

Rating the Packers vs. Bears

Packers win tough fight

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Green Bay — If you looked away from the ball Sunday at Soldier Field, you would have seen evidence that Green Bay-Chicago is never just another game.

The Packers were more than ready to play and proved it with one of their most physical performances of the season. Packers-Bears football is about putting the opponent on his back, going for him when he's down and demonstrating that you're the toughest guy on the block.

It didn't take long for the Bears to respond to the challenge and stand up for their manhood. Neither side won the physical battle, but the Packers won the extremely hard-fought game, 21-14.

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

RECEIVERS (3½)

The topic on how to match up against Jermichael Finley will dominate game-plan meetings for every foe. Finley is big and tall, fast, graceful and increasingly skilled. CB Charles Tillman couldn't handle Finley on a 25-yard post and CB Zackary Bowman couldn't stop a 12-yard slant to Finley on third and 11. The Bears inserted SS Josh Bullocks in certain situations in an attempt to cover Finley because they knew SS Kevin Payne and FS Al Afalava certainly couldn't. Of Finley's 34 snaps, only nine called for him to be in a three-point stance. His effectiveness flanked wide and from the slot has reduced snaps for Donald Lee and the WRs. Knowing that he tends to run rather upright, Finley did try to get low but still fumbled. He almost fumbled another, too. Lee, with 25 of his 37 snaps in a three-point stance, is being used mostly as base blocker and struggling. He was partially responsible for three "bad" runs by missing cutoff blocks against DEs. Based on the review of referee Mike Carey, the 36-yard pass that Greg Jennings appeared to catch for a TD has to be recorded as a drop. What Jennings' performance should be noted for were his subtle adjustments on the fly and his nifty footwork escaping press coverage. Nickel back Danieal Manning kept a lid on Donald Driver in the slot.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3½)

Daryn Colledge opened with a sensational combo block against NT Marcus Harrison and LB Lance Briggs that sprung Ryan Grant for a 62-yard TD. Later, he reverted to form. Colledge moves well enough to reach most blocks but sometimes doesn't bring his feet with him, loses his balance and falls off, enabling his man to pile up the play. Mark Tauscher was late on a pair of back-side cutoffs, gave up two "pressures" to Adewale Ogunleye and missed a blitz pickup that allowed Briggs to slam Aaron Rodgers. Bears DL coach Rod Marinelli dialed up a dozen or more stunts and the three inside players had their share of problems. Josh Sitton was partially at fault for three "pressures." The best performances were by Chad Clifton and Scott Wells. Clifton had the most difficult matchup (DE Alex Brown) and finished with two "pressures." Perhaps inspired by the rivalry, Clifton was more determined shoving at the point and getting after LBs.

QUARTERBACKS (3½)

The difference between Rodgers and many other QBs, including Chicago's Jay Cutler, is becoming increasingly apparent. Even on his average days, which this one was, Rodgers isn't making dumb mistakes that lose games. He held the ball for 4.6 seconds on the sack by DT Tommie Harris, and he reacted poorly on a third-quarter knockdown by MLB Hunter Hillenmeyer that was his responsibility. He seemed to rush a few throws as Lovie Smith blitzed on 48.4% of drop-backs, most by an opponent all season. He overthrew two or three receivers that were open deep. And he also tied some kind of record by fumbling twice on one play. Unlike Cutler, however, he didn't cave in to the moment and start throwing passes into tiny windows (there was one). By staying within himself, Rodgers bought time until Cutler self-destructed to lose the game.

RUNNING BACKS (4½)

Grant isn't running into people much anymore. Two or three times he showed the ability to make more than one cut on a run and weave his way to a reasonable gain. Payne was all jacked up to show Grant just how much punishment he could deliver. After absorbing a big early shot, Grant gained the upper hand by sending Payne sprawling along the boundary and grinding over him several times. Grant is one tough customer and clearly likes a good fight. His attitude rubs off on teammates. He might make a lot of money, but you wouldn't know it by his blue-collar approach. On the 62-yard TD, he beat Briggs and Payne to the spot and outran Tillman. It was extremely impressive. It's hard to say what Ahman Green has left because of his conservative, two-arms-around-the-ball style. Brandon Jackson's drop was his first since Week 4 of 2008. FBs John Kuhn (17) and Korey Hall (15) aren't people movers but usually they cover them up.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3½)

When Ryan Pickett (hamstring) was ruled out, B.J. Raji played more at NT (22 of his 26 snaps) than he has all year. Raji has a lot to learn. After a fast start, he wound up on the ground too much and wasn't exact with his technique. C Olin Kreutz has lost some of his stinger and Raji made a few plays, but the 12-year veteran taught him a few things, too. Raji kind of wades in on rushes and tries to use too many swim moves. He'd be better served playing more of a power game. Cullen Jenkins (52) didn't dominate LG Frank Omiyale as he did Sept. 13. Jenkins had one tackle for loss in the first of six snaps in the new 1-5-5 "psycho" defense and three "pressures" in a rather ordinary showing. Johnny Jolly basically will do anything to win. When Raji went out briefly with a stinger, he played eight of his 52 snaps at NT, a position where he almost never practices. Jolly has been invaluable as an anchor. Despite being short-handed, the Packers found just 11 snaps for Jarius Wynn and three for Michael Montgomery.

LINEBACKERS (4½)

The LBs have been blowing it on screen passes much of the season. Not this time. When the Bears screened in the second quarter, Nick Barnett made a startling play by cutting across Kreutz' face and attacking Matt Forte for minus-3. From his position 5 or 6 yards deep, Barnett is able to slip blocks quickly and find the football without compromising the defense. On one of his eight blitzes, Barnett rammed into FB Jason McKie, quickly spun off and hurried Cutler into the interception by Charles Woodson. A.J. Hawk stayed hot with another aggressive, productive performance. His unselfishness shows in the way he clears out blockers vs. the run and on blitzes. Clay Matthews drew two major penalties and had three "pressures" against LT Chris Williams. He hurdled trash chasing from the back side, isn't being exposed in his zone drops and offers strength against the run. Brady Poppinga played two series in relief of Brad Jones, who didn't have a "pressure" all day.

SECONDARY (4)

Atari Bigby probably played better than he has all season. His smashing knock-back tackle of Kahlil Bell on third and 1 turned the game around. After months of repetition, the pre-snaps calls that he's making to LBs have become more second nature and no longer are impeding the physical part of his game. Meanwhile, Nick Collins made two more exceptional plays (interception, deep pass breakup for Greg Olsen). He is so talented. Charles Woodson intercepted one pass, dropped two others, threw his body around against the run and gave up two big plays on back-shoulder fades, his least favorite route. When the Bears played more two-back sets, Woodson wasn't matched on Olsen as often as in the opener. Tramon Williams is a fearless, dangerous long-distance blitzer. He also gave up a 28-yard pass on third and 18 plus a 19-yard TD pass that he must have closer proximity to the WR in order to defend. Nickel back Jarrett Bush is going to be picked on.

KICKERS (1½)

Mason Crosby missed wide right from the right hash from 42 and hit from the 33 and 26. His three high kickoffs averaged 66.3 yards and 3.95 seconds (hang time), and his two driving hooks to the left were effective. Maintaining a recent trend, Jeremy Kapinos saved his best for last on a four-punt day. His averages were 43.3 yards (gross), 33.8 (net) and 4.26 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3½)

Led by Collins and Poppinga, the coverage units perhaps were as good as they have been all season. For only the second game all season there wasn't a major penalty. The Packers were ready to run a fake field goal before the Bears called a timeout. Live wire Derrick Martin has brought much-needed pizzazz to this group. The return game wasn't much.

OVERALL (4)

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