

Rating the Packers: Week 1 at Eagles

Packers win despite struggles

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Green Bay — This just in: The Green Bay Packers can win a football game when Aaron Rodgers isn't in top form.

They beat the Philadelphia Eagles, 27-20, on the road Sunday when Rodgers compiled a passer rating of 73.1. His low in 17 previous victories had been 87.8 against Baltimore in December.

In a rock 'em, sock 'em affair marked by season-ending injuries to three players and significant injuries to a handful of others, the Packers persevered. Credit mainly should go to Clay Matthews and the special teams.

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

RECEIVERS (3 ½)

This group has grown accustomed to Rodgers' passes being right on them. Thus, there might have been a level of frustration, but it won't last long. The Eagles made certain that Jermichael Finley wouldn't beat them. MLB Stewart Bradley and WLB Ernie Sims jammed him near the line, a tactic Finley better get used to. Part of being a Pro Bowl player is defeating defenses geared to stop you. Finley played 59 of 70 snaps (84.3%), but only 18 were as a conventional TE. He lined up as the only split receiver to a side 19 times. In contrast, none of the WRs approached his playing time: Greg Jennings 43, Donald Driver 42, James Jones 30 and Jordy Nelson 27. In running situations, the combination often was Finley, Nelson and TE Tom Crabtree, who occasionally operated as a FB, stayed low and dug his man out of the hole on old-fashioned iso blocks. Nelson didn't get head around fast enough, leading to an end-zone drop on a slant. Rodgers would have had a third interception (and possible pick-6), but Driver had the presence of mind to strip the ball from CB Asante Samuel, who gambled and cut in front of a run-to-pass toss.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

It seemed as though Mark Tauscher and Chad Clifton were surprised by the Eagles' quickness up front. Crowd noise undoubtedly was a factor why they were late off the ball, but that's no excuse. Tauscher's first half in protection (1 ½ sacks, 1 ½ knockdowns and 2 ½ hurries) might have been the poorest of his career. His kick was off, his balance was shaky and he seemed almost out of control. Tauscher needs to go back to his tried-and-true fundamentals this week. He had major problems against Juqua Parker and Antwan Barnes. Clifton wasn't quite as bad (2 ½ pressures) as Tauscher despite facing a better opponent (Trent Cole). For his sack, Cole knocked Clifton's hands down and beat him around the corner in 3.2 seconds, which prevented Daryn Colledge from getting back to help him. Colledge was able to fan back several times because Scott Wells had his man locked down. In the run game, Wells played so well that Colledge could leave the double team to pick off a LB. All the starters had at least one "bad" run. Josh Sitton, described by Eagles coach Andy Reid on Monday as the Packers' top O-lineman, was solid.

QUARTERBACKS (2)

Of Rodgers' 10 incompletions, two were low, two were overthrown, two were just plain wild and one was behind Jennings. Of his two interceptions, one was a seam route forced to Finley among three defenders and the other apparently slipped from his hand in the drizzly weather. Those are simply awful numbers for Rodgers, given the demonstrated accuracy of his arm and the average nature of the Eagles' pass defense. Hard to say what was going on. Brett Favre's passer ratings in Philly were 61.3, 58.9, 82.4, 32.4, 46.4 and 44.2. The Eagles hit people and take calculated risks on defense, and their crowd roars. Rodgers did hold the ball on a few of the five knockdowns and five hurries, but not on the three sacks.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

Ryan Grant departed in mid-second quarter with an ankle injury after playing 18 snaps and rushing for 45 yards in eight carries. His replacement, Brandon Jackson, was OK. Jackson's body-shaping work has made him a stronger and thicker back, and it showed when he broke seven tackles. Several times, however, his vision wasn't real good. He hesitated before making the first cut and obviously isn't as sharp as Grant reading the defensive scheme on inside and outside zone plays. Many of Jackson's yards came after Omar Gaither, an awful run defender, replaced injured MLB Bradley. Starting FB Korey Hall (20 snaps) delivered a series of wicked cut blocks that sent defenders pin-wheeling. When Jackson needed a break, John Kuhn played six of his 17 snaps in one-back sets. Mike McCarthy is high on Kuhn. He played in a one-back system at Shippensburg and has instincts as a ball carrier.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

With Mike Neal (side) inactive and Justin Harrell (torn ACL) gone after two snaps, it was all B.J. Raji (59 snaps, seven more than his 2009 high), Ryan Pickett (36) and Cullen Jenkins (33). On the Eagles' first play from scrimmage, Jenkins hustled downfield and decked LG Todd Herremans from behind. Herremans didn't look happy. On the next play, Herremans shot forward on a pass and cut Jenkins so hard that he flew up and fractured his left hand upon landing. Stuff happens. Thirteen snaps later, Jenkins was back playing in what must have been throbbing pain with a huge cast. Still, Jenkins led the unit in pressures with 2 ½ , whereas Raji had two and Pickett had none. Raji slowed down at the end but ran a nice twist with Jenkins for a sack and beat Herremans for a quick flush. Michael Vick (11-103) became the first quarterback to reach 100 yards rushing against the Packers in the regular season since Chicago's Bobby Douglass (19-100) did it in November 1973 (Donovan McNabb did it in the 2003 playoffs).

LINEBACKERS (4 ½)

Matthews was dominating. He has great size and strength. He played every bit to his 4.57-second 40-yard dash time. And he demonstrated a quick-twitch burst and explosion that had the Eagles groping to keep him under control. Despite 37% double-teaming on passes, Matthews totaled 5 ½ pressures, including a pair of sacks. He knocked Kevin Kolb from the game with a concussion after a long chase that took 6 seconds. Poor TE Brent Celek got manhandled by Matthews at the point. He did drop an interception, and if he had pursued immediately, LeSean McCoy's screen pass of 27 yards might have been 15. On the other side, Brad Jones offered little as a rusher and got outflanked several times. Because the Packers lined up 100% in nickel, A.J. Hawk was relegated to special teams and watching Nick Barnett and Brandon Chillar from scrimmage. Barnett's recklessness paid off on his 11 blitzes. He was attacking and physical. Because he's small, there were times he got blown up. He made some plays and gave up some plays.

SECONDARY (3 ½)

This was one of Tramon Williams' finest games. He broke up a quick slant, smothered a deep sideline route, closed quickly and made a hustling recovery of FB Eldra Buckley's fumble. McCarthy wasn't sure if Charles Woodson would play 48 hours after wrecking the big toe on his left foot. Not only did Woodson play, he was solid against slot WR Jason Avant and made the strip of Buckley. Dom Capers' plan didn't offer extra deep help for Sam Shields, who got turned and burned on a double-post route by Jeremy Maclin on a 17-yard TD. Otherwise, he was competitive. Rookie SS Morgan Burnett was more bystander than performer in his debut. He needs to start mixing it up more.

KICKERS (4 ½)

Mason Crosby drilled FGs of 49 and a club-record 56 yards right down the middle. Crosby has become highly skilled at a change-up style of kickoffs. In this game, he had two mis-hits, and one went out of bounds. His five-boot averages were 64.4 yards and 3.74 seconds hang time. Tim Masthay's four-punt averages were 41.5 (gross), 38 (net) and 3.82 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4 ½)

Nelson really wants to return kickoffs, and it showed. He made David Akers' pay for mediocre kickoffs (66.6, 3.83) with a 31.2 average. Derrick Martin and Desmond Bishop were among his best blockers. Williams was sound and slippery on punt returns. Jarrett Bush forced two fair catches with hustle and aggressiveness. And the coverage units played fast and smart to keep the lid on Jackson and Ellis Hobbs.

OVERALL (4)

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