

# Rating the Packers vs. Vikings

Favre sustaining excellence

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**Green Bay** - Brett Favre's role in the Packers' 4-0 start has been so overwhelming that his now successful pursuit of the career record for touchdown passes was more like an appetizer than the main course. It's possible that Favre, a week short of his 38th birthday, has never enjoyed a more sustained run of three-week brilliance than he has had against the Giants, Chargers and Vikings.

On Sunday, Favre quarterbacked the Packers to their fourth victory in five years at the Metrodome. His passer rating of 108 also marked the fifth straight game in which he has surpassed 100 in Minneapolis.

Favre's virtuoso performance, especially given the fact his team has no ground game, demonstrated anew his expanding poise and control under the harshest of conditions. From 1992-'95, the Packers were 0-4 at the Metrodome and Favre's best passer rating was 49.1. From 1996-2002, the Packers were 2-5 and Favre's cumulative passer rating was 83.8.

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

## **RECEIVERS (3)**

Donald Lee (39 snaps) and Bubba Franks (41) remained effective in their tag-team arrangement. Lee was able to defeat one-on-one coverage by SS Darren Sharper for an impressive 27-yard reception. He also had another 27-yard catch, but fumbled after stumbling right before the ball arrived and then not being in ideal position to put the ball away. Lee is proving fast enough even to beat some safeties, but doesn't play as fast with the ball under his arm. Greg Jennings went the distance on a tight hamstring, beat Marcus McCauley for a 16-yard TD and was lucky when a fumble bounced right back to him. James Jones appeared to surprise McCauley with his speed on a 33-yard go route for another TD. You just wish that Jones was as good after the catch as he is catching. Ruvell Martin doesn't play much, but ran two expert routes against CB Cedric Griffin for 52 yards. The Vikings prevented Donald Driver from beating them by shadowing with Antoine Winfield and often keeping Sharper over the top.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (2½)**

As usual, pass protection was better than run blocking. Coordinator Leslie Frazier blitzed five or more on 37.5% of passes (six or more on 16.7%) but the pickups were solid. Probably the best performer was Mark Tauscher, although he was charged with the only sack on a burst by active rookie DE Brian Robison. By running merely 28.7% of the time, Mike McCarthy reduced NT Pat Williams' impact. Operating on a tight hamstring, Scott Wells kept sorting out the Vikings' shifting fronts and provided quick, reliable help in protection. Williams made two plays in long pursuit after Daryn Colledge failed to cut him off on the back side. Neither Colledge nor Junius Coston got any movement on Ryan Grant's failed third-and-1 run. The offense needs Colledge to be more consistent. Coston keeps overcoming technique flaws with athleticism. He didn't back down from Kevin Williams even though the Pro Bowl DT kept jamming his hands up into his face. Chad Clifton yielded two pressures to DE Ray Edwards, a much improved player, and ruined a reverse by Driver by missing a block on FS Dwight Smith.

## **QUARTERBACKS (5)**

Playing with the lead almost the entire way, Favre kept his mistakes to a minimum and trumped just about all of Frazier's moves. When the Vikings blitzed into a screen, Favre almost instantaneously hit Jones on the safety-valve crossing route for 4. When Edwards wasn't fooled by a bootleg from shotgun, Favre adjusted, just like that, and flipped it over the big man to Driver for 8. When the Vikings blitzed six in the red zone, Favre audibled at the last second to a man-coverage beater for the TD to Jennings. His accuracy in the short-to-intermediate range has been unreal. Even his long balls were on the money this week. Favre was knocked down six times, including on both TD passes, so it wasn't easy. The noise level was brutal, he had to worry about taking the long snap 40 times in shotgun and the offense had no balance. It came down to whether Favre could maintain order amid chaos, make plays and win the game.

## **RUNNING BACKS ( ½ )**

McCarthy's decision to run 14 plays without a back spoke volumes. Back from a knee injury, Vernand Morency (14 snaps) ran into blockers on his only carry and fumbled on one of his three receptions. DeShawn Wynn (26) made an adequate debut as a starter for Brandon Jackson (shin). The rookie from Florida isn't bad in blitz pickup. The plan was to establish Grant as the short-yardage pounder, but that didn't last long. Grant had nowhere to run on the third and 1, but replays showed that he bobbled and almost lost the handoff. Later, Grant showed no sideline awareness when he caught a flat pass out of bounds, then committed the cardinal sin of losing a fumble on a handoff when the Packers were just trying to run out the clock. Corey Hall was a split-second away from seeing an incomplete pass ruled a fumble.

### **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

The Vikings' aggressive linemen got after this group to the tune of 155 rushing yards. If it hadn't been for Ryan Pickett (34 snaps), it would have been much worse. After facing Pro Bowl-caliber guards in the first three weeks, Pickett wouldn't be budged by RG Artis Hicks and C Matt Birk, made five tackles and beat backup RG Anthony Herrera for a sack in 3.4 seconds. Pickett has had a superb first month. Neither Johnny Jolly (34) nor Cullen Jenkins (49) fared well against the run. Each penetrated and made plays, but too often they were washed down or pushed around. Playing hurt, Jenkins appeared to lack his customary strength at the point and the Vikings exploited him. Aaron Kampman (61) had problems in the run game, but manhandled RT Ryan Cook for six of his whopping seven knockdowns. Ailing Bryant McKinnie got 31% double-team help against Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (40), but still gave up two sacks, a knockdown and a hurry. "KGB" kept dipping his shoulder and shortening the corner toward besieged QB Kelly Holcomb.

### **LINEBACKERS (3)**

The Packers won't stop Adrian Peterson anytime soon unless their linebackers play a lot better than they did Sunday. There was too much grabbing and catching going on. Peterson carried the fight to Nick Barnett, A.J. Hawk and Brady Poppinga, and about all they could do was hold on for dear life and attempt saving tackles. From a physical standpoint, Peterson dominated the action. Hawk tends to drift in coverage when quarterbacks look him off and is out of position too much. Bob Sanders blitzed on 23.4% of passes, but Poppinga was the only LB to get home, and that was only once.

### **SECONDARY (2)**

Basically, it was Al Harris on Troy Williamson, Charles Woodson on Bobby Wade and Jarrett Bush on Sidney Rice. Bush was beat deep by Rice, but the ball was badly overthrown, and later lost a battle at the ball to Rice on a 15-yard fade for a TD. Bush's confidence appears to have dwindled since summer. Williamson had a step on Harris deep three times, but Holcomb's passes weren't quite on the money. Harris and Woodson drew multiple penalties. The fact that Harris played hurt was reflected in his grab tackling. Woodson's gambling nature hurt him on a 40-yard post-corner completion to Wade after he undercut the route. Atari Bigby smacked TE Jeff Dugan on an over route and ripped the ball out with one of his no-nonsense tackles. Later, he adjusted beautifully to intercept a tipped pass. However, his whiff gave Peterson an extra 48 yards on his run of 55. On the play, it took Nick Collins 26 yards to get him down.

### **KICKERS (4)**

Mason Crosby hit FGs of 28, 44 and 33 yards, and his five kickoffs had averages of 71.4 yards and 4.09 seconds of hang time. Jon Ryan's four punts averaged 49.0 (gross), 44.3 (net) and 4.48 (hang time).

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (3)**

Ryan made the absolute best of an unfortunate situation, scrambling for 7 yards and a first down on a fake punt. He's a fine athlete. Driver leaped high to recover his second onside kick in as many weeks. Will Blackmon and Bush excelled in punt coverage. Woodson is sure-handed and solid, but before long, Blackmon deserves a shot to recapture his August flair and return punts.

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