

Grading the Packers: Coaching and Personnel

About the grades

The grades were done by Rob Demovsky of the Green Bay Press-Gazette. They are based on season-long interviews with NFL coaches and scouts, and observations of games and practices.

Coaching

In his second season, Mike McCarthy did perhaps the most difficult thing in the NFL. He took a middle-of-the-road team that finished 8-8 and turned it into a division-winning 13-3 team. That was far more difficult than turning the 4-12 team he inherited into a .500 club. With the youngest roster in the NFL, McCarthy put the Packers into the NFC championship game with the No. 2 seed. His work with Brett Favre was perhaps the biggest reason. By giving Favre ownership of the offense, Favre played smart and limited his interceptions to 15 in the regular season. Special teams coach Mike Stock and his assistant Shawn Slocum turned their units into a strength after being poor in 2006. However, a talented defense finished merely 11th out of 32 NFL teams. The staff was outcoached in its biggest regular-season game (at Dallas on Nov. 29) and its biggest playoff game (the NFC championship loss to the Giants). It went into both games with suspect game plans that failed. The team played poorly in its two coldest-weather games (at Chicago in Week 16 and the season-ending loss to the Giants). McCarthy might have been the coach of the year over New England's Bill Belichick had the Patriots not gone 16-0.

Grade: B-plus.

Personnel moves

General Manager Ted Thompson and his staff deserve just as much credit — if not more — for the moves they didn't make rather than the ones they made. Instead of spending big money in free agency, Thompson trusted his instincts on players like safety Atari Bigby, defensive tackle Johnny Jolly and receiver Greg Jennings. All three turned out to be major contributors. That was a small part of his big-picture plan to build through the draft and give players time to develop. Thompson's best move turned out to be the Sept. 1 trade for running back Ryan Grant. He plucked a starting running back away from the Giants for a sixth-round pick. His 2007 draft produced mixed results. Of the top six picks, only receiver James Jones made a significant impact. But he did well in the later rounds, finding two starters (fullback Korey Hall and kicker Mason Crosby) in the sixth round. Thompson also gave contract extensions to Nick Barnett, Donald Driver, Al Harris, Cullen Jenkins and Mark Tauscher, and all but Jenkins had strong seasons. Even Jenkins was OK. Still, it's impossible not to wonder what impact Randy Moss could have made on this team. Thompson could have had him for a third- or fourth-round pick but offered only a fifth and lost him to the Patriots.