

Rating the Packers vs. Rams

Getting back on track

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Green Bay — Running back Steven Jackson. Safety Oshiomogho Atogwe. Maybe center Jason Brown and middle linebacker James Laurinaitis.

Those are the only players on the St. Louis Rams that a Super Bowl-caliber team would want in its starting lineup.

If the Green Bay Packers didn't get caught looking ahead to Minnesota, there was no way they could have lost Sunday at Edward Jones Dome. Stung by their upset loss against Cincinnati, the Packers came ready to play and turned back the pesky the Rams, 36-17. Here is a rating of the Packers against the Rams, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

It's amazing. Donald Driver will be 35 in February but not once in his career has age ever been an issue. This week, he went wide against CB Bradley Fletcher, a strapping rookie with 4.46-second speed in the 40. Because Driver spends so much time in the slot, there have been whispers in the last few years that he didn't have the game to work a side by himself anymore. Fat chance of that being true any time soon. Driver took Fletcher straight down the field, beat him by a stride and then made one of the more remarkable catches in recent club annals. Driver also caught two slot-slants for 28 yards and a 21-yard TD in which he ran out of room on a vertical route and still found daylight in the end-zone corner away from CB Jonathan Wade, who can really fly. Greg Jennings is becoming the consummate deep threat. He can't run a 40 like Bob Hayes or Cliff Branch but the results basically are the same. He's as fast as he needs to be and almost always wins at the ball. Jordy Nelson played quite a bit more than James Jones but that's due more to Jones' nagging hand injury. Nelson showed burst and played well except for his drop of a 41-yard go route that he tried to body catch. Jermichael Finley had two poor back-side cut blocks and wasn't a factor in 42 snaps, six fewer than Donald Lee.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1 ½)

After giving up another terrible sub-3.0 second sack (2.8), Allen Barbre rallied and probably was the most effective lineman. He didn't allow another pressure to wily Leonard Little. In fact, he controlled Little for long stretches, especially in the run game. Barbre was equally good blocking on the play and back sides. He is such a fluid athlete for his size. Having played his best game as a Packer should buoy his self-esteem heading to the Metrodome. Elsewhere, it was another dreary day. Daryn Colledge really was pretty awful filling in for LT Chad Clifton. Aging DE James Hall whipped him for 4 ½ of the 5 ½ pressures that he allowed. Scott Wells, perhaps the team's most impressive run blocker in August, struggled on reach blocks and gave up penetration. Wells was responsible for two "bad" runs where as Jason Spitz gave up 3 ½ . Spitz settled down in the second half and ended up with an adequate performance. Josh Sitton wasn't very good, either. For making up one of the worst DT corps in the NFL, Clifton Ryan, LaJuan Ramsey and Gary Gibson sure were hard for the Packers to block.

QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)

The defensive brain trust of coach Steve Spagnuolo and coordinator Ken Flajole decided to forgo the blitz (16 %), rushed four and mixed coverages against Aaron Rodgers, especially in the second half after Rodgers hit Jennings for 50 against a six-man pressure. They just couldn't get Rodgers to make a turnover-producing mistake. He faked beautifully on his seven play-action passes, made several extraordinary throws to Driver and sapped the Rams' will by scrambling five times for 38. He was a little off on a few passes and held the ball for 5 seconds on a sack. By and large, he was in total control in squaring his dome record at 2-2.

RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)

Mike McCarthy turned his entire game plan on first down over to Ryan Grant and the results had to be discouraging. Dodging penetrating linemen and at times fighting to make it back to the line, Grant averaged a paltry 2.0 on 17 first-down carries. Grant seemed to become stronger as the game went on, and most of his best runs were in the fourth quarter. He doesn't have the talent to press the line of scrimmage, find a crease and surge into it. Grant is able to turn the corner sometimes. He didn't fumble. But he broke just one or two tackles all day, showing almost no creativity. Maybe it's time to sign another running back with some pizzazz. DeShawn Wynn (11 snaps) had room outside on a draw play but hesitated and ran right into the pile. Korey Hall played on special teams but all 38 FB snaps went to John Kuhn, who scored twice.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

The Rams' momentum died in the third quarter on a second-and-3 run for no gain by Jackson. Spagnuolo had some success single-blocking Ryan Pickett but not on that play. When Brown blocked back, Pickett went in with a low shoulder, shed RG Richie Incognito and enveloped Jackson in the hole. Pickett (37 snaps) took advantage of the brawny Incognito on other plays, too. Johnny Jolly (54) played as well as anyone on defense. Part of the reason is he's playing with incredible energy. Jolly located Marc Bulger's fumble before anyone else and made the recovery, then pressured Kyle Boller into the interception by Charles Woodson. Jolly also had a pair of knockdowns and a batted pass. Cullen Jenkins (60) had a very ordinary game against LG Jacob Bell. B.J. Raji's regular-season debut (24 snaps) was less than impressive. He needs to hold his gap before thinking about anything else.

LINEBACKERS (2)

In a surprise move, Brandon Chillar played SS on 37 of the 40 plays in which the 3-4 was used. He also played all 31 nickel snaps. Chillar gave up two TD passes in the end zone to backup TE Daniel Fells and was burned on a 16-yard rollout pass to WR Keenan Burton. Chillar was in man coverage when Fells beat him for the 16-yard TD. He had good coverage against Fells in a three-deep zone but Boller threw one of the best balls of his career for the 19-yard TD. Chillar had one pressure in seven blitzes, Nick Barnett one in eight and A.J. Hawk none in seven. Hawk looked slow, really slow, in the flat chasing Jackson. Barnett was a little more decisive than he had been before leaving for good midway in the third quarter. Thus, Desmond Bishop got his first exposure of the season, and in nine snaps he was aggressive if not razor-sharp. Brady Poppinga left his position prematurely on a blitz from the other side, giving Jackson room to sweep his side for 20. Aaron Kampman had his best pass-rushing game (five pressures) against backup RT Adam Goldberg.

SECONDARY (3 ½)

SS Derrick Martin played 37 snaps, mostly in sub packages. He had no impact but carried out his assignments. With running-mate Atari Bigby already out, Nick Collins sucked it up and went the distance despite a sore clavicle. He was hardly himself, but just having him on the field directing traffic was a major plus. The Rams didn't have the passers or receivers even to challenge downfield. Woodson took his normal share of chances, undercut Danny Amendola for the interception, missed two tackles and threw his body around trying to tackle Jackson.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby averaged 69.4 yards and a fantastic 4.22 seconds of hang time on eight kickoffs. He told the coaches that the extra point he pulled left was his first miss since his sophomore year at Colorado. He hit from 48, 38 and 25. Jeremy Kapinos had a banner day, averaging 50 yards (gross), 44.3 (net) and 4.51 (hang time) in four punts, three of which were inside the 20.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Jolly, who had the only FG block in three seasons under Mike Stock, blocked a 48-yarder after a charging Pickett cleared a lane. However, one of Crosby's three successful extra points was partially blocked because Pickett didn't execute his block properly. Rookie LB Brad Jones flew around in his coverage debut. Newcomer Matt Giordano also made his physical presence known. The coverage and return units were so-so.

Overall (3)

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