

2007 Green Bay Packers: Player grades

By BOB MCGINN
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Offense

WIDE RECEIVERS (7)

Shaun Bodiford: Cut at the end of camp, spent three weeks with Washington, brought back Sept. 24 and played in six games. On the raw side as a receiver and lacks blazing speed. Tough enough to break up a wedge and a respectable kickoff returner. Worth another look. **Grade: Inc.**

Donald Driver: Elected to second Pro Bowl, and for good reason. Dropped just two passes for the lowest drop rate (1.49%) of his career and averaged a career-best 5.33 yards after the catch. The target of 155 balls on average the last three years, he saw just 134 in '07. Touchdown production waned but he still caught 90 passes for 1,207 yards in 17 games. Will turn 33 this week but as willing as ever to troll among linebackers from the slot. The consummate professional. Played better than anyone else against the Giants. **Grade: A.**

Carlyle Holiday: Power-possession receiver beat out Robert Ferguson for the No. 5 job. Chronic knee problem forced him onto injured reserve after one game. Catches everything, courageous covering kicks and an emergency quarterback. Should be back. **Grade: Inc.**

Greg Jennings: Third in the NFL in average per catch at 17.4. Other than Javon Walker (17.5) in '03, it was the best mark by a Green Bay starter in 21 years. Dynamic after the catch; his 6.48 YAC average was second to Antonio Freeman's 7.3 in '98 among starters during the West Coast era. Smart, resourceful and resilient. Plays even faster than his 40-yard dash time and consistently runs away from defenders. The forgotten man all summer, he forced himself onto Brett Favre's radar screen. Had 14 TDs in 16 games. Dropped eight of 99 passes, a rate of 8.08% that was well above his rookie mark (4.85%). Also needs to block better. **Grade:A-minus.**

James Jones: Trailed only Kansas City's Dwayne Bowe (995) and Detroit's Calvin Johnson (756) in receiving yards among rookies with 676. Widely panned as a third-round selection (14th WR taken), he proved his worth immediately and held the No. 3 job all season. Lacks the speed ever to be a great player but should be solid if he can clean up his drops (eight in 88, team-leading 9.09%) and stay grounded. Hands are so good that he might ease up at times. Seems almost timid at times after the catch (4.64) and as a blocker. Tailed off badly down the stretch, catching merely seven balls for 85 yards in last six games. **Grade: C.**

Ruvell Martin: His deep-ball drop against the Giants will be remembered but shouldn't detract from his overall consistency. It was his only drop in 32 targeted tosses and one of his few miscues. Martin blocked more tenaciously than any WR, made plays just about whenever asked and exuded quiet confidence and professionalism. He's a big man with deceptive speed. **Grade: C.**

Koren Robinson: Seldom have more words been said and written about a lesser player. It's a compelling story, to be sure, this former high pick and one-time dynamic player battling back from alcoholism, suspension and misdeeds. But in the end, he probably played too much. With a bone-on-bone knee problem that isn't going to go away robbing him of explosiveness, his legs couldn't take him where he needed to go. Flashed here and there (Favre almost seemed to favor him), but he didn't run hard on KO returns and simply cannot be counted on in 2008. **Grade: D-plus.**

TIGHT ENDS (4)

Bubba Franks: Due a \$500,000 roster bonus in mid-March and a \$3 million base salary in '08, a steep price to pay for a role player. Was back to being his old reliable self after a horrible season. Reduced his drops from six to one, his penalties from four to none, his "bad" runs from 7 ½ to one and his "pressures" from 9 ½ to none. Still, he missed eight games with a bad knee, isn't getting any faster and doesn't contribute on special teams. **Grade: C-minus.**

Tory Humphrey: Suffered a broken ankle July 28 during the first practice and sat out all year. He has good speed (4.65) but he's also short (6-2) and probably not what the Packers want. **Grade: Inc.**

Ryan Krause: Spent three full seasons with San Diego as a receiving-type TE but didn't have a chance to show his downfield skills in games. Target of just two passes in nine games. Up and down as a screen-type blocker. **Grade: D.**

Donald Lee: Some scouts snickered at the Packers' plans to start this former third-stringer but the last laugh was on them. Other than a fumble in Minnesota and two (of his three drops in 18 games) in the winds of Soldier Field, Lee did everything and more than he was asked. His 575 receiving yards ranked ninth among TEs. His speed created matchup problems for many LBs, even some safeties. His run blocking generally is dismissed as deficient by personnel people but he was responsible for a manageable 4 ½ "bad" runs. Well-deserving of the four-year, \$11.88 million extension that he signed Nov. 5. **Grade: B.**

OFFENSIVE LINE (11)

Allen Barbre: A LG as a rookie after playing LT at Division II Missouri Southern State, Barbre will be expected to challenge for a starting job at guard in '08. Still, tackle could be his eventual position. Only had a few chances to play but still gave up a whopping 7 ½ "bad" runs and 1 ½ "pressures." Bull-in-a-china shop type. Tries to be physical but needs reps and refinement. **Grade: D-minus.**

Chad Clifton: Unquestionably one of the game's elite pass protectors but has never been selected for the Pro Bowl because his run blocking leaves much to be desired. Usually tries to get in the way for the run but will never have a go-for-the-throat temperament. That's just not Clifton. Has the size, feet, punch and quick set to frustrate and shut down any rusher. Allowed 20 ½ "pressures," up from 14 in '06 and his highest total since '01. Cut his "bad" runs from 12 to 10 ½ and had just two false-start penalties, a major improvement. **Grade: B.**

Daryn Colledge: Unable to hold his job in second season, when players often make their biggest jump. Lacks overall strength and body snap. At times, his athletic ability seems overrated, too. Smart, hard-working Alaskan who will have one more chance in Green Bay. Played six really poor games. Might be more comfortable at LT without a big man on his nose all day, but probably isn't gifted enough to start outside. Heading for a career as a swing tackle-guard unless he turns the corner in '08. **Grade: D.**

Junius Coston: Started seven games after having played just five snaps in first two seasons. The Packers' most talented guard remains rough around the edges. Allowed 16 ½ "bad" runs and "pressures," far too many for a part-time starter. Young (24) for his level of experience and still could come on. Has become more aggressive. Now must tighten his game. **Grade: D.**

Tony Moll: Missed half of training camp with stingers, and they continue to dog him physically and mentally. Strictly a backup RT until injuries forced him to start three games (all victories) back at RG. Gave up 5 ½ "pressures" and 5 "bad" runs. The Packers hoped he'd be challenging Mark Tauscher by now, but that hasn't materialized and quite possibly never will. **Grade: D-minus.**

Tony Palmer: Underwent cervical fusion Sept. 28 for a neck injury and might never be cleared by the Packers. Hurt while blocking for a kickoff in Week 2. Might have been the best drive blocker of all the linemen in camp. Well-liked by his teammates. Was back in the locker room for the final month hoping to resume his career. **Grade: Inc.**

Jason Spitz: A better player in '07 than '06. He is scrappy. He's also short-armed and somewhat slow-footed for the position. Comes up short on the athletic tests but often outplays more gifted foes. Brings a measure of tenaciousness to a unit that certainly was in need of it. Possesses top strength. Reduced "bad" runs from 17 ½ to 12 ½ and "pressures" from 19 ½ to 12. Started nine times at RG, three at C and two at LG. **Grade: C.**

Mark Tauscher: Still was an effective player at 30. Played hurt (ankle) for about a month in '07 after doing the same in '06 (groin). Doesn't look like much getting off the bus but has a knack for getting and staying in front of people. Technically superior and has a strong will. Surprisingly athletic enough to recover quickly when pass rushers trash him with the first move. Allowed more "pressures" (29 ½ including team-high 3 ½ sacks) than any other lineman but also the fewest "bad" runs (7 ½). **Grade: B.**

Orrin Thompson: Converted defensive lineman from Duke who has hung around Green Bay for two years as backup tackle. Looks the part and can shuffle his feet, but isn't much of a finisher and failed to impress in exhibition games. **Grade: Inc.**

Tyson Walter: Suffered a torn toe ligament in exhibition finale and went on injured reserve. No need to come back with this aging former Cowboy. **Grade: Inc.**

Scott Wells: In July, line coach James Campen indicated he wouldn't trade Wells for any other center. Five months later, he said that he felt even stronger about Wells. This is a highly efficient technician. Despite playing against Minnesota's Pat Williams four times, he hasn't had a holding penalty since the '06 opener. Short-armed but strong. Plays with great balance. Can get overpowered. Very smart and vocal. Reads fronts beautifully. Leads the group on the field. Had the fewest "pressures" (8) among linemen but also the most "bad" runs (19 ½). The Packers value Wells much more than some opposing scouts. **Grade: B-minus.**

QUARTERBACKS (3)

Brett Favre: Rewrote the NFL passing record book in his 17th season. Turned back the clock to post an 18-game passer rating of 96.0, third best of his career behind 1995 (100.7) and 1996 (97.2). Named Sportsman of the Year by Sports Illustrated for leading a youthful bunch to unexpected heights. When Mike McCarthy gave him more check-with-me freedom at the line, Favre showed his appreciation by taking fewer chances. Trimmed his interception total to 17. Generally played to the defense, subjugating some of his devil-may-care approach. Lost only one fumble, although he was charged with two others that weren't his fault. As always, he made some blockers and receivers look better than they are with his ability to escape and his big, accurate (career-best 66.5%) arm. Played three lousy games in the last seven, including the injury-shortened night in Dallas and the icehouse defeats in Chicago and against the Giants. **Grade: A-minus.**

Craig Nall: Failed to make it with Buffalo and Houston, then resurfaced here for the last six games. He played almost three quarters in Detroit finale and did OK. Nall wasn't accurate and some of his passes hung, but he also didn't come close to an interception. Probably will move on. **Grade: D.**

Aaron Rodgers: Imagine the frustration. He has prepared to play in 40 regular-season and playoffs but got the chance to participate when it mattered only three times. For the first time in '07, he began to handle himself like a legitimate successor to Favre. More decisive with the ball, threw a tighter spiral and didn't make as many impulsive mistakes. Stayed in the pocket longer, too. Discovered that the best approach is the more humble one. His finest hour came in Dallas, when Favre went down and the entire world expected him to be eaten alive. Instead, he looked like a player. **Grade: C-plus.**

RUNNING BACKS (8)

Ryan Grant: Two years ago, Samkon Gado received a B-minus after rushing for a team-leading 582 yards (3 100-yard games) in the last eight games. Gado then was discarded eight months later to Houston for Vernand Morency, almost never to be heard from again. The point is, free-agent running backs can't be considered great overnight. Yes, Grant did rush for 1,186 yards (5.2 average) in just 12 games as the featured back. He lowered his shoulder and finished runs, he made the safety miss and he showed a knack for finding cutbacks in the zone scheme. But he also lost four fumbles (one was charged to Favre), averaged a meager 4.1 in 36 receptions as a raw receiver and wasn't dependable as a pass protector. The Giants knew Grant well and liked him. Still, he was their No. 5 back. **Grade: B.**

Korey Hall: Not only did Hall, a converted LB, make the team as a sixth-round draft choice but he also beat out Brandon Miree and started all year. Played 372 snaps, most by a Green Bay FB since William Henderson had 394 in 2004. Hall is a shrewd operator. He's competitive, shows uncommon savvy for his years and goes hard all the time. His hands are fine; he does lack speed in the open field. Responsible for too many "bad" runs (10), most by a Green Bay FB since 2002. On special teams, he was gung-ho but mistake-prone, sharing the team lead in tackles (three) with Morency, Frank Walker and Tramon Williams. **Grade: C-minus.**

Noah Herron: Held the third-down job for most of 2006 and was in line for it again in '07 when he suffered knee cartilage damage in the exhibition finale and went on injured reserve. Lacks most of the physical elements for the position but loves to compete and will be a hard man to run off if he makes it to training camp. **Grade: Inc.**

Brandon Jackson: Looks like he does have a chance to succeed after not doing much of anything until the final month. Finished with 301 yards rushing (3.6) and 144 yards receiving (8.0). Serious and mature for having entered the draft as a third-year junior. Lacks magic in his feet. More of a meat-and-potatoes type runner. Played 218 snaps, including 41 against Detroit when he rushed for 113. Not bad covering kicks. **Grade: D-plus.**

John Kuhn: Outweighed Hall by almost 15 pounds and played more and more as the year went on. Finished with 188 snaps, didn't have a single carry and caught just two passes. Played mostly RB at Shippensburg (Pa.), then both RB and FB with Steelers in '06. Cut from the same mold as Hall: rugged and unselfish. **Grade: D-plus.**

Vernand Morency: Entered camp as the nominal starter, injured his knee the first day, didn't play until Week 4 and then averaged 13.1 snaps, mostly on third downs. A shifty type runner who made more tacklers miss in '06 than '07. Best part of his game was pass protection. The Packers need better. **Grade: D-plus.**

Ryan Powdrell: Powerful, king-sized (255 pounds) FB from Southern California sprained his knee three weeks into camp and spent year on injured reserve. Converted LB with a chance to get a lot better, especially as a blocker. Not a bad athlete. **Grade: Inc.**

DeShawn Wynn: Wynn wasn't hurt that badly early in Week 7 but the Packers had enough of his penchant for missing time with nagging injuries and dumped him on injured reserve. It was always something with Wynn, who had a chance to run with the job as a rookie seventh-round pick but came up woefully short. He has fourth-round talent but a free-agent heart. **Grade: D.**