

Rating the Packers vs. Vikings

Vikings' weaknesses exposed in defeat

Posted: Nov. 12, 2007

Green Bay - It took nine weeks but the Green Bay Packers finally played a game that wasn't settled until the fourth quarter. This one, a 34-0 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday at Lambeau Field, was over by halftime. Using exquisite game plans drawn up by Mike McCarthy and Joe Philbin on offense and Bob Sanders on defense, the Packers thoroughly outcoached Brad Childress, one of the coaches high on Ted Thompson's list to replace Mike Sherman 22 months ago. McCarthy is 16-9, best in club history after 25 games, and is headed for a new contract. Childress, 9-16, could be headed for a pink slip if owner Zygi Wilf has to watch another travesty like this in the final seven games. Here is a rating of the Packers against the Vikings, with their 1 to 5 football total in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3½)

With Minnesota missing injured CB Antoine Winfield, the Packers had their way with what was left: CB Cedric Griffin, CB Marcus McCauley, nickel back Charles Gordon and veteran safeties Dwight Smith and Darren Sharper. McCarthy used three or more wideouts on 61 of 82 snaps (counting penalties) against a defense that stayed in a two-safety shell and tried to play coverage. Five wideouts combined for 20 receptions and 290 yards, a performance marred by four drops (two by Greg Jennings, one each by Donald Driver and Donald Lee). Jennings, with five drops in the last three games and six overall, made a circus 34-yard catch, adjusting better than Griffin and absorbing Sharper's best kill shot without flinching. James Jones easily ran past Griffin on a 37-yard go route, made McCauley look foolish on a 15-yard hitch and showed that he could learn a lesson, coming back for the ball to deny Griffin an end-zone interception. Ruvell Martin caught two TD passes but wasn't effective blocking downfield. Koren Robinson's second-effort on fourth and 3 demonstrated just how badly he wants to succeed and help the team.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4½)

The pressure was on to shape up or ship out, and Jason Spitz got the message. Spitz probably made the most difficult block of all on Ryan Grant's 30-yard TD, was firm in protection and really worked to neutralize his man and finish. The other guard, Daryn Colledge, didn't allow a pressure even though he was isolated against DT Kevin Williams quite a few times. Colledge was better at the point of attack, too. Borrowing a page from the Patriots' playbook, coordinator Leslie Frazier kept dropping linemen into coverage (he rushed two twice, three 11 times). When he did send five, the unit picked it up all but once. There were no sacks, one knockdown and two hurries. Mark Tauscher was solid against Kenechi Udeze and Brian Robison. Chad Clifton pitched a shutout against Ray Edwards, doing a better job keeping the DE away from his body. And Scott Wells, who was partially responsible for four "bad" runs, fared better than perhaps ever before against hulking Pat Williams.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

With the Packers at home, Brett Favre used even more check-with-me's at the line. Many of his biggest plays came on pump fakes that kept the Vikings almost completely off balance. Afforded excellent protection, Favre worked through his progressions and, when no receiver was open, stepped up and around until somebody was. He threw about five off-target passes, and escaped without an interception even though three balls easily could have been picked. Sharper, who knows Favre so well, had to stay deep and couldn't get a fix all day. Favre's command and pocket presence is so exceptional, people just take it for granted. He turned three dead-to-rights sacks into either gains or incompletions.

RUNNING BACKS (4½)

E.J. Henderson seems to have overtaken Brian Urlacher and Ray Lewis as the heaviest-hitting MLB. Thus, it was interesting to see Grant's non-response after Henderson absolutely leveled him along the sideline. He took it like just another hit. Grant, a big back at 219 pounds, appeared to surprise LB Ben Leber and Smith with his speed to the outside. He also ran with his eyes up, showed pick-and-glide in traffic and kept his legs churning on contact. When Clifton missed Edwards inside early on, Grant adjusted his track and was gone for 8 yards. With some other backs in Green Bay, it would have been minus-2. Maybe the best thing that Brandon Jackson did in 17 snaps was stand up to the blitzing Henderson and hold his ground. After blocking inadequately last week due in part to a neck injury, Korey Hall tried some cut blocks this week and played better.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

The last time an opponent didn't double-team Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila on a single pass play, Detroit LT Jeff Backus gave up three sacks in the 2001 opener. Childress did the same thing Sunday and, in just 20 plays, "KGB" beat LT Bryant McKinnie off the edge for two sacks and, in a rare two-snap appearance on the left side, slipped past RT Ryan Cook for a knockdown. Aaron Kampman (36 snaps) set up one of Gbaja-Biamila's sacks and had three pressures against Cook, who was more competitive than in the Week 4 meeting. Johnny Jolly (21) tried a spin move a few times and registered a sack against LG Steve Hutchinson in 2.9 seconds. Corey Williams (28) had two knockdowns against RG Anthony Herrera. Sanders didn't blitz even once until the final 1½ minutes. Cullen Jenkins (35) started slowly against the run but came back with a knockdown against Hutchinson.

LINEBACKERS (4)

The only two blitzes all day went to Nick Barnett in garbage time. Barnett is much like Kampman. Each week, the coaches know exactly what they're getting, and that it's going to be good. C Matt Birk, a resourceful veteran, either cut or tied up Barnett on three healthy runs by Adrian Peterson. A.J. Hawk played hard and fast until the 50-yard screen pass to Chester Taylor, when both he and Barnett missed the tackle. The Vikings were trying to confuse the linebackers by running Peterson without a lead blocker on an early third and 1. But Brady Poppinga made the defensive play of the game, refusing to be influenced and smothering Peterson with a tremendous tackle. Poppinga's run fits weren't all that good but he was all-pro on that snap.

SECONDARY (4)

Let's be honest. Brooks Bollinger was awful and, without Sidney Rice, none of his WRs posed a threat to Charles Woodson and Al Harris. So Bollinger didn't complete a pass to anyone other than an RB until 2 minutes were left in the third quarter. Later, Harris gave Robert Ferguson a free release and the result was a go route for 35. Harris went low on Peterson and injured his knee, then dodged a guard on the long screen. There's no need for Nick Collins to fret about losing his job based on Aaron Rouse's starting debut. For as big as Rouse is, he didn't look physical bouncing off two tackles. FB Tony Richardson absorbed a sideline lick from Rouse without apparently even changing expression. Sanders had to be pleased with Atari Bigby as the eighth man in the box against Peterson. Bigby kept his wits about him, maintained outside leverage and at least kept getting the great back down.

KICKERS (3½)

Mason Crosby hit from 39 and 24 yards. One week after Dave Rayner parked a kickoff out of bounds, Crosby did the same thing. His six boots averaged 65.0 yards and 3.82 seconds (hang time). Two of Jon Ryan's three punts were touchbacks. His averages were 50.7 (gross), 30.7 (net) and 4.71 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

As a Packer, Charles Woodson has caught 78 punts (including a remarkably low total of six fair catches) without a flub. Two or three times Sunday, Chris Kluwe outkicked his coverage, presenting the punt returner with chances for long returns. Showing minimal burst, Woodson averaged 9.8. Yet, for as strong as the Packers are in other phases, Woodson's safe, steady-as-she-goes approach is more than satisfactory to the staff. The coverage units were jacked-up and physical.

OVERALL (5)

From the Nov. 13, 2007, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel