

Rating the Packers vs. Cowboys

An old-fashioned whuppin'

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Green Bay - Turnover differential took a backseat to good old-fashioned blocking and tackling Sunday night when the Green Bay Packers were bullied by the Dallas Cowboys, 27-16, at Lambeau Field.

Despite a 2-1 deficit in turnovers, the Cowboys controlled both lines of scrimmage. They had two backs better than any one for the Packers, and their defensive pressure package was more successful than anything put forth by Green Bay.

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

RECEIVERS (3 ½)

James Jones dropped a shin-high stop route on the first play of the game, spraining his knee. When Jones returned, Aaron Rodgers went to him on third-and-4 at the Dallas 20 and he dropped a slant in close quarters. He also dropped two last week. Going back to last year, Jones has a seven-game streak with at least one dropped pass. Maybe his hands are vastly overrated. Maybe he chokes in games. Whatever the reason, the Packers can't put up with this much longer. Donald Lee isn't the biggest TE around, but he continues to sustain his blocks consistently, even against the Cowboys' talented perimeter people. Greg Jennings caught eight of the 10 passes thrown his way for 115 yards, including 56 after the catch. Twice he made sharp, unexpected cuts, pivoting back outside and away from CBs for big gains. The Dallas safeties were in a two-deep shell but didn't think Donald Driver would go deep in the third quarter. With Adam Jones having flat responsibility, Driver was wide open 30 yards downfield for a 50-yard gain.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

Two backs, it's a run. Four wide-outs, it's a pass. The Packers' predictability is making it tough on this unit. They need something other than a draw from shotgun and more play-action from base. The ground game (16-74-4.6) from the RBs was solid. It would have been better if Chad Clifton had sustained his run blocks just a tad longer. Clifton did a yeoman's job on pass-rushing sensation DeMarcus Ware. Asked to single-block Ware on 24 of his 28 rushes to his side, Clifton was charged with one knockdown and one-half sack. Unlike in Dallas last November, when he was benched after 22 ugly snaps, Daryn Colledge showed his improvement with a one-pressure day. If Jason Spitz now is headed back to RG, at least he has proved that playing center is no problem for him. The good thing about RG Tony Moll is he's aggressive. The bad thing were the sack and two pressures that he yielded to gap-shooting NT Jay Ratliff. Mark Tauscher bounced back with a winning effort against Marcus Spears and Greg Ellis.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

The Cowboys blitzed Aaron Rodgers more than any opponent so far and messed him up. By the time Dallas scored to make it 27-9 with 9 minutes left, coordinator Brian Stewart had rushed five or more on 58.3% of dropbacks (he finished at 31.3% following garbage time). Rodgers was sacked five times, most for a Packers quarterback since Brett Favre also absorbed five in Week 3 of 2000. Two of them were his fault for holding the ball too long. But sacks aren't the worst thing in the world. They're better than interceptions, and although Rodgers came close to having two of those he ended with none. He also was at fault for a fumbled center exchange, his third in three weeks. Through it all, he maintained his poise, generally took what was there and kept his head up. His marksmanship and reads weren't as sharp this week. That's going to happen.

RUNNING BACKS (1)

Ryan Grant (25 snaps) looked better than he has since last January. He was more decisive selecting a running lane and getting through it. Still, he's a step slow from his 2007 form and he isn't making anybody miss. At least he was reading the outside linebacker and generally making the proper cut inside or outside. His lost fumble on the second play of the game was brutal. Brandon Jackson (43 snaps, including the last 29) isn't exactly Felix Jones but he had a solid outing. He followed his interference, bounced to daylight and went hard wherever it was. As the primary third-down back, however, Jackson's missed blitz pickups, giving CB Anthony Henry a sack and a knockdown.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1 ½)

Green Bay's best player was DE Cullen Jenkins. He had 1 ½ "pressures" against Flozell Adams and 2 ½ "pressures" against LG Leonard Davis when he moved to LT in nickel. Jenkins also forced a fumble, ruined a naked pitch and beat TE Martellus Bennett inside to tackle Jones for minus-5. Coordinator Bob Sanders blitzed on just 20.6% of dropbacks, hoping that Aaron Kampman would dominate RT Marc Colombo in four-man rushes. Surprisingly, that didn't happen. Kampman didn't get home against Colombo all day and he played 66 snaps. Kampman wasn't very good taking on tight ends at the point of attack, either. Still, he probably was better stacking the point than Ryan Pickett (49), who for the first time as a Packer found himself dominated. Possibly the finest guard in the league, Davis put Pickett on the ground time after time. Davis played incredibly well. The best DT was Colin Cole (39), who probably was more consistent than Johnny Jolly (36) at the point and came up with three hurries against LG Kyle Kosier. A non-entity these days, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila played merely nine snaps.

LINEBACKERS (1 ½)

Nick Barnett needs to step up his game. Granted, Barnett suffered an elbow injury in the first quarter when he and Aaron Rouse missed the tackle on Marion Barber's 25-yard burst. And punishing C Andre Gurode was able to get on Barnett too much because the D-tackles weren't always doing their job. But Barnett also got blocked frequently by Tony Curtis, a tall TE forced to lead-block for injured FB Deon Anderson. Barnett just isn't attacking the line as he did in the past. A.J. Hawk delivered three really jarring hits to Barber. He also was up and down with his gap and coverage responsibility, including the 37-yard leak-out pass to Bennett and a 22-yard seam route to Jason Witten. Brandon Chillar proved that he could stay with TEs in coverage and forced a fumble from Barber. But the defense also missed Brady Poppinga's smash-mouth work at the point, which isn't Chillar's forte.

SECONDARY (2)

Nick Collins snatched an end-zone interception with his hands and made a great 61-yard return. That play showed he still might become a terrific player. After reacting poorly in the deep half when a blown assignment in front of him sent uncovered Miles Austin his way, Collins shockingly was able to run him down from behind. Substituting for injured Atari Bigby, Rouse was so-so. He tackled well, making 12 and missing just the one. But for the second week he continued to take some poor angles. He was too wide to halt Barber on a third-and-1, and could have broken up the 22-yard pass to Witten and the 52-yard TD to Austin by putting himself in better position. Charles Woodson got the nod against Terrell Owens ahead of Al Harris. Safety help or no safety help, Woodson's press coverage was so steadfast that only two passes could be thrown to Owens with him in man coverage, and both fell incomplete. Tramon Williams, who gave up the TD to Austin, doesn't seem to be playing as fast as he did late in '07.

KICKERS (3)

Derrick Frost is struggling, as evidenced by his five-punt averages (including 20 yards of roll) of 49 yards (gross), 42.4 (net) and merely 3.66 seconds (hang time). Mason Crosby hit FGs of 36, 38 and 33 yards. His four kickoffs averaged 71.0 and 3.97.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)

Despite three line-drive punts, the cover team held dangerous Adam Jones to a 4.3 average. Explosive Felix Jones was held in check, too. The return game went nowhere. The units drew four penalties.

OVERALL (2)

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