

# Rating the Packers vs. Titans

Close just not good enough

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**Green Bay** - The Tennessee Titans aren't some super team. Their offense is one-dimensional and their defense without injured defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch is good but certainly not great.

On Sunday, the Titans were oh so vulnerable against the Green Bay Packers because their 7-0 record cried out for a letdown, this wasn't an AFC opponent and six days earlier they had expended a ton of emotional energy in defeating the archrival Indianapolis Colts.

It would have been shocking if the Packers hadn't played competitively against the Titans on Sunday at LP Field. After all, they were 13-3 last year, and just two of their preferred 22 starters were out because of injury. The Packers proved to be more than competitive. They just didn't win, largely because they didn't play well enough.

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

## **RECEIVERS (3)**

Nobody has played Greg Jennings as tough as CB Cortland Finnegan. Jennings burned Finnegan early, turning an 11-yard comeback into a 52-yard gain with an amazing sense for finding open field and a nasty stiff-arm. He also caught a marvelous 20-yard deep turn-in that was James Lofton's signature route. But the feisty Finnegan won his share of the battles, too. Call it a draw. On the other side, Donald Driver had a field day, beating CB Nick Harper and nickel back Vincent Fuller for seven catches worth 136 yards (47 after the catch). But Driver dropped two easy passes and Jennings dropped one. With Jordy Nelson catching everything thrown his way (no drops in 26 targeted passes), adjusting his routes nicely at the line and showing excellent ability after the catch, and with Ruvell Martin often being called upon to block, there's little need to activate James Jones, especially considering how unreliable he was in September. Donald Lee had two bad misses in the run game. Jermichael Finley had chances to make two big plays but ran a poor route on the first and didn't go get the ball on the second.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (3)**

DT Albert Haynesworth blew up Scott Wells on two "bad" runs but Wells' resolve and balance also were big reasons why the all-pro Titan didn't have a single pressure. The Packers double-teamed Haynesworth on 70.4% of his rushes, with LG Jason Spitz and Wells handling the chore 14 times. Spitz and Wells each had Haynesworth alone on four rushes. Spitz did a great job helping Wells and LT Daryn Colledge, a late substitute for ailing Chad Clifton. When the Packers ran two genuine power plays, Spitz did OK pulling. Colledge caught a break when Vanden Bosch (groin) went out early in the second quarter. DE Dave Ball is just another overachiever and Colledge yielded two pressures, but given the circumstances Colledge did OK. On the other side, Mark Tauscher kept cutting DT Tony Brown off his feet but had some problems pass-blocking DEs Jevon Kearse and Jacob Ford. RG Josh Sitton's starting debut was up and down. Sitton was physical against Brown, a solid veteran, but allowed a sack when he was late on a stunt. Sitton also drew one holding penalty and might have had two others because he was lazy with his hands.

## **QUARTERBACKS (2½)**

For the first time in a month, Aaron Rodgers looked like a first-year starter. Five of his 41 passes were errant, including the long interception that never had a chance of being completed. Several times, he was too quick to switch a run called by Mike McCarthy and throw a one-step pass outside. In the red zone, he made two or three bad decisions that proved critical in a close game. He reacted poorly on the only zone blitz from coordinator Jim Schwartz, held the ball a little too long and wasn't able to secure it when DE Jacob Ford sacked him after Wells failed to finish his block. The Titans, who blitzed on just 16.3% of passes, mixed coverages and generated enough pressure to unsettle Rodgers. He did throw for 314 yards, but 168 came after the catch.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3½)**

It's hard for any back to measure up against Chris Johnson, the Titans' dynamite rookie. Nonetheless, Ryan Grant did put together maybe his best game of the year. His reads were much sharper this week. He caught Tauscher's man on the ground in his peripheral vision a time or two and cut back effectively. He also had a feel for Haynesworth's penetration, bouncing away from the big man and around the corner a few times. Grant (42 snaps) is more than tough enough, but he would have had even more carries if a hand injury hadn't forced him out so many times. Grant dropped a screen pass, one reason why Brandon Jackson (25) has to keep playing on third down. Corey Hall had 23 snaps compared with John Kuhn's seven.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

DE Jeremy Thompson played 21 snaps compared with 12 for Michael Montgomery in the first half but Montgomery led, 37-8, in the second half in what probably ended up being the best performance of his career. Montgomery had 13 total tackles. He chased, he flattened, he set the edge and he disengaged from blocks. When the Packers jumped into a reduced front with Montgomery one-on-one with LG Eugene Amano, he beat him outside for a sack in 2.8 seconds. Thompson set up Ryan Pickett's sack with a flush against Amano and trashed LT Michael Roos on another rush but the ball was out. At this point, Thompson is late diagnosing plays and struggles getting into his rush. Despite almost all single-blocking, Aaron Kampman didn't have a pressure against RT David Stewart, a massive man who isn't gifted. The first four-man DT rotation of the season showed Johnny Jolly with 49 snaps, Colin and Pickett each with 38 and Justin Harrell with 18. Harrell found the ball a few times, wasn't bad at the point and at least got his long arms extended as a rusher.

## **LINEBACKERS (1)**

Nick Barnett blew the third-down coverage in overtime against Johnson on a 16-yard check-down that gave Tennessee early momentum in its overtime surge. It was inexcusable. Covering Johnson isn't easy but Barnett could have at least given himself a chance by attacking the routes. Barnett might be setting up a yard too deep. By the time he got to the line on some runs, C Kevin Mawae already was in his grill. Coordinator Bob Sanders, who blitzed a season-high 31.7%, seems to have no confidence letting A.J. Hawk cover backs so he rushed him 12 times. Hawk had only one pressure, too often just giving himself up against a blocker. The most physical LB remains Brady Poppinga, who routinely wipes out lead blockers. But Poppinga was too slow reacting on LenDale White's 54-yard run and took a terrible personal-foul penalty. Brandon Chillar played extensively for both Hawk and Poppinga and covered OK, giving up three of five passes to TE Bo Scaife for 26 yards.

## **SECONDARY (3½)**

Mindful that the Titans didn't have a legitimate wideout, the cornerbacks basically smothered what came their way until the end of regulation. None of the three balls thrown at Al Harris were completed. Charles Woodson saw three of eight completed against him for 26 yards. Back from a seven-week hamstring injury, Atari Bigby missed the only tackle by the unit and looked rather stiff in his movements. Nick Collins continued making decisive reads and hard tackles.

## **KICKERS (4)**

Mason Crosby made three field goals (23, 25, 38 yards) and his six kickoffs averaged 67.2 yards and 3.9 seconds of hang time. Derrick Frost punted three times, averaging 44.3 (gross), 40 (net) and 4.34 (hang time).

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Hustling Jarrett Bush got just enough of Rob Bironas' 47-yard try at the end of regulation to change the flight of the ball and cause it to miss. The Titans' kickoff team gave the Packers a series of unusual schemes and personnel configurations but Will Blackmon and Nelson solved them for a joint 32.3 average. Hard-running Chris Carr averaged 24 yards on six kickoff returns.

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