

Rating the Packers vs. Cowboys

Failing grades in Big D

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The post-mortems on Thursday night after the Dallas Cowboys dispatched the Green Bay Packers, 37-27, were interesting, to say the least. On a post-game television show, owner Jerry Jones said: "The difference was the quarterback and the offensive line. We excelled there."

In the Dallas Morning News, linebacker Bradie James said: "To me, Aaron Rodgers played way better than Brett Favre. Brett Favre was just throwing the ball up. I don't know if we'd rather have him in there or Rodgers." With Favre picking the biggest game of the season to come up with his worst performance, the defensive line failing to threaten Tony Romo and the secondary sinking to new depths without injured Charles Woodson, the Packers sunk to 0-9 in Big D during the Favre era.

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

RECEIVERS (4)

As expected, the unit played well against a suspect secondary. Greg Jennings ignited his down-and-out teammates in the second quarter, turning a short out cut against dime back Nathan Jones into a gain of 43 with sensational run-after-the-catch skill. He's an upright type of runner who is always moving his arms and avoiding defenders. He's strong for his size, not as fearless as Donald Driver but courageous nonetheless, and a TD threat on every reception. James Jones wasn't using proper footwork and slipped at the top of two routes in the first series, dropped one pass and perhaps should have come up with another. Donald Driver and Ruvell Martin couldn't get deep, but it wasn't their fault Favre was in deep brain-lock and kept flinging it anyway. Donald Lee isn't Jason Witten but SS Roy Williams and the LBs couldn't handle him. Why he wasn't a more prominent part of the game plan the last two weeks is anyone's guess.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

Daryn Colledge was so bad over the first 22 plays that Mike McCarthy yanked him, moved Jason Spitz to the left side and inserted Junius Coston at RG. Colledge got no movement at the point, missed a back-side cut, missed a block on a screen pass and gave up two knockdowns. On Ryan Grant's 62-yard TD, Colledge almost blew the whole thing when NT Jay Ratliff walked him back 3 yards. His ability to move laterally is getting worse and worse. The best of the bunch was Scott Wells, who made good adjustments against a diversified 3-4 and got great movement on DE Marcus Spears on the long TD run. Chad Clifton blocked DeMarcus Ware most of the day and was unscathed other than a lightning-like sack in 2.4 seconds. Trying to compete on a sprained ankle, Mark Tauscher did OK against Shaun Ellis. He allowed one-half sack and four pressures.

QUARTERBACKS (2)

Favre reverted to mad bomber mode. In 20 minutes, he repeatedly threw long when nobody was open and suffered two interceptions and had another dropped. In a 60-minute game, he might have been headed for five or six picks. He misread coverages, showed little or no patience, ignored Lee and disregarded check-downs. Then he suffered an elbow injury on a basic slot blitz that he amazingly failed to see coming and gave way to Aaron Rodgers. It's almost as if Favre lost his way after getting popped hard four times in the first quarter. Given almost no practice time and a 27-10 deficit, Rodgers had his finest hour in Green Bay. When Ware and others clobbered Rodgers, he warmed to the physical give-and-take. He sold out on a third-and-7 scramble for 8. He ran the offense. He had zip on the ball. He moved well in the pocket, always looking to throw instead of bolting prematurely like in the past. And he generally got the ball out on time and with accuracy. However, he did go the wrong way on an aborted handoff and made a few shaky reads.

RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)

Grant won't stay in on third downs if he blows another blitz pickup as he did on the first play of the second half. James, who was Grant's man, came scot-free when Grant didn't see him. Grant knocked off Tauscher and James flushed Rodgers into a sack by Ellis. Grant should have stayed inside of Clifton on a toss that he took outside for minus-2. And he did more thinking than slamming on a failed third-and-1 that was blocked well enough to be converted. In his defense, this was the first 3-4 defense Grant had run against this season. On the plus side, Grant accelerated so fast on the first third-and-1 that he bolted right past Hamlin and Williams, then impressed with his finishing kick. He also took a crushing lick from Williams on the second series and didn't go into a shell. Vernand Morency, who saw action on 13 passing plays to just one for Brandon Jackson, offered next to nothing, as usual. John Kuhn delivered a booming block on LB Akin Ayodele on Grant's TD.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2)

The domino effect was at work. Minus Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila and Johnny Jolly, Cullen Jenkins had to play 52 of his 53 snaps at DE and Ryan Pickett had to play too many snaps (50), period. When coordinator Bob Sanders rushed his customary four on the first 12 passes, the Cowboys often doubled Aaron Kampman and Corey Williams and singled Pickett with RG Leonard Davis and Jenkins with LT Flozell Adams. That's why Tony Romo had all day. Five of the team's disappointing total of six pressures came from Kampman, who could never dominate slow-footed RT Marc Colombo. Jenkins drew one hold on Adams but otherwise was semi-manhandled. Pickett and Williams fought the good fight against ferocious double-teams for Marion Barber. Sanders ended up blitzing on 18% of passes. Justin Harrell (18) was schooled in the first half by Davis but outmuscled LG Kyle Kosier a time or two in the second half. Not once was he totally blown off the ball.

LINEBACKERS (2 ½)

A.J. Hawk played as well if not better than Nick Barnett. He had three tackles for loss, sifted through blockers into ball carriers and was active. In coverage, he had problems against TEs Jason Witten and Anthony Fasono, but most LBs do. Barnett ran through and missed once, then was out of position a few other times. Sanders sent Brady Poppinga on a blitz twice but to no avail. Poppinga made known his intentions prematurely once and slipped on the other. Whether it's lack of opportunity or skill, this unit doesn't offer much pass rush.

SECONDARY (½)

Teams react well to adversity such as Woodson's absence all the time. This group went belly-up. Terrell Owens almost seemed to toy with Al Harris. He turned inside, not outside and was out of position on a 37-yard completion. He short-circuited, stayed at the line and gave up an easy 35-yard pass to Patrick Crayton on third and 19. Harris was denied either an interception or fumble recovery early, but then when he did notch his first pick of the season he drew attention to himself forgetting that a horrendous end-zone drop by Owens was responsible for the gift. Woodson's replacement, Jarrett Bush, yielded a 40-yard interference penalty and 3-yard TD pass to Crayton before being replaced by Tramon Williams, who other than a questionable 42-yard interference penalty fared much better. Nickel back Frank Walker played better than anyone else. At safety, Atari Bigby and Nick Collins were a disaster. Bigby was a liability man-to-man against Witten and in various forms of zone coverage, then ripped Barber's helmet off for one of his two 15-yard face-mask penalties. He's either regressing or has hit a plateau. Back from a three-week hiatus due to a knee injury, Collins got away with being too nosy early in the game and then paid for it with several terrible plays down the stretch. Like Bigby, he kept guessing and biting on play-action. Looks like Aaron Rouse needs to be on the field.

KICKERS (4 ½)

Mason Crosby hit from 47 and 52 yards, kicked off six times and had averages of 64.2 yards (gross) and 4.06 seconds (hang time). Jon Ryan's three punts averaged 49.7 (gross), 46.3 (net) and 4.68 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (2)

Despite nice directional work and height from Crosby, the kickoff coverage team permitted the mediocre Austin returns of 35, 38 (shortened to 22 by penalty), 38 and 32 yards. That's awful. Koren Robinson and Tramon Williams need to stop dancing and looking for the 98-yarder and start running tough for 25-to-30. The surprise onside kickoff was recovered by Crosby but was brought back when the ball bounced off Kuhn's arm 5 yards downfield. It was an unlucky break.

OVERALL (3)

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