

Rating the Packers vs. Lions

Reserves too much for Detroit starters to handle

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All across the National Football League on Sunday, playoff teams either scratched or pulled starters early and then sat idly by as backups lost games that were considered meaningless. At Lambeau Field, a remarkable scene unfolded. The Green Bay Packers basically played their backups, but they were too well-coached, too aggressive and too intense for the Detroit Lions' starters. Shooting for a .500 season, reputed tough-guy coach Rod Marinelli watched as his team, especially the defense, didn't even compete. With nothing tangible to play for, coach Mike McCarthy's club oozed confidence and swarmed all over the Lions, 34-13. Here is a rating of the Packers against the Lions, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

With Greg Jennings, Donald Driver and Donald Lee on the excused list, Ruvell Martin started at split end, James Jones started at flanker and Bubba Franks started at tight end. Martin, an inviting target because of his size, keeps on catching everything, making clutch plays and blocking tremendously. In this game, Martin cut a defensive end, took out LB Paris Lenon when pressed into a rare role as the lead blocker and crack-backed on S Kenoy Kennedy. He's as tough as an old boot. Jones got caught running a sloppy route on a slant and failed to make the catch. His blocking was better. Franks was impressive. He beat S Gerald Alexander off the line and hauled in the 24-yard pass with his hands, then tucked it neatly away. He also showed good awareness on the goal-line and caught a TD pass away from his body. Plus, he provided more horsepower than Lee when blocking DEs. He had been missed. You can tell that Brett Favre likes throwing to Koren Robinson, who led in receptions, with four.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Chad Clifton, who played just 23 snaps, and Daryn Colledge, who relieved Clifton after starting at LG, were the top blockers. Eight and a half of the 11 "bad" runs were charged to the line, but neither Clifton nor Colledge had one. Clifton pretty much owned Dewayne White, who has given some tackles problems. Colledge looked surprisingly natural pass blocking outside and played with more strength than usual. Coordinator Joe Barry shifted and slanted a ton and also blitzed on 21.4% of passes. DT Shaun Rogers is a load for anyone, and asking undersized Scott Wells to handle him one-on-one on a day when he came to play probably was a little too much. Wells gave up 2 ½ "bad" runs, a knockdown and a hurry, all to Rogers, and was responsible for one of the fumbled exchanges with a premature snap. Rookie Allen Barbre flashed his potential, dropping his hips and driving DT Cory Redding 10 yards back on one running play. Other times, he was late reacting and adjusting. Playing both RT and RG, Tony Moll played with little power early but did some athletic things later. Junius Coston gave up two "bad" runs, a knockdown and three hurries before leaving with a calf injury.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

After subpar performances in three of the last four games, Favre appeared completely into this one and was outstanding in a three-series, 21-play, three-TD cameo appearance. Several times this season, Favre has passed up chances to run, but when the Lions rushed six on the second play of the game, he took off on a bootleg for 21. His long pass to Franks and 21-yard comeback route to Robinson were terrific. The TD pass to Franks was risky because he was sprinting hard right and the throw was back into the middle. Given his long layoff, Craig Nall did OK. He's smart and responsible. He wasn't accurate and some of his passes hung, but he also didn't come close to an interception. Some No. 3's might have lost this game; Nall never even came close to that.

RUNNING BACKS (5)

Ryan Grant left after eight snaps with a stinger, but still gained 57 yards and was labeled a "classic cutback runner" by Alexander. Brandon Jackson played 41 snaps, the same number that he had played in the previous seven games, and for the first time lent some validity to his second-round selection. Part of his success was the fact that the Lions' defense is a beaten-down mess and Jackson looked like a fresh young colt in comparison. But Jackson made one big-time run and repeatedly broke tackles. He did drop a promising screen pass. FB John Kuhn also played more (39) than he has all season and had his best outing. Kuhn held up well at the point against hard-charging Boss Bailey and made some crisp cut blocks on Lenon and Ernie Sims, who ended up on the ground a lot and surprisingly wasn't a major factor.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

With Aaron Kampman and Ryan Pickett resting, eight men played between 29 and 45 snaps. Nobody was awful, but nobody was great, either, and the Detroit O-line has weaknesses galore. Rookie DTs Justin Harrell (29), Daniel Muir (34) and Conrad Bolston (29) were OK. Harrell stood firm at the point, but still hasn't offered much, if any, pass rush. Muir made five tackles but also got displaced a few times and appeared to tire. Bolston, the former Viking, didn't get much done. Corey Williams (29) didn't have a pressure and Cullen Jenkins (29) had just one, plus a batted ball that was intercepted by Tramon Williams. Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (34) says his ankle is fine, but in 16 one-on-one rushes against LT Jeff Backus, a veteran he has dominated at times over the years, all he could muster was one hurry. Jason Hunter (45) was next to invisible.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Nick Barnett was yanked after three series (nine snaps) and replaced with rookie Desmond Bishop, who was disruptive as a blitz (two hurries) but was hesitant in coverage and didn't stick out against the run. Playing only the first half, A.J. Hawk read some runs quickly and knifed in for the tackle. He also came free on a blitz with a chance to splatter Jon Kitna but showed little burst or close. With no backup, Brady Poppinga had to go the distance. He gave up a 22-yard gain to T.J. Duckett when C Dominic Raiola hooked him on a quirky Mike Martz screen that Marshall Faulk once ran to perfection. However, Poppinga's bulk and ruggedness were reasons why Duckett averaged just 2.2 yards per carry. The only two missed tackles all day were by Tracy White.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (4 ½)

Although enigmatic Calvin Johnson appeared to give up on the route and Kitna's pass lacked steam, Atari Bigby still drove impressively on a dig route for his fifth interception. The other safety, Nick Collins, didn't have good position on two corner routes that the inept Kitna fired incomplete. Aaron Rouse dropped a routine interception but did some hard hitting, as did Collins. With Charles Woodson out and Al Harris limited to nine snaps, the four backup CBs played extensively. The best was Tramon Williams. He loves competing and almost always turns back for the ball on long balls. Will Blackmon would have given up two long TDs if Kitna had any accuracy. Frank Walker and Jarrett Bush were OK. Despite below-average pressure, Kitna often had nobody open.

KICKERS (5)

Jon Ryan rebounded magnificently from his nightmare in Chicago. The Lions went for the block on all four punts, but he caught the snaps cleanly, got the ball off fast and averaged 49 yards (gross and net) and 4.46 seconds of hang time. Mason Crosby delivered a perfect onside kick, made FGs of 33 and 35 yards and averaged 60.7 and 3.85 on six kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Blackmon, Jackson and White all were in position to recover the onside kick, but looked as if they were sitting around the campfire and collectively whiffed. Aveion Cason's 54-yard return on the opening kickoff would have been longer if Crosby hadn't alertly taken a tripping penalty to get him down. Robinson did well to turn a 16-yard return into 28 by bouncing outside, but it might have gone for 90 if he hadn't cut back inside once he got out there. White, Bush, Hunter and others contributed to an overall effort that has made exceptional coverage almost routine.

OVERALL (4 ½)

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