

Rating the Packers: Week 4 vs Lions

Packers good enough to survive

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Green Bay — Maybe the Detroit Lions are a whole lot better than we thought they were. Or, just maybe, the Green Bay Packers are a whole lot worse.

Those judgments should be left for another day. For now, let's just say that the Packers survived Sunday at Lambeau Field by the hair on their chinny-chin-chin.

Here is a rating of the Packers' in their 28-26 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3)

The Lions used a variety of combination coverages designed to keep Jermichael Finley from running roughshod. Playing 91% of the snaps, Finley took FS Louis Delmas away from Donald Driver (31 snaps) on a 48-yard bomb and made it easier for Driver to beat CB Jonathan Wade on an improvised corner route for a 29-yard TD. On Finley's 13-yard TD, he burst past veteran Julian Peterson so fast that the linebacker had to turn his body and provide Finley the narrow window that he needed. Finley got a raw deal on the holding penalty against him that was declined. He blocked pretty well, but not as well as Tom Crabtree did in 14 snaps. On the final play from scrimmage, Crabtree rode Peterson 5 yards off the ball. Greg Jennings (32) ran a great route against Wade on his 17-yard TD. Later, Jennings permitted diminutive nickel back Alphonso Smith to take a home-run ball right away from him and didn't react quickly enough on a back-shoulder fade that was intercepted. When the Packers ran the ball late, Jordy Nelson finished with 17 snaps compared to James Jones' 14. Donald Lee's clutch reception of 15 yards on a bootleg against LB Zack Follett was his longest since Week 9 last year.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4½)

After three average to poor performances, the unit excelled against the Lions' prized front four. There were no penalties, one sack (against Daryn Colledge, who left prematurely to fan back outside when a stunt was developing inside), no knockdowns and six hurries. The top dogs were Chad Clifton, Scott Wells and Josh Sitton. No one comes more relentlessly than RE Kyle Vanden Bosch, but Clifton took away his extra-wide rushes. Clifton even got after it in the run game, worked up nicely to the LB level a few times and actually got some movement at the point of attack. Wells got beat back-door twice on running plays, once by RT Corey Williams and once by LT Ndamukong Suh. Otherwise, he continued to perform like one of the top centers in the NFC. Sitton went nose-to-nose with Suh and acquitted himself very well. He was partially responsible for two "bad" runs but had another outstanding day in protection. Mark Tauscher got his butt down, anchored better, got his hands inside and held LE Cliff Avril to two hurries and zip against the run. Colledge had problems with Williams' bull rushes and was adequate overall.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

One of the reasons why Clifton had the upper hand on Vanden Bosch was Aaron Rodgers' clever use of cadence. Vanden Bosch, maybe the smartest D-lineman in the NFL, was penalized three times for jumping offsides (one was nullified). Lesser quarterbacks figure they have enough to worry about and don't even try to draw people offsides. Rodgers is becoming as good as if not better with hard counts than Brett Favre. Given how exceptional his protection was, this could have been a field day for Rodgers against a feeble secondary. Although Rodgers did have three TDs, including a brilliant pass to Finley, he made a poor throw on his first interception and on another back-shoulder interception by CB Chris Houston that was nullified. The red-zone sack fell on Rodgers because he had an open receiver staring him straight in the face.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

Just three played: Brandon Jackson (26 snaps), Korey Hall (20) and John Kuhn (16). An often overlooked factor in the assessment of the post-Ryan Grant group is pass protection. When the Lions did blitz, their people just got attacked by Edgar Bennett's charges. On a second-half stunt, Vanden Bosch was surging hard on a twist, and Hall, a tough guy, delected him. Starting again over Quinn Johnson, Hall cut some linebackers, took others high and made a strong statement to keep the job. Before the final clock-killing drive led by Kuhn's old-fashioned line bucks, Jackson had 24 snaps to seven for Kuhn. Jackson picked up 14 on a lead draw, squirted away for a gain of 11 and had a 12-yard run wiped out. Kuhn wears his heart on his sleeve. After getting tripped up at the end, he shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Oh, shucks."

DEFENSIVE LINE (3½)

For the first time this season, Cullen Jenkins was the club's best rusher. He bulled and then trashed RG Stephen Peterman for a sack in 2.8 seconds, just missed another sack with an inside charge against Peterman, registered two hurries against hulking RT Gosder Cherilus and hopped over RB Maurice Morris for another pressure. The debut of Mike Neal came at the ideal time because the defense was on the field for 82 snaps. Neal played 26 snaps, including 11 at RE out of the 14 times the Packers used the base 3-4. Neal, who is so much better than fellow rookie C.J. Wilson, poked a fumble from Jahvid Best's grasp and had two pressures. His presence enabled Jenkins to play just 50% (41 snaps), keeping him fresher for rush downs. B.J. Raji's time was 80.5%, which is still too high but more reasonable than it had been.

LINEBACKERS (1)

Clay Matthews played the vast majority if not all of the snaps but couldn't solve LT Jeff Backus, who is off to a tremendous start in his 10th season. Matthews' only pressure was a 3.1-second sack on a spin move inside against Backus, but QB Shaun Hill was flushed first by blitzing Jarrett Bush. Matthews ran into two blockers on 36% of his rushes, but many of those came on Dom Capers' three-man rushes when LG Rob Sims had nothing better to do than peel off to assist Backus. But when Backus was one-on-one against Matthews, he had the feet to take away his arc rush, the strength to hold on against power and the balance to control spin. For some reason, Matthews played almost the entire game at ROLB. At LOLB, Frank Zombo played five series, Brady Poppinga played four and Brad Jones played two. Zombo had the only hurry but didn't set the edge like the other two. A.J. Hawk kept finding the ball carrier, delivered a couple of hard hits and caught an interception when Best slipped. But not only does Hawk demonstrate athletic limitations in coverage, he has made basically the same mystifying mistake two weeks in a row. Last week, Hawk blitzed past his man, TE Greg Olsen, who then leaked out for 16. This week, Hawk lost contact with TE Brandon Pettigrew on a controlled rush and the gain was 17 before Hawk ran him down. Nick Barnett blitzed 16 times and had merely one pressure.

SECONDARY (2½)

The best player for the second week in a row was Tramon Williams. He got up in Bryant Johnson's face and dominated him. Right now, it's hard to complete a pass on him. Charles Woodson matched against Calvin Johnson outside and passed him to Bush when he was in the slot. Woodson missed three tackles, failed to dig out the long fade to Calvin Johnson and wasn't sharp in coverage. On the other hand, he made a tough interception, alertly scrambled to his feet before anyone else, made Best miss the tackle and went 48 yards for a TD. Then with the outcome at hand, he made three difficult plays in a row. Replacing injured Sam Shields at nickel back, Bush was beat by Scheffler on a 25-yard flat-and-up route but also threw his body around on blitzes and covered pretty well. Nick Collins isn't playing as physical as he once did. Morgan Burnett actually made two aggressive hits on the first series before suffering a season-ending knee injury. He opened his hips prematurely on the skinny post by Calvin Johnson and gave up the 23-yard TD.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby's five kickoffs had averages of 66.6 yards and 4.04 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay had one bad punt and two good ones. His average hang time was 4.02.

SPECIAL TEAMS (½)

Shoddy blocking by Andrew Quarless and Desmond Bishop, among others, enabled tacklers to swoop down and crunch Nelson. Still, his two lost fumbles were horrendous. Coach Shawn Slocum used a stationary, balanced KO coverage unit for the first time after showing cluster sets in the first three weeks. The coverage was so-so. After the FG block in Chicago, Slocum switched the positions of Sitton and Bryan Bulaga, moving Sitton back to his '09 post of RG and shifting Bulaga to RT.

OVERALL (3)

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