

Rating the Packers: Week 1 vs. Bears

A good enough launching pad

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Green Bay - Evaluating the strength of the two teams as the game progressed. Factoring in Chicago's debilitating string of injuries. Considering the optimism spawned by Green Bay's great training camp and exhibition season. The truth is, the Packers and the majority of their fans would have been and should have been absolutely crushed by a defeat Sunday night at Lambeau Field. Would it have had lasting effect? Of course not. But now that they managed to eke out a victory, the immediate future couldn't be brighter. Coach Mike McCarthy is 1-0 and can rip all he wants this week because his team deserves it. On paper, at least, an opener against the Bears, a club that was riding a 4-1 crest at Lambeau, might be the second toughest test for the Packers in their first six games.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 21-15 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (1 ½)

Dealing with the Rod Marinelli-inspired rush was the hard part offensively. In contrast, this group should have had smooth sailing against an inferior, beat-up secondary. As talented as this unit is, the four drops (two by Donald Driver, two by Jordy Nelson) can't be excused. Driver came free several times against Danieal Manning, one of the most competitive nickel backs around. The Packers had success matching up WRs deep on FS Kevin Payne but couldn't connect until Aaron Rodgers looked him off and found Greg Jennings for the decisive 50-yard strike. Jennings had five rather easy catches for 93 yards against CB Nathan Vasher, who not only can't run anymore but seems to have lost his nerve. Jennings was open all day against him. Donald Lee and Jermichael Finley split time but neither was a factor. Spencer Havner, who blocked well last month, shouldn't play any more than he did (five snaps) if he doesn't block better Sunday.

OFFENSIVE LINE (½)

It has been a long, long time since the Packer had a tackle play worse than Allen Barbre. Even before giving up a ridiculously short corner and the first of his two sacks on the 11th play, Barbre was trashed three times by DE Adewale Ogunleye only to be saved when the ball came out quickly. Besides the sacks, he yielded two knockdowns and two hurries. His kick step and footwork in protection were wildly inconsistent, he kept getting his hands swatted down and his balance was abominable. He couldn't handle edge rushes or bull rushes, even hump moves. McCarthy offered chip-blocking help to Barbre on 41% of dropbacks but even that didn't work. Instead of letting the chipper do his thing, he drifted and wasn't in position to clean up. Jason Spitz had a very disappointing day. Spitz had leverage on DT Israel Idonije but had to torque him to the ground; he should know by now that the umpire will call just about every time. Daryn Colledge and Josh Sitton were marginal. Chad Clifton might have been the best of the bunch even though he gave up 1 ½ "bad" runs and one-half sack.

QUARTERBACKS (3 ½)

It's hard to recall Brett Favre, with his recoiling throwing style and some excellent lines, getting hit as hard in his final seven or eight years as Rodgers was here. Besides the four sacks, he was knocked down five times and pressured five times. The first-quarter frontal shot from a full-speed-ahead Brian Urlacher is about as hard as a quarterback can get hit in today's game. But Rodgers is tough. Unlike his impetuous counterpart, Jay Cutler, he refused to start throwing the ball up and blaming the circumstances. He had no interceptions. He didn't fumble. Yes, the safety was almost totally his fault. He fought the good fight and had the one great throw in him to earn the "W."

RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)

The Bears had Ryan Grant and the ground game figured out. Lovie Smith ran well-choreographed run blitzes, bringing FS Kevin Payne hard into the box and looping Urlacher and Lance Briggs. If there was any daylight, Grant wasn't able to find enough of it. The Bears closed on Grant in a hurry and made him pay a physical price for his 61 yards in 16 carries. Because Grant looks like an Adonis, you just always expect more. DeShawn Wynn (18 snaps) replaced injured Brandon Jackson on third downs, was sound against blitzes and dropped one pass. John Kuhn pancaked two LBs on one running play.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Minus B.J. Raji (ankle), Cullen Jenkins (64) and Johnny Jolly (60) had to play too many snaps on a humid night. One of the reasons why the Bears gave LG Frank Omiyale \$5.5 million in bonuses was to block Jenkins, a player for whom they have extreme respect. But Jenkins, after a calculatingly sluggish August, turned it up three notches and made Omiyale look real bad. Jenkins trashed the 315-pound guard for three tackles for loss, a sack and 1 1/2 pressures. Besides his breathtaking interception on a screen, Jolly played sideline-to-sideline making tackles on bubble screens and sweeps. Just one of Ryan Pickett's 25 snaps came on a passing down. His role as an early-down and short-yardage stuffer is set. Despite the heat, the coaches didn't show much trust in Michael Montgomery (12 snaps) or Jarius Wynn (five).

LINEBACKERS (4)

Brandon Chillar had 14 blitzes, twice as many as any other defender, and came through with three pressures, including a hurdling sack over RB Garrett Wolfe that was magnificent. Just as important were the two tackles at the line that Chillar made against Matt Forte in which he rag-dolled blockers (WR Rashied Davis, Omiyale) to get there. Chillar, however, wasn't the only ILB playing stronger at the point. A.J. Hawk attacked the line confidently, taking down interference or stacking the ball carrier. He also timed his blitzes better than last year. Hawk did need to carry TE Desmond Clark farther downfield on his 23-yard reception. Nick Barnett was OK. Aaron Kampman isn't the factor yet at LB that he was the last three years at DE. ROLB Brady Poppinga gave way to Clay Matthews in sub packages in the first half but began double duty against the run in the fourth quarter. Matthews chases around and is tough, but twice he was pinned inside by tight ends on substantial gains and also missed two tackles.

SECONDARY (3 ½)

Charles Woodson used his strength and long arms to match up frequently against TE Greg Olsen and help limit him to one catch. However, Woodson gave up three passes totaling 113 yards and kept trying to blitz too wide, making him easier to neutralize. Al Harris really threw his body around on contact, caught the slant pass from Cutler that rookie Johnny Knox quit on and wasn't beat deep. Chalk up his phantom illegal-contact foul to reputation. Tramon Williams was one-for-three in interception chances. With Atari Bigby (knee) and Nick Collins (leg cramps) hurting, Aaron Rouse got a chance and was more impressive than he has been in a long time. Cramping or not, there is no reason for Collins to discount Devin Hester as a threat and then take a bad angle on his 36-yard TD reception.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby hit from 52 and 39 yards, missed from 49 and averaged 72.3 yards and 4.02 seconds hang time in four kickoffs. Any punter would have been overshadowed by the clinic put on by Chicago's Brad Maynard. However, Jeremy Kapinos was adequate with marks of 44.7 (gross), 35.5 (net) and 4.09 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Anytime the Packers can earn more than a draw against the Bears' crack units is worth noting. With Will Blackmon (thigh) out, Nelson struck a blow for himself as the kickoff returner. Nelson does have a knack for it. He's faster, more elusive and tougher than he looks. He broke five tackles in all, including two on a 29-yard return that set up the winning drive. WR Brett Swain alertly tackled Wolfe on a fake punt. Bishop didn't play from scrimmage but made his physical presence felt here.

OVERALL (3)

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