

# Rating the Packers vs. Eagles

## Engine revved despite not firing on all cylinders

*Posted: Sept. 10, 2007*

Green Bay - Three and a half months from now, when teams are jockeying for playoff berths and seeding in the NFC, the Green Bay Packers will know the magnitude of this narrow, imperfect victory over the Philadelphia Eagles.

Throughout the decade, the Eagles have had one of the best teams and best-coached teams in the league. They figure as a contender once again, but now the Packers would win any tie-breaker against them for seeding and home-field advantage if they go on to a successful season.

Green Bay's special teams were magnificent, its defense was stubborn and its offense was abysmal. It might bode well for the Packers in that they were able to defeat an opponent as strong as the Eagles with just two phases contributing.

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

### **RECEIVERS (1½)**

The midweek loss of Greg Jennings (hamstring) was a cruel blow. It forced James Jones and Ruell Martin to move up a notch, and neither proved ready. There was too much imprecise route-running and tentative play. Twenty-five balls went to WRs, 12 were caught and just 25 of their 109 yards came after the catch. Donald Driver, wearing a boot on his damaged foot nine days earlier, didn't have much of a day. His only clean drop was wiped out by penalty, but there were two others that Brett Favre needed Driver to snag and he didn't. TEs Donald Lee and Bubba Franks performed just about to par, which means mediocre.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (½)**

Eagles coordinator Jim Johnson blitzed on four of the first eight dropbacks, then just nine of the last 38 for 28.3% overall. Against primarily four-man rushes, the pass protection was terrible. Mark Tauscher had a hand in two sacks and allowed two other knockdowns. He was sluggish reacting to the variety of moves presented by Juqua Thomas and Jevon Kearse. On the other side, Chad Clifton had fewer bad plays but gave up 1½ sacks to Trent Cole, including the late sack-fumble that almost deep-sixed his team. Daryn Colledge whiffed against Montae Reagor for a sack, struggled physically against Brodrick Bunkley and had two false starts. Center Scott Wells was on the ground too much. RG Jason Spitz, in for the first 40 plays, was pulled for medical and performance reasons in the middle of a third-quarter series for Junius Coston, who immediately missed Mike Patterson on a cut block and then gave up three pressures in his 24 snaps. The Eagles were worried sick about their interior run defense but the Packers' attempts to exploit them were rather feeble.

## **QUARTERBACKS (2½)**

Mike McCarthy has said Brett Favre threw the deep ball better this summer than in the past but you wouldn't have known by the fourth-quarter bomb of 40 yards that sailed over the head of Jones when he was behind Will James. Given how the deck was stacked against Favre, he simply must complete that pass. No Jennings. No Vernand Morency. Three of five skill positions manned by rookies. No run game. His linemen in the tank. The Eagles able to pressure with four men and stop the run with seven. Johnson across the field. No, this was no picnic. Favre was intercepted once, should have been intercepted at the Green Bay 17 by Takeo Spikes and made some other questionable decisions. But he also made two great ad-lib plays worth 24 yards in the third quarter with the offense in first gear. It's called doing just enough to win, which Favre did.

## **RUNNING BACKS (1)**

Brandon Jackson doesn't look like a starting-caliber player at this stage. He isn't creating on his own. He isn't finishing runs. He isn't explosive. He's isn't a heavy runner. And he is fighting the ball as a receiver. Jackson did break a pair of tackles by MLB Omar Gaither on two of his four receptions. Every now and then you see some flare. That's about it. Jackson played 46 snaps compared with 12 mostly third down plays for DeShawn Wynn. He showed some shake on a third-and-11 draw for 8 yards but with the first down in sight he ran right into S Sean Considine. Ahman Green drew one penalty in the last five seasons; Wynn had a false-start in his first game. Korey Hall (24 snaps) wasn't bad.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Despite having a robust RT in Jon Runyan, the Eagles weren't going to let Aaron Kampman beat them. In a novel scheme, they would have Runyan double down for a moment against the DT, then double back outside to help TE Brent Celek after Kampman had trashed him. Playing all 66 snaps, Kampman had two pressures and wasn't sharp against the run. On the other side, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (32) was one-on-one 78% of the time against LT William Thomas and basically stalled out. The best player was Cullen Jenkins (50), who lost one sack by penalty and set up Corey Williams (29) for another after splitting a double team. He beat Thomas twice for pressures on spin moves, then drew a holding penalty on LG Todd Herremans with a fierce bull rush in the final series. Now that Jenkins has been burned twice on naked pitches, he needs to react better. Ryan Pickett (33) bumped bellies with RG Shawn Andrews, one of the game's elite drive blockers, and did OK. Much better was Johnny Jolly (31) with an astonishing three batted passes and power at the point. The interior pass rush wasn't real good.

## **LINEBACKERS (3½)**

Nick Barnett was instrumental in keeping Brian Westbrook's long gain to 16 yards in 26 touches. He made a host of rapid, decisive reads, didn't miss a tackle and was credited with a game-high 13. When Donovan McNabb didn't see Barnett in his throwing lane the linebacker showed great hands, reaction and adjustment in snagging an interception from just 10 yards away. One of his best plays came when he got over the top of a block by C Jamaal Jackson to stop Westbrook for no gain inside the 5. Slot WR Jason Avant didn't beat Barnett by much on a 9-yard TD pass in a tough coverage. A.J. Hawk got knocked around inside too much, looked bad against Westbrook in the flat for the only missed tackle by a linebacker and had a quiet day. Brady Poppinga survived his 26-play stint when the Eagles were unable to match up Westbrook on him.

## **SECONDARY (4)**

Atari Bigby's first regular-season start was impressive, to say the least. You know he's on the field. He played with speed, aggressiveness and intensity. He was reckless when it was time to be reckless but never appeared to be way out of position. The ability of Nick Collins and Bigby to stay in balance kept Westbrook from breaking loose. Collins made some tough hits early before missing twice and dropping a routine interception. Avant gave Charles Woodson fits from the slot. Al Harris blanketed receivers with one good arm after having to sit out 14 first-half snaps with an elbow injury. That took a ton of guts. Forced to play briefly as the dime back, Tramon Williams gave up a 37-yard go route to Kevin Curtis. Nickel back Jarrett Bush was up and down.

## **KICKERS (4½)**

Mason Crosby's decisive field goal from 42 in the waning seconds was amazing because Jon Ryan had all he could do just to get the high snap down somewhere. A machine since he arrived, Crosby also hit from 53 and 37 and had good kickoff averages of 70.5 yards and 3.94 seconds of hang time. Ryan's averages (40.9, 39.1) were helped by 22 yards of roll. His average hang time of 4.10 won't cut it.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (5)**

Tracy White scored a touchdown, recovering a fumbled punt that Bush jarred away from Greg Lewis. Bush beat a single block by CB Joselio Hanson to get there so quickly. Later, Bush recovered the fumble by punt returner J.R. Reed to set up Crosby. Jason Hunter, John Kuhn, Bigby, White and Wynn all flew around. Williams fought for every inch of his 25-yard mark on kickoffs behind folks like G Tony Palmer, who moved bodies in the middle of the wedge. The Eagles got utterly embarrassed.

*From the Sept. 11, 2007, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*