

# Rating the Packers vs. Colts

## Defense stumps Manning

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**Green Bay** - Bob Sanders coordinated the game of his life Sunday afternoon, confusing Peyton Manning and the proud offense of the Indianapolis Colts in the Green Bay Packers' 34-14 victory at Lambeau Field.

With his receivers all but paralyzed by Sanders' match-coverage scheme, Manning couldn't get anything going and resorted to whining to the officials in a lame attempt to get a few more calls.

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

### **RECEIVERS (3)**

The Colts tried to keep two safeties deep in a 50-50 mix of Cover 2 and Cover 3. It succeeded in limiting Greg Jennings to 32 yards and just four targeted passes, his lowest amount since Week 12 last season. Donald Driver made a tough catch in traffic for 24, the Packers' longest play from scrimmage. Donald Lee had a chance for a 35-yard touchdown on the first drive when he got behind MLB Gary Brackett. But when the ball came down Lee absorbed a frightful shot in the back of the head from SS Melvin Bullitt and it fell incomplete. If the other vertical receiver, Jordy Nelson, had been able to hold Bullitt, Lee might have scored. But Bullitt didn't respect Nelson's speed and decided to leave Nelson and go belt Lee. Driver had a chance for a long run after the catch against CB Tim Jennings but dropped an easy slant. Lee adjusted his route to beat man-to-man coverage by Marlin Jackson for a 12-yard touchdown. Ruvell Martin hung on for 17 yards after being crushed head-on by Brackett on a slant.

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

Almost everybody has been taking advantage of the Colts' undersized front, and the Packers were no exception. As the back-side guard, Jason Spitz did a better job this week wrapping around on fullback leads and getting movement. Spitz was responsible for two "bad" runs caused by rookie DT Eric Foster and looked awful on two screens. Chad Clifton yielded four "pressures" to DE Dwight Freeney, three on his patented spin move. But Clifton did a great job shoving Freeney deep and wide on his speed rushes. By blocking his man consistently on weak-side stretch plays, Clifton demonstrated he can do those things well if he's primed to do them. Matched some of the time against speedy DE Robert Mathis, Mark Tauscher gave up two hurries but was steady blocking for the run. Daryn Colledge missed one stunt but otherwise did well in protection. He just isn't going to road-grade anybody. Coordinator Ron Meeks blitzed on just 9.4% of passes. Playing hurt once again, Scott Wells (chest) sorted things out and played with balance and poise.

## **QUARTERBACKS (4½)**

Aaron Rodgers kept on functioning at a high level despite his sprained shoulder. Eight times he was able to release the ball on check-downs or other routes just as the rush was arriving. It was uncanny. His pocket presence saved his linemen time and again, a la Brett Favre. Rodgers throws a very catchable ball, his accuracy is excellent and he's not hanging receivers out to dry. He continues to make plays on the move, seems in complete control of Mike McCarthy's check-with-me system at the line and stayed a step ahead of Bullitt and his late forays into the box. On one of the occasions when Bullitt guessed right and hung inside to stop the slant, Rodgers made his only forced throw when Lee in the flat was the place to go. He aced his first test in the winds of Lambeau.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

Ryan Grant carried enough times (31) to surpass 100 yards (105), but at this point he's not getting much more than is blocked. Hamstring apparently fully healed, he played 44 snaps and did run hard. He cut Freeney beautifully on the TD to Lee and saw a ball thrown his way for the first time in three weeks. No one could doubt his courage. He'll run into anything, which unfortunately includes his own blockers. On at least five runs, his choice of run lanes could have been better. Besides not making the safety miss, Grant struggles navigating through trash and gets tripped up. He also fumbled, but hustling Corey Hall clawed his way to the recovery. Brandon Jackson released cleanly on check-downs, caught all six and did well after the catch. John Kuhn (29) played a lot more than Hall (14) because he blocked better, although they both missed a block on a "bad" run.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

The seven-man rotation was down to six when Jeremy Thompson (stinger) exited with 17 of the Colts' snaps remaining. Thus, Aaron Kampman sucked it up and played all 71, Johnny Jolly played a career-high 57, Colin Cole played a career-high 50, Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila played a season-high 39 and Ryan Pickett went 24 despite a damaged triceps trussed up in a harness. Kampman didn't come close to dominating RT Ryan Diem but registered two knockdowns and a hurry. Jolly played with more gap discipline and pursued well for his size. Cole batted a pass, diagnosed a screen and beat rookie RG Mike Pollak up the field for a knockdown. Basically playing with one strong arm, Pickett stood his ground and batted a pass. "KGB" failed to beat vulnerable LT Charlie Johnson but he's getting closer. Thompson was outflanked or fooled three times but showed some body snap in close quarters.

## **LINEBACKERS (3½)**

A.J. Hawk will get credit for a game started because he played the first snap, but after that it was Brandon Chillar as Sanders played nickel all day. Not only is Chillar better in coverage than Brady Poppinga, who played in short-yardage only, he's also better in coverage than Hawk, which the coaches acknowledged by not playing him. Matched against TE Dallas Clark, Chillar gave up five completions for 53 yards. His worst play was a 29-yard seam route when he took a run fake from Clark and was burned deep. But even when Chillar found himself covering Reggie Wayne, he didn't seem the least bit intimidated athletically. Chillar knows the ins and outs of coverage. Certainly, he was far better than Nick Barnett, who had too many lapses covering Dominic Rhodes.

## **SECONDARY (5)**

Charles Woodson ends up on the ground too much. That's because his damaged foot prevents him from planting properly. Did it stop him from dominating Wayne in the slot? Not hardly. With Woodson glued to him, Wayne caught one of six passes for 9 yards. It was a stunning performance. Outside, it was Will Blackmon vs. Marvin Harrison and Tramon Williams vs. Anthony Gonzalez. Whether he is or isn't, Harrison looked washed up after catching two of six for 11 yards against Blackmon. Williams failed to pick up a check and gave up a 34-yard pass, and drifted inside on an 18-yard flat pass to Rhodes. But those were almost insignificant because on a down-in, down-out basis he was all over his man. Nick Collins made a spectacular interception return for a TD and an even more spectacular break-up of a likely 27-yard TD pass to Harrison, the one time he got behind Blackmon. After one late run force and a dropped end-zone interception, Aaron Rouse etched his name in the record book with a sensational 99-yard TD off another pick.

## **KICKERS (1)**

A well-conceived but poorly executed onside kick failed when Mason Crosby flubbed it out of bounds. Then, when his plant foot seemed to stick in the ground, he hooked a FG from 36 yards. He was good from 31 and 29, and his seven kickoffs had averages of 65.7 and 3.92 seconds of hang time. Derrick Frost hit two high, long punts, and was a bit unlucky when both wound up as touchbacks.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Jolly shot through a gap partially created by Cole and recorded the first FG block of coach Mike Stock's 41-game tenure. Blackmon fumbled twice on punts, recovering one himself on the catch and watching as the other was recovered by an alert DeShawn Wynn. Brett Goode keeps doing the job even though he gets bowled over on most snaps. After getting beat blocking on a punt, Williams took a bad penalty by drilling WR Pierre Garcon in the back.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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