

2009 Player Grades: Offense

*By Bob McGinn of the Journal Sentinel
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WIDE RECEIVERS (6)

Donald Driver: Turns 35 next month, but you wouldn't know it by his body or his durability sheet. Per-catch average of 15.2 yards was his best since 2002; he made two spectacular one-handed catches far downfield on takeoff routes. Hard to say why he dropped so many passes (11) or lost two fumbles. That isn't Donald Driver. The Packers just need to pay him his \$1 million roster due in mid-March and let him get the 507 yards he needs to break James Lofton's club record of 9,656. There's some good football left in him. **Grade: B-minus**

Greg Jennings: Stylish, refined route runner. Quick feet and fast hands. Matched 2008 big-play production with 20 catches for 20 yards or more, including 11 in the last six games when Driver had just two. Made big improvement after the catch (6.53 yards this season, 4.34 last season) and had the best drop rate (4.69%) on the team and of his career. Every now and then he needs to be prodded to stay on task. **Grade: B-plus**

James Jones: Bounced back from a terrible season and regained the No. 3 job. Benefits from coverage slanted toward Jennings and Driver. Much improved after the catch (6.0 from 2.9). Tends to drift mentally, which has led to some sloppy routes and way too many drops (20 in three years, including eight in 67 targeted throws this season). Built like a brick outhouse but isn't a physical runner or blocker. **Grade: C-minus**

Jordy Nelson: Missed three games with a knee injury and had to be content with No. 4 WR snaps. Probably a more dependable route-runner and catcher than Jones, but it's questionable whether either one will develop into a legitimate starter. Poorest after the catch (3.78) of the top five receivers. Did a respectable job in 11 games as the kickoff returner. **Grade: C**

Brett Swain: Out-dueled Ruvell Martin for the No. 5 job. Gone was his rookie timidity on special teams and route-running in traffic. Blew out his knee in Week 7; that's a tough injury for his position. **Grade: Incomplete**

Patrick Williams: Popped a hamstring in training camp before being brought back on the practice squad and then onto the roster in Week 14. Never played a snap. Size is his best asset. **Grade: Incomplete**

TIGHT ENDS (4)

Jermichael Finley: Took the league by storm from Week 10 on after getting back from a knee injury. The Packers' 1-2 record during his absence was indicative of just how much they missed him. Grew up by leaps and bounds in what would have been his fifth year of college. Just 22. Presents a matchup dilemma for every D-coordinator. Easily the best receiving TE in Green Bay since Keith Jackson. Averaged 40.3 snaps, with 40% spent out wide or in the slot. Hasn't had a penalty in two years, averaged 5.67 after the catch and had 835 receiving yards in 14 games. Started to take some pride in his blocking and became much more effective doing it. **Grade: B-plus**

Devin Frischknecht: Signed in mid-June to be a camp body and broke his leg in second exhibition game. Won't return. **Grade: Incomplete**

Spencer Havner: Much better No. 3 TE than Tory Humphrey, whose broken arm Aug. 6 led to Havner's position switch from ILB. Four of his five TDs (in merely nine receptions) came against good teams (Minnesota, Dallas, Arizona). Logged 221 snaps, including 21.3% at WR or in slot. Became a reliable blocker after semi-slow start. One of the top six core players on special teams. **Grade: C-minus**

Donald Lee: A steady starter in 2007-'08 but reverted to his inconsistent form of 2006. Dropped eight of 55 balls (14.6%), worst drop rate of career and on the team. Two were in the end zone. Started body-catching everything and offered next to nothing after the catch with average of 2.92, a far cry from 5.23 in '07. Finley's rise reduced him to the conventional TE location (65.8% of 746 snaps), and although he gives effort his body type isn't suitable for in-line blocking. Will be 30 by next season. Work ethic might warrant another chance. **Grade: D-plus**

OFFENSIVE LINE (10)

Allen Barbre: Has a year left on his contract and probably will be back in camp. Spent the entire off-season and all of training camp as the starting RT and was a disaster. Ranked second in "pressures" allowed with 26½, even though he was yanked after seven games. He is aggressive. He is athletic. But even after three seasons, he remains a rather crude pass blocker, both in terms of footwork, hand usage and feel. The game just seems too big for him. **Grade: F**

Chad Clifton: Had a typical Clifton year. Limited by injury, missed four starts. Led the team in penalties with nine, including five false-starts. Pass blocked fine (4½ sacks, 17 pressures). Responsible for nine "bad" runs, about par for the course. He'll be 34 in June. Look for him to return with a one-year contract. **Grade: C-plus**

Daryn Colledge: Didn't play with strength, athleticism or savvy. Allowed an astronomical 40½ pressures, 10 more than the previous leader (RG Will Whitticker, 2005) in the last 10 seasons. Not only that, but he was the runaway leader in bad runs with 18½. Four of his 7½ sacks allowed came at LT, where he was like a fish out of water. Falls off too many blocks at LB level. Just not a tough guy. His awful overtime holding penalty in the playoffs might have cost him a contract offer. **Grade: D-minus**

Evan Dietrich-Smith: Undrafted rookie from Idaho State. Played just a handful of snaps. Thick, tough and smart. Much better center than guard. Could have a future.

Grade: Incomplete

Breno Giacomini: Played one snap in two years. Deserving of more exposure than Barbre in the off-season just to see what he's got. Has the size, arm-span and temperament to be the prototypical RT. But until he starts bending better, improves his pass-protection technique and plays with some confidence, it's all a hope and a prayer.

Grade: Incomplete

T.J. Lang: Demonstrated the ability to perform at four positions. Now the coaches must determine which one is the best fit. Should be a better player than Colledge was. Seems to have the feet and length for RT but might not be special enough athletically to be the long-term answer at LT. Thinks well on his feet, has a professional air about him and wasn't intimidated by Jared Allen or DeMarcus Ware. **Grade: D-plus**

Josh Sitton: Took major strides in second season and is on the verge of being categorized as a solid starter. Brings "don't mess with me" mentality to work every day. Mauler with a lot of mass and OK feet. Improved as a pass blocker (18 pressures) but still can become much more dependable, as another late pick, Marco Rivera, once did.

Grade: B-minus

Jason Spitz: Played well in camp as the No. 1 center but then struggled in four starts (two center, two LG). Some of it was due to a herniated lumbar disc that bedeviled him for weeks and required surgery Nov. 11. Veteran of 47 starts at the three interior positions. Probably out of the mix at center given how well Scott Wells played but still could factor at LG with a clean bill of health, increased flexibility and new contract.

Grade: C-minus

Mark Tauscher: Came back from reconstructive knee surgery to bail out Barbre and the entire offense. Made 10 starts at RT and allowed 18½ pressures, which is comparable to his 23 in 13 starts last year. Valuable locker-room presence. After a decade, everyone can see his strengths and his weaknesses. He will be 33 next summer. Maybe he returns on another one-year deal. **Grade: C**

Scott Wells: Regained his job in Week 3 and probably played the best football of his career. Had excellent games against Minnesota's Pat Williams, Cleveland's Shaun Rogers and Dallas' Jay Ratliff, three of the top 10 NTs in the business. Scouts have always knocked him for having short arms and lacking bulk, but he usually grades out much better than he looks. Allowed 10½ pressures and 11½ bad runs. **Grade: B**

QUARTERBACKS (2)

Matt Flynn: Improved considerably in his second season. Threw with greater velocity and accuracy. Had fourth-quarter stints against Seattle and Arizona and was fairly impressive against Seahawks. At his best when protection breaks down.

Grade: Incomplete

Aaron Rodgers: Rated the ninth-best QB in the NFL by scouts entering playoffs. Just turned 26 and should get only better. Likes to wing the ball around but has a plan for every pass and almost never throws into traffic. Highly intelligent, in complete command of the offense. Respected by teammates for his ability and courage. About once a week he beats perfect coverage by running for a first down. Surprisingly athletic. Posted second-best passer rating (103.2) in team history. Responsible for 16½, or 30%, of his 55 sacks. Needs to release the ball in more timely fashion on a consistent basis. Passed for 423 yards in his postseason debut but had too many critical errors and overthrows, failing to meet the standard for a winning playoff quarterback. **Grade: B-plus**

RUNNING BACKS (7)

Ryan Grant: Third-year starter probably had his best season. Downhill collision runner with size, grit and pretty good power. Ran more decisively later in the season and didn't stumble as often getting over trash. Highly focused; no penalties in three years. Once regarded as something of a fumbler, Grant fumbled just once in 320 touches this season. Durable. Broke out of a big-play slump with six 20-plus runs in last eight games. Lacks natural hands and feel as a receiver and is an average-to-below pass blocker. **Grade: B**

Ahman Green: Turns 33 next month and probably ought to retire. Has lost much of his explosiveness. Probably was embarrassed by two-year stint for Texans in which he seldom was on the field due to injury; now can go out with his head held higher. Played 84 snaps in nine games, missed two games with a groin injury and gained 183 total yards. **Grade: D**

Korey Hall: Probably the best receiver and perimeter blocker of the three FBs. Improved his overall blocking. Steady, never spectacular on special teams. Still hasn't made it through an entire season, missing 12 games due to injury. **Grade: C-minus**

Brandon Jackson: Made an amazing transformation in blitz pickup from his rookie year of 2007 to now. Needed to carve out a niche as a reliable pass blocker because he's so pedestrian with the ball in his hands. Once described by a scout as a "meat and potatoes" runner. For their third-down back the Packers need someone with more speed. **Grade: C-minus**

Quinn Johnson: Traditional isolation-type blocking FB in an offense that doesn't do much of that. Likes to punish defenders but will overextend and partially miss trying to hammer people. His hard hands are and probably will remain an issue in the passing game. Despite playing nine games, he didn't have a single special-teams tackle. **Grade: D**

John Kuhn: Considered the starting FB. Played 241 snaps compared with Johnson's 136 and Hall's 115. OK blocker, OK receiver, OK runner. Helped lose the Tampa Bay game when his blown assignment as personal protector led to a blocked punt and TD. He never returned to that role. **Grade: D-plus**

DeShawn Wynn: Beat out rookie Tyrell Sutton, who had 130 yards from scrimmage and 302 on returns for Carolina. Lasted four games, playing on third downs for an injured Jackson, before going down with a season-ending knee injury. He'll get one more chance. **Grade: Incomplete**