

Rating the Packers: Week 12 vs. Saints

Sifting through the wreckage

By Bob McGinn of the Journal Sentinel
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Green Bay - Seven touchdowns. Seven.

That's what the Green Bay Packers' defense yielded to the New Orleans Saints on Monday night in the 51-29 debacle at the Superdome.

Missing five starters, including running back-punt returner Reggie Bush and three of their top four cornerbacks, the Saints equaled their franchise record for points by scoring the most against Green Bay in 22 years.

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

RECEIVERS (2)

Mike McCarthy sensed Greg Jennings-Jason David would be a mismatch. That's why Jennings was the target of 15 passes, three more than ever before. But Jennings only caught eight because Aaron Rodgers struggled so badly. Otherwise, Jennings' 101-yard day might have been 200. Jennings still shows some inconsistencies in and out of his breaks. But not every great young receiver would be willing to run seam routes in front of lurking safeties as Jennings did twice. That was impressive. Jordy Nelson cost Rodgers his second interception by not finishing an inside route. Donald Driver drew ex-Patriot Randall Gay in the slot; they battled to a draw. One of the limitations in Donald Lee's game is he's just not very creative after the catch. Tory Humphrey got down the seam for 29 yards.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

Daryn Colledge had a couple poor plays in the fourth quarter but before that he was solid. Colledge has parlayed his off-season strength gains into a slightly more physical style of play. The Packers still might try to replace him as early as 2009, but for now he's OK. Jason Spitz never will move as well as Colledge, which keeps getting him in trouble in protection. DT Sedrick Ellis blew past him for a sack in 3.0 seconds. Ellis also had two hurries and one knockdowns (Spitz was involved in two of those) for possibly his best day as a rookie. Scott Wells got beat by NT Kendrick Clancy on one "bad" run but was more than adequate in protection until the end. Scouts wish Wells had more horsepower but most teams would like his quickness, intelligence and instincts. When Mark Tauscher (hamstring) exited on the second play, Tony Moll had the disadvantage of having to play cold. Moll struggled to keep up with speedy DE Bobby McCray, who beat him for two knockdowns and two hurries. Moll played high at times and labored in space, but for having limited practice time his showing could have been worse. He just doesn't seem to have starting ability. Chad Clifton didn't make any glaring miscues in the run game and limited DE Will Smith to two hurries.

QUARTERBACKS (1½)

At this point, it's probably too much to ask Rodgers to carry this team. Operating against a very weak secondary and what had been a marginal pass rush, he wasn't sharp enough with his reads or accuracy. The Superdome was really, really loud, but the Packers have the silent-count routine down now so they use the shotgun anywhere. But Rodgers just threw some terrible passes. On the first interception, he appeared to rush a square-out of about 14 yards to Jennings when he was running a corner at about 18. Yes, Jennings slipped, but the fault falls on Rodgers. Given that coverage, the ball probably should have been thrown elsewhere. It was a killer mistake. Later, he threw a hanger to Donald Driver that Gay dropped or it might have gone for a 37-yard TD. Rodgers scrambled eight times for 36 yards, but only two or three were pressure-related. He just likes taking off. He's good at it, too.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

Defensive coordinator Gary Gibbs played a seven-man box, telling the Packers he was going to protect his vulnerable cornerbacks so go ahead and run all you want. Ryan Grant had a decent first half (16-64), then just two carries in the second half when McCarthy abandoned the run. Grant converted two third and 1's (Brandon Jackson made another). He used his speed to bounce around the corner for gains of 6 and 4 yards. And he played 47 snaps compared to Jackson's 17, staying in on many third downs. However, a back with better overall ability might have gained 100 or more yards in those 16 first-half carries, which then would have forced Gibbs' hand and might have opened up the passing floodgates. Grant has the speed and the toughness. He just doesn't have the natural skill of the better backs.

DEFENSIVE LINE (½)

Bob Sanders rushed five or more on 26.7% of passes, and Brandon Chillar had the lone sack on a blitz. This was the second straight game in which no one in this unit other than Aaron Kampman got any pressure. Kampman had five "pressures," including four against finesse RT Jon Stinchcomb. He also beat Stinchcomb for minus-2 in the run game, but then TE Jeremy Shockey dominated Kampman on Pierre Thomas' 31-yard TD run. Michael Montgomery (47 snaps) slithered his way into five tackles but got nowhere as a rusher against LT Jammal Brown. As usual, Johnny Jolly was inconsistent at the point. LG Carl Nicks, C Jonathan Goodwin and RG Jahri Evans were so good in protection that all Ryan Pickett (27), Colin Cole (31), Justin Harrell (25) and Jolly (28) could do was thrash away and jump up trying to bat balls. The four-man rush is on life support.

LINEBACKERS (½)

Coach Sean Payton's imaginative game plan exposed A.J. Hawk in his second game for injured Nick Barnett. It's a totally different set of keys in the middle and Hawk looked lost in coverage. Compared to the Saints' Jonathan Vilma, Hawk was wholly deficient, and Vilma currently isn't a great player by any means. Hawk obviously isn't slow, but it's strange because at times he plays really slow. And when the Packers tried playing some zone his drops were off. Chillar, who blitzed six times, also had a knockdown and hurry. In coverage, he gave up too much (4-39). On the wide-receiver pass, Chillar made one of the most decisive reads all season by a LB when he charged from nowhere to drill Lance Moore as he threw.

SECONDARY (1½)

Nick Collins had his worst game of the season, mainly because he stopped being aggressive. On the 70-yard TD pass to Moore, he was late reacting. When Moore turned up field, Collins just gave himself up to Shockey's block and it was over. On Moore's 14-yard TD pass, Collins was faked out so badly on a hesitate-and-go route that he came out of his shoe. And on Thomas' long TD run, Collins waited too long once again and gave the back a two-way go, which with a hole that large spelled finis. Before being benched, Atari Bigby's failure in the open field against Moore brought back memories of Marquand Manuel. At this point, Bigby is a liability in space. His replacement, Aaron Rouse, also got exposed. He did deliver a few hard hits in the box, but in the open field it was ugly. Rouse paused on the sideline rather than strike a blow, didn't look like he could run and took an improper angle and failed to get Marques Colston down on his 70-yard TD. Charles Woodson played the third-and-7 sticks against Colston, lost his gamble and paid a huge price. Woodson was his usual physical self until the end, when he shut down pursuit on the Thomas breakaway. Winning efforts were by Al Harris and Tramon Williams, neither of whom allowed a completion. Harris was still going after people in the 59th minute.

KICKERS (1½)

Domes at this time of year should be a punter's best friend. Not for Derrick Frost, who was awful in Minnesota and even worse Monday. Excluding a low 48-yarder that rolled nine yards, his three-punt averages were 28.7 yards (gross), 25.0 (net) and 3.77 seconds (hang time). But he is a fine holder. Mason Crosby averaged 66.5 and 4.10 on four kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1)

The Saints, especially veteran FB Darian Barnes, were more physical. There were a season-high five missed tackles as Courtney Roby averaged 34.3 on three kickoffs. Will Blackmon returned a punt 27 yards off the bounce but weak blocking limited him to 19.9 on eight kickoffs. He turned careless at the end, fielding one on a short hop and fumbling another that he recovered on the fly.

OVERALL (1)

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