

# Rating the Packers vs. Bears

Packers appear playoff-ready

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**Green Bay** - The way it stands now, it's hard to believe any of the six teams in the NFC playoffs would want anything to do with the healthy and hungry Green Bay Packers after what they did to the Chicago Bears on Sunday night at Soldier Field.

Meaningless game or not, the top-seeded Bears were playing on their home field and used most of their starters until late in the third quarter. Maybe the Bears really were as flat as flat can be, but that wasn't the Packers' fault.

The Packers' defense, much improved since Cullen Jenkins took over for Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila at right defensive end in Week 13, all but dominated the Bears.

Their offense kept the Bears off-balance with a masterful job of play-calling by coach Mike McCarthy.

And their special teams stifled the Bears' units, which deserved to be grouped among the league's elite.

The result was a 26-7 victory, the Packers' fourth in a row to end the season. The only hotter team in the NFC is Philadelphia, which has won five straight.

Green Bay's final record of 8-8, a significant improvement on 4-12 in 2005, is reflected by the number of footballs that were awarded in the Journal Sentinel's 13th annual "Rating the Packers" feature. The Packers received 43 total footballs, a jump from 36 ½ a year ago.

For the first time, the running backs led the team in footballs with 48, or an average of 3.0 footballs per game. Quarterbacks had been first nine times, kickers led the way in 2000, the offensive line was No. 1 in 2003 and the defensive line was first in 2005.

Following running backs, in order, were: quarterbacks and defensive line, 44 ½ footballs (2.78); kickers, 44 (2.75); receivers, 43 ½ (2.72); defensive backs, 43 (2.69); offensive line, 42 ½ (2.66); linebackers, 42 (2.63); and special teams, 40 (2.50).

The only position that didn't show improvement from last season was special teams, which was down from 41 footballs, and offensive line, which stayed the same. The biggest jump was made by running backs, which had 39 ½ in 2005.

Wide receiver Donald Driver, running back Ahman Green and defensive end Aaron Kampman were the only players named player of the week twice. The only position group to receive 5 footballs in any game was the quarterbacks at Minnesota.

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

### **RECEIVERS ( 3 ½ )**

With Greg Jennings back in Green Bay while his wife gave birth, free agents Ruvell Martin and Carlyle Holiday saw to it that he wasn't missed. Martin ran a few poor routes, including quitting on a slant route that was intercepted, and dropped a pass. But he also caught seven of 12 passes for 118 yards, including 42 after the catch. Martin used his long stride to run away from Ricky Manning Jr. on a 33-yard fade and didn't cower while running slants into the lair of Brian Urlacher. Holiday reached back to make two catches for 28 yards on balls behind him, went inside for crack-back blocks that Driver and Jennings almost never are asked to make, and showed long burst across the middle on a 35-yard bomb against Nathan Vasher. He's a big man who can drop his hips and settle in zones. Bubba Franks allowed a sack to Alex Brown on an inside charge and struggled on back-side cuts. With David Martin still out, Donald Lee played extensively and dropped a pass.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Last week, Detroit LT Jeff Backus had fits trying to keep up with DE Mark Anderson. Not so Chad Clifton, who had the dangerous rookie most of the time and pitched a shutout. Mark Tauscher spent most of the night blocking Adewale Ogunleye and limited him to one pressure. That pressure by Ogunleye was enough to hurry Brett Favre just enough so he couldn't complete what should have been Franks' first TD pass of the season. Besides the sack, Brown had two hurries on Clifton. As one of several players that bodied Urlacher and prevented him from blowing up the run game, Scott Wells was outstanding. Daryn Colledge was involved in two hurries but also was sharp drive-blocking Tank Johnson. After a shaky first few series, Jason Spitz came on.

### **QUARTERBACKS (4)**

You couldn't call Favre precise in his reads or overly accurate with his passes. This was one of the few times all season his receivers other than Driver made difficult catches for him. Nevertheless, Favre was much improved from his awful Week 1 showing against Bears coordinator Ron Rivera. Based on Rivera's loose coverages and semi-predictable seven zone blitzes, it seemed fairly evident that the Bears spent little or no time game-planning for Green Bay. Favre remained patient on a windy night, stepped up and away from outside pressure to complete passes six times and did his best work on third down. McCarthy hurt the Bears' Cover 2 looks against spread formations and prevented Rivera from drawing a bead on Favre by constantly moving the pocket.

### **RUNNING BACKS ( 3 ½ )**

Neither Ahman Green (52 snaps) nor Vernand Morency (14) were sharp in their reads. Two of the 11 "bad" runs were their responsibility, and FB Brandon Miree (24) got off track as the lead blocker several times on 2 ½ other "bad" runs. Miree was able to tie up Urlacher once or twice, but the pop that he showed early in the season basically vanished with his dislocated elbow in Week 7. Attacking the Urlacher-led ground defense is hardly a day in the park, so Green was even more physical than usual. He dished out punishment with his active forearms and took a heap of it, too. The blocking was so-so, but have you ever seen Green complain in any way about his supporting cast? He just keeps on ramming along.

### **DEFENSIVE LINE ( 4 ½ )**

LG Ruben Brown was having a resurgent season until he ran into Corey Williams in the passing game. Williams bull-rushed Brown for a sack and two knockdowns, and tipped a pass over the top of Brown that was intercepted by Patrick Dendy. Brown got back at Williams as a drive blocker, displacing him on Cedric Benson's 30-yard run. Tying his season-high total of 46 snaps, Jenkins slipped inside to beat LT John Tait for a pair of knockdowns. One turned into Charles Woodson's interception. Kampman, who played all 56 snaps, didn't get much done against savvy RT Fred Miller and got washed down on a few runs. Gbaja-Biamila might have been more physical in his choice of rushes than he has been all season and played 23 largely productive snaps. Ryan Pickett met his match several times at the point.

### **LINEBACKERS (3)**

At times, A.J. Hawk takes himself out of position with delayed rushes when the percentage play is to mirror the quarterback. That's basically what happened on a shallow crossing route that Muhsin Muhammad turned into 27 yards. Hawk also made a bad decision by undercutting a screen pass that subsequently ruptured into 22 yards for Benson, and slipped before being blocked by Ruben Brown on an 18-yard burst by Benson. Later, Hawk didn't come charging in, stayed back in the throwing lane and made a great interception. Nick Barnett had a strong game against run and pass. Brady Poppinga gained revenge on Week 1 tormentor Desmond Clark by shutting him out but blew the tackle at the line on Benson's long run and wasn't up to par in his run fits.

### **SECONDARY ( 4 ½ )**

Perhaps for the first time in Green Bay, Nick Collins was feeling it. He was all over the field making huge plays and smashing people. He made a great break on the 55-yard interception TD, stayed back and made another tough interception and dropped a third in front of Rashied Davis that was in his hands. Woodson and Al Harris provided inspired coverage, with Woodson flashing his sensational hands on his eighth interception. Neither Muhammad nor Bernard Berrian could get untracked. The 75-yard TD pass to Mark Bradley was another case of Marquand Manuel failing to stay deep and Dendy possessing pedestrian speed.

## **KICKERS (2)**

Dave Rayner appeared to over-stride beyond the ball and ended up duck-hooking a 32-yard FG and an extra point off the left upright. He also badly mishit the second-half kickoff. But Rayner got his act together late to nail a 46-yard FG through a stiff crosswind. Jon Ryan closed on a high note, punting five times for averages of 40 yards (gross), 38.4 (net) and 4.13 seconds (hang time).

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

The coverage against electrifying rookie Devin Hester was so superb that the Bears' 37-yard completion from punt formation can be placed on the backburner. Hester had a long of 24 yards on six returns. His lanes were clogged and Tracy White (two), Atari Bigby and Jarrett Bush delivered hard hits. The fake punt came after coach Mike Stock gambled on getting a good return, double-teaming the two flyers and running a stunt off the edge. Woodson came through with a 23-yard punt return, and Morency's only kickoff return was for 26.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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