

# Rating the Packers: Week 5 at Redskins

## Defensive Front A Bright Spot

*Posted: Oct. 12, 2010*

**Green Bay** — Maybe the Green Bay Packers' 16-13 overtime loss to the Washington Redskins will be remembered more as the day their defensive line came of age than the day when injuries and frustration continued to mount.

Monday in Ashburn, Va., Redskins coach Mike Shanahan directed high praise toward the Packers' front.

"The defensive line we played against is probably the best in the NFL," said Shanahan. "If they're not, I don't want to play the team that has better personnel than they do."

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

### **RECEIVERS (1)**

Donald Driver had been playing fine until Sunday when he dropped four fairly routine passes. In August, Driver freely admitted that his drop total of 11 in 2009 was too high. He hadn't dropped a pass in the first four games. Driver just wasn't looking the ball into his hands. His eyes seemed to be averted, but a secondary with ferocious SS LaRon Landry can be a factor, too. James Jones dropped two and Jordy Nelson dropped one for a total of seven, an utter embarrassment for a unit that is supposed to rank with the NFL's elite. All the WRs made plays when coordinator Jim Haslett played CBs DeAngelo Hall and Carlos Rogers off. Haslett blitzed on just 8.7% of passes in the first half compared with 23% in the second half, when Hall-Rogers weren't giving as much cushion. Hard to say what's going on with Greg Jennings, but once again he wasn't a real factor. On Donald Lee's fumble, he caught the ball against his chest and didn't have it fully secured when Landry whacked him in the back. If he had plucked the ball, he could have tucked it in immediately. Andrew Quarless and Tom Crabtree functioned well for Lee (chest) and Jermichael Finley (knee), both of whom left injured in the first quarter. Quarless ran an impressive slant for 21 yards against Hall from a split-receiver location. He had a bad holding penalty on a backside run block against Brian Orakpo. No matter the type of block, Crabtree is a hard man to shake.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (3½)**

Bryan Bulaga's experience at RT was next to none but he did an adequate job filling in for Mark Tauscher (shoulder). Probably 80% of his pass sets came against Orakpo, the top dog. Bulaga kick-stepped efficiently and didn't get beat outside all day. On the inside, Orakpo slipped past him for two hurries and LB Lorenzo Alexander beat him inside for a half sack. Bulaga did have two false-start penalties. Probably the No. 1 performer was Josh Sitton, who other than a missed cut block against DE Phillip Daniels and a late flush by LB Chris Wilson played very well. After a string of terrific performances, Scott Wells had just an average game. The half-sack Wells yielded to LB London Fletcher on a blown recognition was his first sack of any kind since Week 7 last season. Chad Clifton shut down LB Andre Carter in a solid showing. However, he got too high on Aaron Rodgers' failed QB sneak and then gave up a bad upfield sack to Orakpo in just 2.5 seconds in overtime. Daryn Colledge was responsible for 2½ of the five "bad" runs but was solid in protection. It would have been fascinating to see how the Packers' interior would have fared against Albert Haynesworth.

## **QUARTERBACKS (1)**

Overtime hasn't been kind to Rodgers. In January, his gaffes led directly to a playoff defeat. On Sunday, he tried to force a post route to Jennings on the second play of OT and was lucky when Hall dropped the ball. On the next series, Rodgers threw a bad ball to Jennings that was behind him and intercepted by Landry. Yes, Rodgers had DT Jeremy Jarmon in his face, but if he hadn't drifted several steps to the right a direct throwing lane would have been available. Two of the four sacks and another knockdown were on Rodgers, either for running into them or holding the ball too long. He wasn't decisive or rhythmic. He putzed around in the pocket instead of just making the decision to scramble and go. It seemed that about one of every four of his passes were bad balls. After a fast start, it was mostly downhill from the mid-second quarter on. Rodgers let his receivers down just as they let him down.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

The first-down run game was exceptional. It was a wonderful run by Brandon Jackson (35 snaps) for 71 yards. He found the tiny A-gap crease, hit it fast enough to split the linebackers, made FS Kareem Moore miss, stiff-armed Hall and was off to the races. John Kuhn's limitations were evident on a second-and-goal inside carry at the 1 for no gain. Wilson, the unblocked man who was lined up wide of Crabtree, had enough time to flatten down and strike Kuhn. If Kuhn had greater acceleration to the hole Wilson couldn't have got to him and it would have been a TD.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4½)**

If Cullen Jenkins wasn't playing with a club on his broken left hand he would have had two or three sacks. He just couldn't grab Donovan McNabb. As it was, Jenkins (55 snaps) led the defense with 4½ pressures in what was his finest pass-rushing game of the season. B.J. Raji (70) played his best overall game as a Packer with two tackles for loss and 1½ pressures. And Mike Neal, who played 52 snaps after Ryan Pickett (ankle) departed on the second play, had two pressures. Guards Kory Lichtensteiger and Artis Hicks were embarrassed, and C Casey Rabach was overmatched as well. Early on, Neal was penetrating too much and the Redskins took advantage on some runs. When he began to flatten his charge in unison with Raji's movements, the run by Ryan Torain, a rugged straight-liner, went away.

## **LINEBACKERS (3½)**

The second start in Desmond Bishop's four-year career went about as expected. He's a heavy hitter who can slip blocks or stack the point. He's able to time his blitzes well and jack up blocking backs, evidenced by his four pressures in 16 sorties Sunday. On the other hand, he's still not there yet against the pass. When Bishop decided to cut inside rather than outside of Ryan Torain on a fourth-quarter blitz, McNabb had room to move around him and buy time to hit Anthony Armstrong for the game-changing 48-yard TD. And on a 23-yard dig route to Armstrong, Bishop jumped the tight end in the short zone, leaving the more important deep middle mostly unprotected. Bishop replaced Nick Barnett (wrist) on the weak inside, and A.J. Hawk, who was OK, played almost every snap on the strong inside. Clay Matthews had 3½ pressures before aggravating his chronic left hamstring problem late in the third quarter. Teams ought to forget about trying to bootleg against Matthews. He's too alert and fast for that stuff. He also did some good things in coverage. As Matthews' fill-ins, Brady Poppinga was more effective than Frank Zombo. Poppinga has his share of shortcomings, but he does have a straight-line burst and won't ever be shortchanged when it comes to taking a lick. ROLB Brad Jones, who had 1½ pressures, was up and down setting the edge on running plays.

## **SECONDARY (2½)**

The No. 1 CB so far has been Tramon Williams. He's becoming a hard man to beat. On the other side, Charles Woodson is becoming the antithesis of a fluid cover corner. Rather than backpedal smoothly, he is stopping, brushing up with receivers and forever hunting for interceptions. The fact Woodson is getting so much action means opponents think they can beat him with good fundamental routes or draw a penalty flag. He had three more penalties. Pat Lee failed to impress playing the slot in nickel. He didn't show much burst and didn't get home in 12 blitzes. So far, at least, Nick Collins looks to have lost his stinger. He just hasn't been the same all-out player, sore knee or not. Charlie Perth's debut will be remembered for the two bombs totaling 100 yards that he allowed, but he'll learn from those mistakes. At the same time, he proved to be more physical than Morgan Burnett. He even had the courage to meet Torain head-on on a screen.

## **KICKERS (2½)**

Mason Crosby had the chance to win the game in regulation but bounced a 53-yard try off the left upright two-thirds of the way up. He hit that ball well as he did his makes from 52 and 36. His 48-yard push right wasn't kicked well. His three kickoffs averaged 66.7 yards and 4.08 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay's six-punt average hang of 4.36 was by far his best of the year. However, his one line-drive punt set up the Redskins' TD.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (2)**

Without Korey Hall's three tackles, there's no telling what diminutive Brandon Banks might have done on returns. Williams got straight up field on his 52-yard punt return. Neither Nelson nor Pat Lee seemed willing to sell out returning kickoffs.

## **OVERALL (2½)**

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### **Player of the week: NT B.J. Raji**

Raji was a dominating force against Casey Rabach, a veteran center trying to get by mostly with finesse. He played a career-high 70 snaps and didn't appear to tire despite unseasonably warm weather. This was his finest game in Green Bay.

### **Play of the week**

Early second quarter. Fourth and goal at the 1. The Packers, leading 7-0, call a timeout. It's an I formation, with Korey Hall and John Kuhn behind Aaron Rodgers, Jordy Nelson wide left and Andrew Quarless tight right. Tom Crabtree shifts from wing right to wing left. The Redskins are in an eight-man line. Rodgers fakes a handoff to Kuhn off left guard and heads right on a naked reverse. LB Chris Wilson, who is unaccounted for, rushes immediately straight at Rodgers. Quarless is running a corner route against Lorenzo Alexander, a 275-pound linebacker-lineman who is playing over him. Alexander reacts well to the route but isn't in position to turn back for the ball. Wilson is in Rodgers' face so quickly that he has to throw the ball prematurely. The pass is on target but slightly underthrown. It bounces off the back of Alexander's helmet just as Quarless' hands are beginning to grab it. The route by Quarless is fine. Given the tight face-guarding type coverage, Quarless could have stopped and either vaulted for the ball or, as a last resort, try to initiate contact in hopes of gaining a pass-interference penalty. Mike McCarthy regrets not having called the naked on third down instead of a failed quarterback sneak. Denver coach Mike Shanahan calls it the most important play of the game.

## **Stat of the week**

Charles Woodson draws three penalties, giving him seven accepted penalties in the first five games. Woodson's five-game penalty totals in his previous seasons were two in 2006, three in '07, two in '08 and three in '09. At this rate, Woodson would finish with 22. Counting playoffs, his yearly totals were five in 2006, nine in '07, three in '08 and eight in '09. His partner at cornerback, Al Harris, had a career-high 10 penalties in 2004. This year, Woodson has four pass-interference penalties (for 51 yards), one holding, one illegal hands to the face and one illegal contact.

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