

# Rating the Packers vs. Giants

## Team finding ways to win

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers have opened the season with victories over two of the six NFC playoff teams from a year ago and didn't have to play anywhere near a complete game to do it.

That's the beauty of the Packers' best start since 2001, when they posted a double-digit victory total for the first of four seasons in a row. As once again the youngest team in the league, the Packers can and probably will play appreciably better as the year progresses.

Green Bay is being carried by special teams and defense, and what offense it has is being carried by Brett Favre and Donald Driver.

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

### **RECEIVERS (4)**

It became obvious early that CBs Corey Webster, Sam Madison and R.W. McQuarters couldn't stay with a suspect receiving corps that was missing Greg Jennings (hamstring). Without speed and quickness, they were petrified about getting close to Driver. It was a little like a 7-on-7 drill, or maybe even a walk-through against air. Driver could get free any time that he wanted. At the same time, Donald Lee and Bubba Franks were in the unfamiliar position of having a field day against lousy linebackers. Franks made a one-handed snag with MLB Antonio Pierce draped all over him for his first TD in the span of 27 games. Maybe it will serve as a red-zone rediscovery of sorts for him. Lee is starting to play back to the way he did in '05, not '06. Rookie James Jones got vertical for the first time since Aug. 18 with a 46-yard go route behind the feckless Webster.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (1½)**

One week after the Cowboys mauled the Giants' interior, the Packers failed to break even. The unit was responsible for 8½ of the whopping 15 "bad" runs, including 4 ½ for Daryn Colledge and 2 ½ for Junius Coston. The Packers made the move at RG last week, promoting Coston over Jason Spitz, but if Colledge doesn't pick it up there's no way the Packers can withstand his presence on the field. Colledge isn't playing with strength or to his athleticism. Besides giving up three of the eight pressures, he offered little push at the point of attack, wasn't dependable on his back-side cuts and didn't look sound fundamentally. Coston also got bounced a few times in protection, yielding two of the Giants' three knockdowns on power moves by DT Fred Robbins. But at least Coston tried to be physical. Scott Wells kept his head despite the constant checking by Favre at the line and was excellent in protection. Michael Strahan is a mere shadow of his former self but for Mark Tauscher to hold him without a pressure was a fine day's work. Both Tauscher and Chad Clifton had their share of bad plays in the run game.

### **QUARTERBACKS (4½)**

The fact the Giants were playing the same Eagles scheme that Favre saw last week was critical to the outcome. The A-gap bluffing, the overload blitzes and the base "quarters" coverage all were the same. After giving his toothless ground game 2 ½ quarters to produce, Mike McCarthy gave the game to Favre. At that point, Favre elevated his tempo. He was in and out of the huddle in a hurry. He often went on the first sound. When defensive linemen beat his blockers, Favre got rid of the ball. When the Giants started blitzing (28.2% on passes), Favre shouldered the responsibility for the extra man and completed passes before they could get to him. He drained the fight right out of the Giants and their sellout crowd. Most of his biggest plays came when he made the play call at the line from one or two options. From his back foot, he was dead on the money deep to Jones and in the end-zone corner to Lee with SS James Butler leaping into his face. Favre is playing as if he fully understands this season is all about winning, not records.

### **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

Brandon Jackson played twice the snaps of DeShawn Wynn (40 to 20) but had fewer yards from scrimmage (59 to 68). Not only is Wynn 15 pounds heavier but he also is exhibiting more natural running skills. He set up his blocks beautifully on touchdowns of 6 and 38 yards. On Wynn's long run, FS Gibril Wilson either turned down the hit or was frozen by the rookie's subtle fake. Then Wynn stiff-armed Butler into submission. Wynn, Jackson and FB Korey Hall all were impressive after the catch in the check-down department. Wynn is going after people as a helper in pass protection, whereas Jackson is just trying to stay square and avoid getting flattened. Ten of Jackson's 17 carries were for 1 yard or less; on the positive side, he didn't fumble. Hall isn't real big and continues playing too high as a lead blocker, which doesn't help the ground game, either. Ryan Grant's best moment in six snaps was turning a 6-yard screen into 21 with a great display of balance.

### **DEFENSIVE LINE (3½)**

Before the score got out of hand, the front four almost never laid a glove on Eli Manning, and Derrick Ward averaged 6 yards a carry. Nothing came cheap for three quarters against the Giants' veteran line. With Aaron Kampman playing hurt (rib) and with moderate effectiveness against brutish RT Kareem McKenzie, it made no sense for him to play all 63 snaps of a blowout. Before the fourth quarter, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (36 snaps) kept trying to bull-rush LT David Diehl with disappointing results. When "KGB" realized the team isn't counting \$6.6 million against its cap for him to take the easy way out, he terrorized Diehl around the corner with three late knockdowns. Perhaps the best player was Corey Williams (35), who had an interception, sack, knockdown and tackle for loss. For confidence's sake, he needed a good game.

### **LINEBACKERS (3)**

A.J. Hawk is off to a very average start. In some ways, he is starting to play like Nick Barnett used to play. Barnett is becoming the more physical of the two even though he's 15 pounds lighter. Barnett is attacking guards and the center before they can lower the boom on him, then scraping off and finding the ball. His temperament is outstanding. On the other hand, Hawk seems slow to see and go. He was fooled on a draw and a bootleg, had some problems downfield with Jeremy Shockey in coverage and delivered just one smashing hit. The Packers succeeded in keeping Shockey away from Brady Poppinga.

### **SECONDARY (3)**

The most impressive defensive back was Jarrett Bush. He clamped his man and hit hard, knocking WR Steve Smith out with a fractured shoulder blade. Charles Woodson acted too nonchalant and just didn't seem up for covering Amani Toomer. He was on the ground for Toomer's 40-yard gain on a 14-yard comeback route and again on what would have been a 21-yard TD if Manning had thrown a better pass. Woodson also had two missed tackles and got sucked inside on a 19-yard run. Al Harris shadowed Plaxico Burress and fared pretty well. Burress' 26-yard TD pass was more the result of Atari Bigby vacating his quarter of the field to cover Shockey short than Harris not guarding closely. Ward's 26-yard run broke when Bigby took a bad angle. Nick Collins was out of position on what would have been a 30-yard TD pass to Shockey only to rush back at the last instant and apparently shield the tight end's vision just enough for him to drop the ball.

### **KICKERS (2)**

Mason Crosby got a low snap from Rob Davis, might have been too quick into the ball and missed from 42. His six kickoffs were short (62.7-yard average) and high (4.14-second average hang time). Jon Ryan's three punts had averages of 36 (gross), 35.3 (net) and 3.93 (hang time).

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (4½)**

These units took it to the Giants. Tramon Williams had one KO return of 42 yards and another of 46 that was shortened to 26 by Colin Cole's holding penalty. A long strider, he is fast and willing to sell out. The hard-charging cover teams forced a turnover on a kickoff..

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