

# Rating the Packers vs. Bears

## Packers' lack of spirit helps inspire the Bears

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**Green Bay** - One could arrive at a hundred theories why the Green Bay Packers played by far their worst game of the season Sunday in a 35-7 loss to the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field.

- They were overwhelmed by the abominable weather conditions and lost all focus.
- They were dejected after Dallas won Saturday night, decreasing their home-field opportunities in the playoffs.
- They had players still hanging their heads after perceived snubs by Pro Bowl selectors Tuesday and it affected their performance.
- They had cause to be even more overconfident after learning shortly before kickoff that LB Lance Briggs and CB Nathan Vasher surprisingly were on the inactive list, meaning the Bears were without eight starters.
- They had a coach, Mike McCarthy, and a defensive coordinator, Bob Sanders, who were due for a lousy game.

No matter the reason, the Bears' 18-play, 67-yard drive for a field goal to open the game basically let the air out of the Packers. Instead of establishing a physical presence right from the start, the listless Packers let the inspired Bears simply take it to them.

If that didn't send the Packers into a state of shock, the magnitude of the punting collapse probably did. Something that bad happens every generation or so.

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

### **RECEIVERS ( ½ )**

It wasn't a day for receivers and defensive backs to affect the outcome. Still, this unit found ways to contribute negatively. Donald Lee, a paragon of consistency with one drop in his first 59 targeted passes, dropped two easy ones (if a catch could be easy in the harrowing wind and cold) in the middle of the field that would have totaled at least 20 yards. James Jones, who is playing less, dropped another and was shut out for the second time in three weeks. Greg Jennings stumbled on a slant that otherwise would have been catchable and wasn't able to shield CB Charles Tillman on a 24-yard run by Ryan Grant that otherwise might have been a 74-yard TD. Despite their severe limitations in coverage, the Bears' secondary gummed up the slants and dared the Packers to beat them deep. The lurking presence downfield of Brian Urlacher limited the yards after catch by wide receivers to a paltry 11 yards.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (1)**

The start was excellent. Scott Wells pancaked DT Israel Idonije on Grant's 24-yard opener. Then Wells made a great block on WLB Jamar Williams and Daryn Colledge pulled to cut down NT Jimmy Kennedy on Grant's 66-yard TD. The plan was to run away from talented DT Tommie Harris. Having determined that Jason Spitz is his No. 1 guard, McCarthy started Junius Coston (29 snaps) at LG for the first time and then alternated him every two series with Colledge (25). The top players were Mark Tauscher, who held red-hot Adewale Ogunleye without a pressure, and Colledge. When McCarthy decided he had to start passing, Bears defensive coordinator Bob Babich blew it up with a well-coordinated zone-blitz package. Babich zone-blitzed nine times on passes (after not using one in the Week 5 meeting), and the left side of Chad Clifton and Coston allowed two knockdowns to LB Hunter Hillenmeyer. Clifton also was beaten inside by Alex Brown on a semi-coverage sack and gave half-hearted effort on a failed cut block late. Wells was charged with a fumble that never made it off the ground.

## **QUARTERBACKS ( ½ )**

Amazing as it might be, indefatigable Brett Favre looked as if he dreaded every second Sunday. Ever seen Favre with his parka fastened all the way up? He was the first one heading to the locker room at halftime, too. His face was beet red, his hands were numb, his body language signaled defeatism and he played poorly. By comparison, Kyle Orton, of all people, threw the ball well and was devoid of mistakes. Favre threw two interceptions, three other passes were dropped by defenders and two others were almost picked. With his focus wavering, Favre fumbled two adequate shotgun snaps. Favre kept throwing floaters, perhaps hoping his receivers would find them easier to catch. Probably a better way to go would have been to put the ball hard right on people.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

The best player for Green Bay was Ryan Grant. The Packers became predictable, shifting Bubba Franks from one side to the other and then running Grant on zone plays behind Franks. The Bears shifted down their linebackers toward Franks and stuffed it after the opening run. On the 66-yard TD, Grant's finishing kick left CB Trumaine McBride and others in the dust. Babich risked everything on stopping the run, playing eight in the box and hoping McCarthy would turn to the pass. The fact that the only FB, John Kuhn, was on the field for merely 12 of 54 plays in horrible weather spoke eloquently to the game plan.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE ( 1½ )**

Backup RBs Adrian Peterson and Garrett Wolfe carried 42 times for 131 yards. Yes, that's a mere average of 3.1, but on an icy field running behind a decrepit offensive line their production was the decisive factor. Minus Ryan Pickett and Johnny Jolly, the Packers were catching too many blocks. Corey Williams (unit-high 49 snaps) made a few plays but also got displaced too much. Justin Harrell (41) is hard to move because he's just so darn massive. However, he spent too much time on the ground against journeymen guards and hasn't demonstrated any pass rush yet. Aaron Kampman (47) registered 1½ of the paltry two knockdowns and folded back inside to make some tackles, but wasn't able to turn his matchup with RT Fred Miller into a game-changer. Cullen Jenkins (47) didn't jam TE Desmond Clark on a 3-yard TD pass and missed Peterson once in the backfield, but with his overall fitness improving he's becoming a little more dynamic physically. Rookie Daniel Muir (19) struggled to disengage and got buried once or twice, but in all he was OK. Mike Montgomery (21) was active.

## **LINEBACKERS (1½)**

Every third-down completion was like gold. On the first drive, A.J. Hawk didn't play the ball and got beat by Clark for 10 on third and 9. Three plays later, Nick Barnett was hooked by C Olin Kreutz on a screen pass and Wolfe sprinted outside for 16 on another third and 9. Later, TE Greg Olsen beat Barnett inside for 10 on third and 7 in the red zone. To win, the outcome of these critical plays must be reversed. Barnett kept trying to tackle Peterson too high and gave up falling-forward yardage. Was he suffering from Pro Bowl hangover? The most physical LB was Brady Poppinga. If he doesn't make the play it's because of talent, never effort.

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS (1½)**

After alternating in "sub" defenses with Tramon Williams and Frank Walker last week in Jarrett Bush's absence, Will Blackmon was the only nickel back. The reason why the Bears got in position to score the go-ahead TD late in the half was the missed tackle by Blackmon on Wolfe that turned a 6-yard screen pass into 33. Then the Bears out-schemed Sanders, matching the towering Olsen on Blackmon on an easy two-point fade pass. Orton never threw deep. Despite 45 running plays, Atari Bigby and Nick Collins had almost no impact. Aaron Rouse wasn't used.

## **KICKERS ( ½ )**

It wasn't as bad as the 1975 opener when the Lions blocked three of Steve Broussard's punts, but Jon Ryan's pratfall was close. It's hard to blame him for the two that were blocked. But it was Ryan who couldn't get off one punt after dropping the snap and hit another off his ankle for 9 yards. In comparison, Chicago's Brad Maynard seemed unfazed by the elements. Mason Crosby's two kickoffs were superlative.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS ( ½ )**

Snapper Rob Davis probably had his worst game in 10½ seasons. Whereas it was pretty much business as usual for Chicago's Patrick Mannelly, Davis kept moving Ryan well off his spot. The block by Charles Tillman for a TD was caused by Kuhn failing to see Tillman creeping down and then making a timely call to pick it up. However, Davis' wide snap that increased Ryan's block zone also loomed large. Poppinga assumed blame for the first block after being beat by LB Darrell McClover. Koren Robinson kept running laterally on kickoff returns. One way or another, Devin Hester had the least productive game of his career.

## **OVERALL ( ½ )**

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