

# Rating the Packers vs. Seahawks: The confidence game

## Green Bay didn't let two-touchdown deficit shake up its game plan

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**Green Bay** - Almost every person who was part of the Lambeau Field record crowd of 72,168 on Saturday was thinking the same thing: How in the world could such a sensational season end like this? The only ones who counted, the players and coaches for the Green Bay Packers, apparently had different ideas. Not only didn't the Packers panic when down, 14-0, they never gave the hint of being the least bit concerned. That's confidence, that's preparation and that's coaching. It's also why the Packers ultimately were able to come back and smash the Seattle Seahawks, 42-20, in a divisional playoff game.

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

### **RECEIVERS (3)**

Thinking he had to stop the run, coordinator John Marshall played mostly zone, frequently with one safety in the box. That left Greg Jennings alone with a CB and the Seahawks couldn't handle him. He caught three passes on all-pro Marcus Trufant, including an extremely difficult reception on the sideline for 24 yards; two on Kelly Jennings, including a 15-yard TD off a sight adjustment with Brett Favre with no safety help; and a 2-yard TD against Jordan Babineaux. Jennings and James Jones each dropped a short pass. Donald Driver saw four balls compared with Jennings' eight, and two came on successive hitches when somebody decided to throw him a bone. More and more, it appears as though Jennings has assumed the role of No. 1. Of course, Driver remains more than capable; he just isn't featured anymore. Aggressive Ruvell Martin came off motion to seal the edge against Russell on Grant's long run of 43. Bubba Franks and Donald Lee leaked out of protection chores on what essentially was the same route for key dump-off catches from Favre. Franks delivered some solid double-team run blocks with Mark Tauscher on Patrick Kerney.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (4)**

With Kerney unable to get the quick jump off the ball that he's accustomed to in noisy Qwest Field, Tauscher rendered the all-pro invisible with a tremendous effort. Remarkably, Kerney had neither a tackle nor a pressure. Tauscher was helped maybe 25% of the time, and the Packers had control of down and distance throughout. Not only did Tauscher stone Kerney, who played into Tauscher's hands by adhering to an ill-suited read-and-react technique, but he also was effective blocking at the second level against a top LB corps that wasn't even a factor. Neither Tauscher nor Chad Clifton had any of the 6 "bad" runs assigned to the unit. Clifton had no trouble with DE Darryl Tapp, a hard charger. Under pressure to perform or else, Daryn Colledge came through pretty well. He allowed the only knockdown, but for the most part kept his pads down and had his feet moving on contact. That helped create some gaping holes. Scott Wells and Jason Spitz combined for 5 "bad" runs, yet both had winning performances. Wells was quick to sort out Marshall's hard-to-handle 3-3 nickel package. Spitz was physical but also failed to contain DT Rocky Bernard on two no-gain runs.

## **QUARTERBACKS (5)**

Would he or wouldn't he? With a 14-0 deficit, Favre allayed fear that he might pull another Dallas by completing four of four short passes for 65 yards and a quick retaliatory TD. Favre stayed a step or two ahead of Marshall the entire game. The Seahawks blitzed on 30.4% of passes, but twice Favre stepped away from onrushing Julian Peterson to avoid sacks. On the one time Marshall all-out blitzed, and Favre was responsible for unblocked SS Deon Grant sprinting for his face, he lofted a perfect touch pass to Jennings for the 2-yard TD. His only off-target throw still was caught by Ryan Grant on a ball slightly behind him on the opening play. The Seahawks said Favre's hard cadence kept them off balance. It was obvious that Favre was overflowing with energy. Still, he played within himself and didn't take chances. His falling-down 11-yard underhanded toss to Lee, after DT Brandon Mebane beat Colledge, was vintage Favre magic.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

Grant's two lost fumbles in the opening 1:09 could have meant finis against a more formidable foe. After that, he ran with an unbridled fury that the Seahawks found impossible to match. In all, 73 of Grant's 201 yards came after contact, which isn't a lot. The Seahawks were caught blitzing the wrong way a few times and Grant had massive holes. Perhaps most noteworthy was his display of speed on a snow-covered field. He outran Jordan Babineaux to the corner and both Grant and Russell in break-out situations when they elected not to come up and shorten the angle. Grant played 41 snaps, exiting on passing downs for Vernand Morency (five) and late for Brandon Jackson (11). Jackson was impressive in his own right for the second straight game, especially outrunning Hill on a 13-yard TD catch. Korey Hall (32) and John Kuhn (27) blocked pretty well.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

The Achilles' heel for Seattle was LG Rob Sims, C Chris Spencer and RG Chris Gray, and the Packers were more than ready to make it hurt. Gray got absolutely manhandled by Ryan Pickett (31 snaps); at 37, he needs to retire. Sims couldn't contain Corey Williams (46), and after Sims departed his replacement, Floyd Womack, couldn't handle energized Cullen Jenkins (47) on passing downs. Williams was more effective than he has been in weeks, breaking down his opponents with power, short-area quickness and attention to detail. Ditto for Jenkins, who used a spin move to beat Sims for a sack, had 1 pressures against Womack and reacted well on a screen. LT Walter Jones and RT Sean Locklear played well in the first half. In the second, Aaron Kampman used power for three knockdowns against Locklear. After being blotted out by Jones for three quarters, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila (16) slipped by the perennial all-pro for a partial sack.

## **LINEBACKERS (3)**

It wasn't a fun day to be a linebacker. With Mike Holmgren giving such short shrift to the run (16 carries by RBs), Brady Poppinga didn't play much and Nick Barnett and A.J. Hawk were used mostly in coverage. Coordinator Bob Sanders went back to limited blitzing (19.4% on passes), and Charles Woodson got most of the calls. Poppinga had one pass-rush chance but blew it by going offside. Shaun Alexander, the former NFL MVP, did more baby-stepping than power-running. Some hard early hits by A.J. Hawk drained some resolve from him.

## **SECONDARY (4)**

The Packers haven't had an intimidating performance by a safety in a long time. Atari Bigby provided one here, knocking the stuffing out of TE Marcus Pollard (he fumbled) and WRs Bobby Engram, Ben Obomanu and D.J. Hackett, who was looking more at Bigby than the ball on his crucial third-down drop at the 3. In all, Seattle dropped six passes. Al Harris played very well, too, especially from a physical standpoint. He hasn't been the most aggressive hitter at times this season but he laid the wood to people Saturday. Woodson was off, missing two tackles, guessing and getting beat on a slant-and-go by Obomanu for 22 and reacting poorly on the dropped TD by Pollard. Nick Collins also missed two tackles by being out of control and bit on the 11-yard TD pass to Bobby Engram. The new nickel back, Tramon Williams, gave up completions of 20 and 21 yards and made a deft deflection of a deep sideline pass. He isn't coming out of his breaks very well and has been late on the ball.

## **KICKERS (3)**

Mason Crosby's six long kickoffs averaged 61.5 yards and 3.99 seconds of hang time. Jon Ryan sat idle until the fourth quarter, then punted three times for averages of 35.0 (gross), 28.3 (net) and 4.11 (hang time).

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Tramon Williams slipped and botched the opening kickoff. He then averaged 27.3 on four more, taking them straight back up the field with little regard for personal safety. His courage is unquestioned. Now he needs to work on his vision. Given the poor visibility, his decision to let two punts bounce was smart. After Hall missed the tackle on the first kickoff return (26 yards), the Seahawks averaged just 13.2 on the last six. Jackson broke scot-free and appeared destined to block a second-quarter punt by Ryan Plackemeier. Then he slipped and drew a 15-yard penalty instead for roughing.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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