

Rating the Packers vs. Seahawks

Packers squander chances

Posted: Nov. 29, 2006

Green Bay - It was 34 degrees at kickoff on Monday night, coldest for a home game in Seattle's 31-year history. It also snowed, marking the first time that happened for a Seahawks home game. There also appeared to be several thousand no-shows because fans had trouble reaching Qwest Field. Plus, there was a substantial turnout of Packers fans from the Pacific Northwest.

The Packers were helped even more when Matt Hasselbeck turned the ball over four times in the first half.

Despite so many factors going their way, the Packers couldn't really establish anything on either side of the ball and ended up getting beat, 34-24. Here is a rating of the Packers, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (2 1/2)

Brett Favre went to the line with a run-or-pass option early in the third quarter. Seeing CB Kelly Herndon playing 8 yards off Donald Driver, Favre called a one-step inside route. Driver made the catch at 6 yards, skipped away from onrushing FS Kenny Hamlin and outran Herndon for a 48-yard TD. The Seahawks limited Driver to three receptions in nine targeted throws with concentrated coverage. That left Greg Jennings and Ruvell Martin with some one-on-one situations but neither did much with them. Jennings beat CB Marcus Trufant deep but was unable to track the ball's flight and it fell incomplete. He did gain 18 of his 50 yards after the catch by retracing his steps a few times, but the rookie continues to play with some tentativeness. Martin ran a poor route on a third-down incomplete pass in the red zone. With David Martin sidelined (ribs), Donald Lee had some good blocks on the play-side and Bubba Franks did an effective job cutting on the back-side.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1)

Seattle coordinator John Marshall has been a big blitzer of late but here rushed five or more on just 18.6% of passes and more than five only once. Still, Mike McCarthy was wary. Three minutes remained in the first half when he called his first pass off a five-step drop, let alone a seven-stepper. The Packers had reason to fear the matchup of RT Tony Moll against DE Bryce Fisher and DT Rocky Bernard. On the other side, Chad Clifton was very good in protection against DE Grant Wistrom and LB Julian Peterson. Moll gave up two pressures against Bernard, one to rookie DE Darryl Tapp and a sack to Tapp on the final play. Jason Spitz allowed two pressures to backup DT Craig Terrill and missed Peterson on a screen pass, only the Packers' third since the bye. One reason the ground game went nowhere was the ability of the Seahawks' defensive linemen to grab blockers before they got to the linebackers. Another was shaky cut-blocking, including two by Moll in the first half.

QUARTERBACKS (1 ½)

With the run game rendered null and void, Favre had to carry the team and he couldn't do it, even in his kind of conditions. The Packers insisted his week-old elbow injury didn't hinder his throwing. His best ball was the superlative touch pass to Driver for 34 yards on a classic Cover 2-beating route. Other than that, Favre didn't make a lot happen. Through 10 weeks, Seattle's cornerbacks didn't have a single interception. Here they had three. Herndon would have been vulnerable against Franks on a long bootleg pass but stayed on top of the route and picked Favre's overthrow. Trailing by 10 points with 6 minutes left, Favre began a series at the GB 31 by putting up a 42-yard post to Chris Francies even though he wasn't open. Marcus Trufant intercepted. Two minutes later, on first down from the GB 39, Favre wouldn't take Ahman Green on the check-down and forced a deep sideline route even though Ruvell Martin wasn't open. Kelly Jennings intercepted.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

Green might have run as hard as he has all season. There wasn't much there on his 5-yard TD but he kept his legs churning, his pads down and wouldn't be denied. Green broke two tackles on a 14-yard burst and showed great second-effort on a third-quarter flare pass. But Green is leaving the lineup more lately than he did in the first month. In the second quarter, Green left after three plays even though third-and-goal from the 11 was upcoming. The Packers cannot afford to have him sitting in that situation. In all, Green played 35 of 59 plays, Vernand Morency played five in each half and Noah Herron, who didn't appear in the first half, finished with 13, mostly in garbage time. Brandon Miree returned after a three-week absence and was neither sharp nor physical. He had 14 snaps and William Henderson had 18.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2)

A flush by Cullen Jenkins inside against G Rob Sims enabled Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila to come around the edge and force the fumble that Abdul Hodge returned for a TD. Still, give "KGB" credit for finally beating the great Walter Jones. Otherwise, he didn't have a pressure in 30 rushes on Jones' side, and just 15% involved double-teaming. The Seahawks almost wore out Jones running Shaun Alexander to his side. Alexander averaged 5 yards (13-65) on plays directly at "KGB," who played 60 snaps. His backup, Mike Montgomery, was even less effective in 32 snaps. Alexander had runs of 18, 8, 13, 16 and 15 yards to his side. Mike Holmgren could keep putting Hasselbeck seven steps deep because there he could step up. The best rusher was Jenkins with four hurries in 29 snaps. Aaron Kampman, who sat out merely two snaps, had two knockdowns and three hurries but was unable to beat RT Tom Ashworth for a sack and missed two tackles. With two batted passes and staunch at the point of attack, Ryan Pickett (60) might have had his best game for Green Bay.

LINEBACKERS (1)

A.J. Hawk continued his pattern of being out of position in coverage. He's just raw on how to handle some basic route combinations (back to the flat, wideout on a curl) and zone drops. There's never anything wrong with Hawk's effort against the run. But he had a long day taking on FB Mack Strong and made too many of his 15 tackles downfield. Facing Alexander and Holmgren in his first start made it doubly tough on Abdul Hodge. At times, he lined up a yard or two closer to the line than Nick Barnett does and wasn't able to get outside. His low-block shield wasn't good. He missed four tackles. And Holmgren twice exposed him with end-zone passes to TE Jerramy Stevens. Hodge didn't seem overly instinctive, which was mildly surprising. Brady Poppinga put TE Itula Mili out with a concussion-causing hit.

SECONDARY (4)

Charles Woodson had a huge game with two interceptions and an end-zone breakup. On the interception, he guessed right on an out-and-in route off motion by Deion Branch and cut him off beautifully for the pick. Woodson had a hand inside Darrell Jackson's hands but he caught the ball anyway for a 4-yard TD on a fade. Branch had receptions of 17 and 13 yards against Al Harris, who matched with him most of the game. Harris also had a marvelous interception, baiting Hasselbeck with a sneaky move in Cover 2 zone coverage. Most of Hasselbeck's limited success came against Patrick Dendy, who committed two penalties on the 10 passes thrown at him and gave up six completions (four to D.J. Hackett) for 62 yards. Playing against his old team, Marquand Manuel probably had his best performance. He was very physical. Nick Collins was in position for more than one interception but couldn't finish.

KICKERS (1/2)

Low trajectory was a reason why Terrill was able to block Dave Rayner's 28-yard attempt. Rayner did hit from 34 off the snow-covered FieldTurf and, on five kickoffs, averaged 60.6 yards and 3.59 seconds of hang time. Jon Ryan's five punts had averages of 34.8 (gross), 29.2 (net) and 3.91.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1)

Terrill was able to penetrate by bulling back Spitz and Clifton. The kickoff coverage was abominable. Nate Burluson would have had 32 more yards if not for two holding penalties on LB Kevin Bentley. Morency brought it hard on kickoff returns.

OVERALL (2)

Reprinted from the Nov 29, 2006 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel