

# Rating the Packers vs. Cardinals

## Playing like they mean it

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**Green Bay** — The first play on offense for the Packers and Cardinals told the story of "Owning Arizona," Green Bay's 33-7 victory Sunday at University of Phoenix Stadium in the regular-season finale for both teams.

On the Packers' first play, cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie basically ran away from Donald Driver after he caught a 14-yard pass in his face.

On the Cardinals' first play, cornerback Tramon Williams blasted Steve Breaston in the back after he caught a 3-yard pass on him.

The "mail-it-in" Cardinals didn't seem any more interested in playing or coaching Sunday than "DRC" did tackling. On the other hand, the Packers played it to the hilt, flew around the field and drilled anything that moved.

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

### **RECEIVERS (4)**

Arizona defensive coordinator Billy Davis stayed true to form, preferring his base 3-4 to his nickel against Green Bay's three-WR formations. That made it easy for Driver, who made two catches for 33 yards just by eluding a linebacker out of the slot. Driver caught the six passes thrown to him for 65 yards, his best outing in a month. He looked fresh-legged and energized, good signs for the playoff push. Driver's only miscue was an alignment penalty that wiped out a 30-yard completion to Jermichael Finley. When Rodgers-Cromartie exited with a knee injury on the third play, little Michael Adams and later rookie Greg Toler had fits trying to keep up. Finley was sloppy with his route, depth and footwork on the 1-yard pass he caught beyond the end line. He also ran some beautiful inside-breaking routes flanked as a WR. Finley had 41 snaps compared to 26 for Donald Lee, who seems not to be trusting his hands fully anymore based on a pair of body catches. James Jones ran a poor route on Matt Flynn's interception and showed no sideline awareness by going out of bounds before coming back in. Jordy Nelson's 51-yard catch was a career long, but in an August exhibition game on the same field he hauled one in for 76.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (3)**

DE Darnell Dockett, like most of Arizona's defensive starters, didn't play beyond the first series. Still, it was impressive watching Scott Wells knock Dockett off the ball on an early stretch play. Wells didn't get much movement against NT Bryan Robinson on a failed third-and-2 running back. Otherwise, he didn't allow a "pressure" in an impressive showing. In fact, the unit gave up merely two pressures, including a knockdown by DE Alan Branch against Mark Tauscher and a sack split between T.J. Lang and Josh Sitton. The starters played until the start of the fourth quarter, when C Evan Dietrich-Smith, LT Lang and RT Allen Barbre entered for the final 13 snaps. The Packers are high on Dietrich-Smith, the rookie free agent from Idaho State. He showed some strength and aggressiveness but also blew an assignment and lacked overall awareness. Daryn Colledge, Chad Clifton and Wells went unscathed pass blocking mostly against shock troops. However, Colledge got Ahman Green blown up in the fourth quarter by missing his man and wasn't very good cutting off the back side or sustaining at the LB level.

## **QUARTERBACKS (4)**

The 94-yard drive in the third quarter when Rodgers completed nine of 10 for 92 yards was like seven-on-seven practice. Davis blitzed on merely 26.7% of dropbacks, didn't generate pass rush from his backup front four and couldn't cover with his backup secondary. Easy? Yes, it was. Still, Rodgers didn't try to take advantage of the situation. He is just so confident in what he sees. Three times in the first nine plays he changed the huddle call from a run to a quick pass, completing all three for 29 yards against three different CBs. Rodgers converted once on a sneak, giving him four-of-five with a yard to go on third and fourth downs this season. He overthrew Greg Jennings twice deep up the sidelines, a throw that more times than not he hits. Boy, he adjusts quickly in the pocket, slides into a new passing window and whips the ball into places where only his receiver can get at it. Flynn was better against Seattle. He had nothing on an intermediate dig route that was behind Jones on third and 11 and then didn't make a good read on Ralph Brown's 80-yard interception.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3 ½ )**

Brandon Jackson is following his blocks on screens much better than in his first two seasons. On the two third-quarter screens for 29 yards, he didn't rush things, let inside linebackers Monty Beisel and Reggie Walker make mistakes and then maneuvered outside down the sideline to daylight. On one third-down blitz, he made a great read crossing from one side of the formation to the other in front of Rodgers, picked up his man down the middle and watched the pass get away cleanly for a first down. Ryan Grant and Ahman Green ran through some arm tackles and kept their legs driving on contact. They both have had better decision-making days. At FB, John Kuhn had 25 snaps to Quinn Johnson's 18.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

Short-handed without Ryan Pickett (hamstring, five snaps in the last four games), the unit got a break when Arizona had a mere 47 gradable snaps. Thus, usually overworked Johnny Jolly, who played 21 of 23 in the first half, should be fresh for the rematch after playing just seven of 24 in the second half. Meanwhile, B.J. Raji and Cullen Jenkins checked in with 35. Unlike Packers' defenses throughout the decade, Dom Capers and Mike Trgovac don't believe in granting D-line time to players just because they've got a uniform on. Jarius Wynn played 10 snaps, his third highest total of the season, and was driven out of his gap on an 8-yard run. Just up from the practice squad, Anthony Toribio was given only three snaps. Jolly was immovable. Jenkins and Raji were OK.

## **LINEBACKERS (4)**

After a few down games A.J. Hawk was back playing physical, decisive football. He slipped mauling RG Deuce Lutui and made a hard hit. He made a quick read on a WR screen and wrapped up Larry Fitzgerald for a 2-yard gain. He crushed Steve Breaston on a crossing route and again when he was held up near the sidelines. With Brandon Chillar (back) out, Hawk probably was helped playing every down again. Fill-in LT Jeremy Bridges had a surprisingly solid first half protecting against Clay Matthews. After that it was a massacre, with Matthews beating him for three knockdowns and a hurry. In all, Matthews had eight "pressures," including two on stunts against LG Reggie Wells and another when he ran right over the top of RB Beanie Wells. The Cardinals, who helped Bridges on just one dropback against Matthews, might have to re-think their protection plan. Brad Jones appeared to surprise RT Levi Brown with two first-half knockdowns, but Brown shut him down thereafter. Fitzgerald was able to score at the end when Desmond Bishop let him get over the top on the goal line.

## **SECONDARY (4 ½ )**

Charles Woodson not only frustrated but embarrassed the great Fitzgerald in their matchup before Woodson left with a sore shoulder late in the first half. Just like Detroit's Calvin Johnson on Thanksgiving, Fitzgerald probably didn't run his slant route full go, didn't get across the cornerback's face and watched Woodson jump all over it for an amazing TD. Atari Bigby has really sure hands, is breaking on balls with more confidence from the back half and knows what angles to take in the scheme. He's more of a hitter than a wrap tackler, but the Packers need a little of the intimidation factor. Tramon Williams kept pace, falling back from a rolled-up coverage and snaring his first pick in four games. Nick Collins KO'd Anquan Boldin (ankle-knee) with a big breakup. Nickel back Jarrett Bush, dime back Brandon Underwood and No. 5 cornerback Josh Bell are proving they'll stick their nose in there and hit people.

## **KICKERS (3)**

Mason Crosby hit from 26 yards (right hash mark) and averaged 70.7 yards and 3.64 seconds of hang time on six deep kickoffs. With one good and one bad punt, Jeremy Kapinos averaged 49.0 (gross), 47.0 (net) and 3.98 hang time.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

The kickoff return team is missing fewer blocks and the long-striding Nelson has taken advantage, including a season-best 54-yarder Sunday. Bell and Bishop were the standouts on the hard-charging coverage units. Wynn is becoming a punt-blocking threat by power-rushing the long-snapper, including Arizona's 238-pound Mike Leach.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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