

Rating the Packers: Week 11 vs. Bears

Mending their business

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Green Bay - Mike McCarthy and just about every other coach in the National Football League likes to talk about making corrections after a defeat.

Let's see. After the Minnesota loss, McCarthy wanted the offensive line to shape up, Aaron Rodgers to stop holding the ball, the defense to start stopping the run and Mason Crosby to make his next field-goal attempt of 50 yards or more.

It was mission accomplished for McCarthy on all four counts Sunday when the Green Bay Packers played their finest game of the season.

Here is a rating of the Packers' 37-3 victory over the Chicago Bears, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

When the Bears couldn't cover Tennessee's low-rent WRs the week before, Greg Jennings and Donald Driver knew they had little hope of covering them. Their combined total (nine catches, 124 yards) would have been higher if defensive coordinator Bob Babich hadn't kept both safeties back so much. Extremely precise in their route-running, Jennings and Driver overmatched CBs Nathan Vasher, Charles Tillman and Corey Graham. Even though the game plan was to run, McCarthy placed his best blocker, Ruvell Martin, on the inactive list in order to give James Jones a chance. But Jones banged his bad knee again and was limited to nine snaps, not even close to Jordy Nelson's total of 42. Four of Donald Lee's six receptions came on check-downs (20 yards) heretofore handled by Brandon Jackson. They all came in Lee's eight snaps in the backfield. Tory Humphrey shifted 11 times into a backfield location, was assignment-sound and didn't miss any blocks. Lee would like more deep balls down the seam but hurt his chances to see more by dropping what would have been a 16-yard TD.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4½)

Seldom, if ever, has five-year vet Scott Wells played as well as this. He owned NT Dusty Dvoracek, and helped the guards in protection against DT Tommie Harris. There wasn't a single knockdown or sack, and the line was charged with merely two hurries. At least eight times, the Packers ran an outside zone play to the weak side in which Wells and Daryn Colledge neutralized Dvoracek before Colledge moved to the second level, where he kept shoving Brian Urlacher around. After being castigated all week following a lousy performance, Clifton obviously was putting more effort into finishing his run blocks. He showed that he can get after people. Clifton neutralized DE Alex Brown in the first half, then allowed a team-high 2 ½ "bad" runs and a flush in the second half. Mark Tauscher gave up one bull-rush flush to Adewale Ogunleye. Other than that, Tauscher really seemed to frustrate Ogunleye. Jason Spitz isn't a textbook kind of player but he did a lot of good things, especially in short-yardage.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

Aaron Rodgers might go the rest of his career and never experience a game in which he wasn't knocked down at least once. Afforded impeccable protection and with the run game in rare form, Rodgers' main job was to not muck it up as Brett Favre generally did the last four times Chicago visited Lambeau Field. His only glaring miscue came on third and 8 from the Bears 40 in the second quarter. Running up in the pocket, he threw to Driver, the only open receiver. But Rodgers rushed the pass before Driver really had time to burn Urlacher in the deep middle and then badly underthrew it for an interception. Otherwise, Rodgers seemed a step ahead of the cat-and-mouse games played by S Mike Brown. For the first game all season, McCarthy kept at least one player in the backfield near Rodgers on every snap. Babich, who had been blitzing extensively, decided to play mostly coverage (29.6% blitz).

RUNNING BACKS (4½)

Ryan Grant broke seven tackles (two by Urlacher, two by Brown), perhaps more than he did in the first nine games. That suggested the Bears weren't ready to play and that Grant is back to his 2007 form. Of his 145 yards, 101 came after contact. On his 25 carries, you might quibble with one or two of his reads. McCarthy didn't even use Jackson until the 18th play, and only then because Grant lost track of Brown and took an unexpected shot in the midsection. Grant was down in the bench area trying to regain his equilibrium, but to his credit he went back in five plays later none the worse for wear. Jackson, who played 21 snaps compared to Grant's 46, gained 29 of his 50 yards after contact and broke two tackles. He fought hard, too. McCarthy liked what he saw of Korey Hall early and gave him 32 snaps; John Kuhn had 19. Hall delivered 12 stiff run blocks on LBs but also missed two. Kuhn stayed low, picking up two third-and-1's behind Colledge.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3½)

Justin Harrell, who often played hurt at Tennessee, now has done so in Green Bay. After suffering a sprained knee 72 hours before kickoff, the Packers didn't know until Sunday morning if he'd play. Harrell sucked it up, went 25 snaps and held his own. For the second straight week this unit stayed square against the run, although Colin Cole had a couple shaky plays early due partly to an arm injury that made it hard to push off. Ryan Pickett (25), who blew up RG Roberto Garza on a third-and-1, and Johnny Jolly (30) were tough to move. Michael Montgomery (42) set the point well and always flattens down into a tackle or two. His off-sides penalty cost Nick Collins an interception. Kenny Pettway (13), who played RE in nickel, cost the team a timeout by not being on the field. Reliable Aaron Kampman (53) had two pressures against RT John Tait, then switched sides to welcome rookie LT Chris Williams with a flush on his first snap.

LINEBACKERS (4)

A.J. Hawk's first start at MLB was favorable. He didn't miss a tackle, his coverage against skilled RB Matt Forte was more than adequate and coordinator Bob Sanders credited him with relaying his electronic calls without a hitch. That's a hard switch to make in a week. Hawk shed a block by C Olin Kreutz on the third-and-1, then filled the bubble created by Pickett to tackle Forte for no gain. He also choked down some of Forte's options as a receiver by moving up aggressively to chuck him. Although Brandon Chillar is 10 pounds lighter than Brady Poppinga, Sanders played Chillar in nickel and still contained the run. Chillar's one poor play was letting Rashied Davis cross his face and then missing the tackle on a crossing route that ruptured into 36 yards.

SECONDARY (4)

Kyle Orton wanted no part of Charles Woodson. His plan was to work Devin Hester deep against Al Harris and beat whoever would cover TE Greg Olsen. Harris kept jamming Hester and Davis at the line, and when the deep balls came he was in good position. Playing about 80% of the downs, Tramon Williams gave up three completions to Olsen for 35 yards but eliminated anything deep. Collins was late arriving and misplayed an 18-yard wheel route to Forte. Completely overshadowed by Collins, Atari Bigby has to get back on track and carve out a niche for himself.

KICKERS (4½)

Crosby made coach Lovie Smith pay for mismanaging the game at the end of the half, drilling a 53-yard FG at the south end. It occurred at the more treacherous south end, too, where the wind plays more tricks. He also hit from 33 and 45, and his seven deep kickoffs averaged 65 yards and 4.0 seconds of hang time. Crosby showed good directional ability, helping confine Hester to one side of the field. Derrick Frost's two punts (35.0 gross, 31.5 net, 4.24 hang time) were effective.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

After being outplayed three times and gaining a draw in the other meeting in the last four games against the Bears, the Packers' units earned the decision. The job was made easier because Hester, who not long ago was courageous as well as electrifying, isn't selling out these days. Crosby kicked away, the Packers covered well and Hester averaged 22.8 on five kickoffs before being benched. Chicago's effective kicking blunted the returns of Will Blackmon.

OVERALL (4½)

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