

Rating the Packers vs. Lions

Lions help Packers roar

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Green Bay — The National Football League schedule called for a game to be played on Thanksgiving at Ford Field. In truth, it was a glorified scrimmage.

Network broadcast teams talk and talk and talk but never must they cross that invisible line banning harsh criticism of general managers, coaches or entire organizations. The very nature of their business relationship with the NFL precludes it.

The Lions have a top wide receiver and might have a good quarterback, but beyond that none of the pieces are in place. How can a team be on the so-called road to respectability when its defense can't cover, can't rush and has only two or three players of value?

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 34-12 romp, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

Donald Driver's three biggest plays - a 68-yard bomb, a 45-yard post and a 7-yard TD pass - were the direct result of blown assignments by SS Marvin White, who started 13 games for Cincinnati in 2007-'08 and was making his first for Detroit. White also missed the tackle on a 33-yard reception (23 after the catch) by Greg Jennings. James Jones hasn't been very good after the catch, but when the Lions blew another coverage, he turned a 9-yard pass into a 21-yard TD. Jones is doing a better job blocking. All three TEs have to pick up their blocking, especially Jermichael Finley (45 snaps). He showed indecision blocking in space. Even though it was in garbage time, Finley can't permit DE Cliff Avril to knock him on his butt 5 yards deep in the backfield and onto Brandon Jackson. On the previous play, Spencer Havner (nine) almost got Jackson killed by coming across and whiffing on DE Andre Fluellen. Donald Lee (43) was at least partially to blame for two "bad" runs after being blown up by Fluellen. Finley probably was right to take some of the blame when he failed to make a catch in the end zone. White made a terrific break to get his hand inside, but if Finley had reached for the ball instead of going for the body catch White's hand might not have mattered. Not having scored in 14 games, Lee showed his hunger by going airborne from the 3.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

Coordinator Gunther Cunningham blitzed the exact same amount (39%) as he did in Week 5, but the Lions' sack total fell from five to one. The Lions aren't lining up with D-linemen that good teams would want, but it's still the NFL, right? Josh Sitton continued to lead the way. He looked good pulling on two "stutter" weak counter plays, is reacting faster all the time against stunts and keeps performing with a glowering presence that casts the unit in a tougher light. Scott Wells was excellent in protection, but then he almost always is. He and Daryn Colledge had their hands full coping with NT Grady Jackson. Colledge seemed to be more aggressive and actually produced sizable movement a few times. Chad Clifton pretty much owned Avril but also made a few errors before leaving with a hamstring injury at the 8-minute mark of the third quarter. T.J. Lang bounced from right to left tackle without missing a beat or getting beat badly. Mark Tauscher ended up yielding four "pressures," but three came late against Avril when he might have tired.

QUARTERBACKS (4½)

It's much easier for quarterbacks nowadays to stand tall in the face of approaching punishment because pass rushers usually pull off fearing penalties and fines. Still, Aaron Rodgers found himself in those positions more often than normal and passed the tough test, getting it out to Jennings for 33 and Driver for the 7-yard TD. When Rodgers didn't have answers on first and second down, he almost always did on third down. He patiently took check-downs four times. He read soft corners and effectively turned called runs into 2- to 8-yard "glance" completions. At times, the Lions did manage pressure, but frequently he danced away and made plays on the move. When Rodgers does leave the pocket, he keeps his eyes downfield, right where they should be. When a screen didn't materialize immediately, he adroitly stepped left and improvised a flip to Ryan Grant for 27.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

White, a highly physical player, delivered a couple of jarring tackles against Grant. However, two of the four tackles broken by Grant were at White's expense. Rookie WLB DeAndre Levy, who was the Lions' best defensive player, had to make several impressive tackles or Grant's average would have been much higher than 3.1. Grant didn't run with his recent power or crispness, but the short week is toughest of all on a running back. He did look more comfortable in the passing game. His carry that turned into a safety was poorly blocked across the board, but still it's Grant's job to get out of the end zone. Running way out wide wasn't the way to go. Korey Hall (16 snaps) and Quinn Johnson (15) were so-so at FB.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Each week B.J. Raji (season-high 29 snaps) is playing more, which in turn is lightening what had been an oppressive load on Cullen Jenkins (48) and Johnny Jolly (46). Jolly has been a brute, consistent force at the point almost all season. He batted another pass, and Raji had one as well. Jenkins had a field day working against guards Manny Ramirez and Dylan Gandy, neither of whom could handle his quickness or strength. One time, Jenkins had Ramirez beat for a sack but C Dominic Raiola doubled back and saved QB Matthew Stafford. In all, Jenkins had three "pressures" whereas the other four linemen didn't have any. Raji blew up RG Daniel Loper on a power play for minus-4, then thrashed Ramirez for minus-1. However, he was displaced three times from his gap, three more than anyone else was, and thrashed too much as a rusher. Ryan Pickett played just 18 snaps.

LINEBACKERS (3½)

Now the starter for Aaron Kampman, Brad Jones played about 50 snaps and was adequate. He played with effort, generally was in decent position and beat RT Gosder Cherilus late with a nice inside move. Cherilus has struggled on islands, but the Lions felt comfortable giving him Jones, and he didn't have much trouble controlling the rookie. For his linear build Jones plays with OK leverage, but he did end up on the ground four or five times. Both A.J. Hawk and Nick Barnett consistently disrupted the Lions' run game by being tough and aggressive. Both had problems in coverage, especially Barnett on two fourth-quarter completions worth 29 yards. Clay Matthews led in "pressures" with four although just one came against LT Jeff Backus. They probably played to a draw. Matthews is playing with tremendous speed and intensity.

SECONDARY (4½)

Charles Woodson's full game was on display. He used his height and wisdom to dominate Calvin Johnson. He changed course on a blitz that made all the difference in getting the sack. He baited Stafford into two interceptions; when he undercuts routes, Woodson usually is right next to his man. Other people might have stopped playing in garbage time but not him. The result was a strip-fumble recovery against TE Casey FitzSimmons. He attacked the 320-pound Loper on a screen, shrugged him aside and made the tackle. On four end-zone passes to Johnson he defended three and got beat on one. His hands are just so strong. Nick Collins' sideline interception was a gem. He has boundless athleticism and speed. Jarrett Bush gambled and lost on a 47-yard completion to Dennis Northcutt, one of three balls that someone with better ball skills might have intercepted. But Bush also provided clingy coverage down after down, was aggressive blitzing and knifing into the box, and helped with his fresh legs. Now the starter for Al Harris, Tramon Williams played well, too.

KICKERS (2½)

From the right hash, Mason Crosby usually misses left. This time, he missed right by a lot from 43. He also hit from 20 and 25 yards, and averaged 64.8 yards and 4.04 seconds of hang time on six kickoffs. Jeremy Kapinos' three-punt averages were 44.0 (gross), 32.7 (net) and 4.23 (hang time); his 62-yard free kick was in the air 4.55.

SPECIAL TEAMS (½)

Jordy Nelson ran up the right side of the field on the opening kickoff carrying the ball in his left arm. Even though he switched arms on his next attempt, there was no excuse for fumbling. Turk McBride knocked the ball out with his shoulder, not his helmet. Nelson fielded a punt at the 6; he can't seem to get untracked. The kickoff team gave up two 34-yard returns; the first probably would have been a 98-yard TD if not for Crosby's open-field tackle of Aaron Brown. Brady Poppinga, Atari Bigby and Johnson drew major penalties.

OVERALL (4)

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