga was more disciplined than expected but now faces a long road back. Rookie Roy Manning was up and down at the point of attack.

Secondary (3)

The degree of difficulty was minimal with a rag-armed quarterback operating in bad weather. Al Harris matched on base downs against Roy Williams, gave up his first TD pass of the season on a 4-yard fade and was beat for 40 on a double move up the sideline. Ahmad Carroll played through a hip pointer and was pretty good. Mike Hawkins, the No. 3 cornerback, was exposed on a skinny post to Williams that might have gone a long way but was dropped. Nick Collins was out of position on Kevin Jones' 40-yard run but showed his blazing speed by running him down at the 10. Some safeties might have given up on such a play but Collins always chases hard.

Kickers (4)

Ryan Longwell hit the winner from 28, added field goals of 36 and 39 and saw one from 38 blocked. His four kickoffs averaged 56.5 yards and 3.6 seconds (hang time). On five punts, B.J. Sander averaged 34.4 yards (gross), 31.8 (net) and 3.79 (hang time).

Special Teams (1)

The Packers suffered their first blocked field goal since October 2002 when Whitticker got lazy and let Jared DeVries push him back. Then he was benched in favor of Wells. Henderson missed the tackle on McQuarters' 73-yard kickoff return and Longwell, who didn't even lay a glove on him, let him cut back into the middle of the field. It was revealing that WR Andrae Thurman couldn't catch McQuarters, whose serious decline in speed is well-known among personnel people. Once again, Collins had to run him down. Chatman's 33-yard return made for a positive start in overtime.

Overall (3.5)