

# **Rating the Packers vs. Lions**

## **Plenty good enough**

*Posted: Sept. 15, 2008*

Green Bay - It's hard to say how good the Green Bay Packers are two weeks into the season. Their victim Sunday at Ford Field, the Detroit Lions, were dominated the week before by the Atlanta Falcons, who in turn were dominated by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Sunday.

All that really matters is the standings, and the Packers have a two-game lead on the Minnesota Vikings, the NFC North favorite.

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

### **RECEIVERS (4)**

What makes Greg Jennings such a sensational player is his ability to go inside and outside. The great ones all can do that but some of the good ones can't. Three times he went straight into the heart of the "Tampa-2" zone scheme on slants, knowing full well that he'd get drilled by a safety. He isn't very big but he is tough and is catching the ball better in a crowd than in the past. At this point, Jennings is playing faster than anyone on the field. His quick fake left Brian Kelly, a proud but aging cornerback, on the ground and Jennings with a 62-yard reception. With the Packers behind, Jennings beat speedster Keith Smith to the inside on a slant. He's so smooth and reaches top gear so fast that FS Dwight Smith couldn't tackle him as he roared past for 60 yards. James Jones broke off routes four times for 29 yards, providing an excellent outlet for Aaron Rodgers, but he also dropped two slants. The Lions tried to cover Donald Driver in the slot with LB Ernie Sims or various zones, and Driver went 7-52. He should have put away a short shot for a 7-yard TD. Jordy Nelson also destroyed Kelly on a post-corner route for a 29-yard TD and almost made a great catch behind Smith. Blocking by wide receivers and tight ends wasn't good enough.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (2½)**

Mark Tauscher is going to face far better players than Jared DeVries. That's why Tauscher's yield of 4½ pressures, including three to DeVries on up-the-field charges, must be a mild concern to the staff. Tauscher had trouble with DeVries' speed off the ball, of all things, and his ability to dip under and turn the corner. Chad Clifton has had much better days, too. He got beat by DE Dewayne White for a sack-fumble, had some problems with stunts and was penalized twice, giving him five in two weeks. The best players were LG Daryn Colledge and C Jason Spitz. Colledge missed two cut-off blocks on "bad" runs but was firm in protection, got movement against big men and kept shoving LB Ernie Sims, who isn't the same player in '08 that he was in 2006-'07. Spitz was flawless pass-blocking. RG Tony Moll was responsible for 2½ "bad" runs and was just adequate in protection, but when he does err at least now he's going 100 mph.

## **QUARTERBACKS (4½)**

It was the first road game, and first dome game, for Rodgers but he wasn't fazed. In fact, he seemed in complete control of himself, the game plan, the opponent and the noise level, which was rather high when the Lions took the lead midway through the fourth quarter. Coordinator Joe Barry blitzed Rodgers on just 9% of dropbacks in the first half, found out his secondary was awful and then blitzed 35% in the second half. Rodgers evaded three sacks, ran for 25 yards and made four dead-on-the-money throws racing hard to his right. There was a bad read and bad throw here and there, and his second fumbled exchange in two weeks was his fault. But it'd be hard to ask for much more. His arm strength continues to surprise. Even when he throws straight-legged with all arm, his ball has zip.

Running to his right, he almost casually flipped the sideline ball to Nelson that carried 40 yards.

## **RUNNING BACKS (2)**

The Lions might not have a stellar defense but they aren't stupid. Ryan Grant lined up for 21 snaps. On 15 of them he carried the ball. On eight of the 15 he gained 1 yard or less. Grant is playing hurt (hamstring) and off his game. On a second-quarter draw, he missed an open lane to the right and plunged into trash straight ahead. The line kept missing cut-off blocks so often Grant had no chance. Brandon Jackson (32 snaps) showed good patience, made his one cut at the right time, followed blocks and gained 61 yards in seven carries. He made the hapless Kelly miss in the open field. He also had a terrible drop. Kregg Lumpkin's nine-play stint begged for more. Korey Hall blocked poorly on the first two plays, suffered a knee injury and was replaced by John Kuhn (27), who showed good pop hammering LB Paris Lenon all day.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Unlike some defensive ends, Aaron Kampman (62 snaps) and Cullen Jenkins (53) "set the edge" against the run. In other words, they usually maintain up-field leverage and are difficult to hook. Also, they don't go so wide on the pass rush that teams can run draws underneath them, as they've done to Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila his entire career. Kampman and Jenkins each had 5½ "pressures" (combination of sacks, knockdowns and hurries). Kampman whipped RT George Foster so badly that the Lions switched to mammoth Gosder Cherilus in the second half. The rookie buried Kampman on his first play. Kampman got two hurries off Cherilus but the physical youngster held his own. This was the start of what should be a high-powered rivalry. Ryan Pickett (33) was way too powerful for RG Stephen Peterman. Colin Cole (27) was stout, too. Johnny Jolly (41) isn't getting anything done as a rusher. The Lions just let Jeff Backus block "KGB" one-on-one 19 times in 22 rushes and he had no problem.

## **LINEBACKERS (3½)**

The first time that rookie RB Kevin Smith cut A.J. Hawk on a blitz, Hawk tumbled like a house of cards. However, you can't cut someone of Hawk's alertness twice in the same game. When Smith tried it again, Hawk went over the top of him and swallowed up Jon Kitna for a sack. Hawk used his strength and bulk to hold the point. However, in coverage, he lacks fluid movement, doesn't show the ability to backpedal and seems to end up guessing a lot. He isn't able to use his excellent speed. Nick Barnett spent most of the game covering the back man-to-man in the flat and had one solo tackle, a career low.

## **SECONDARY (4)**

Charles Woodson shot up his broken toe, went the distance and turned the game around with two fourth-quarter interceptions. His anticipation, nerve and skill ruined Kitna's horrible day. If Kitna had any accuracy, Roy Williams would have enjoyed a huge day at Al Harris' expense. Williams probably has never been open as much against Harris as he was Sunday. Harris is playing too high, doesn't change directions well and looks as if he has lost speed. After Harris made an outstanding deflection downfield, he walked off the field with an apparent injury. Nobody really noticed it, least of all Tramon Williams. The Packers prefer an injured player to stay down. When Kitna saw Roy Williams all alone, he flipped it to him for 23. Both Woodson and Tramon Williams got beat inside on Calvin Johnson's long TDs. However, sore ankle or not, Aaron Rouse really hurt his chances for steady employment by failing to charge downhill and blow up Roy Williams both times. After Johnson had run a dig two or three times, Nick Collins made a picture-perfect break on the same route and returned the pick for a breathtaking TD.

## **KICKERS (2)**

Derrick Frost gave up a safety by inexplicably failing to handle an adequate snap from Brett Goode. Counting a free kick, his five-punt averages were 47.2 yards (gross), 35.8 (net) and 4.25 seconds (hang time). Mason Crosby hit field goals of 25 and 39, and his nine-kickoff averages were 70.9 and 3.85.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (3)**

Will Blackmon attacks everything. He broke eight tackles on four kickoff returns, using both power, a neat jump-back step and courage. However, three times the ball popped loose just after he hit the ground.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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