

Rating the Packers: Week 6 vs Dolphins

Packers' personnel shortage is hurting

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Green Bay — Based on how the Green Bay Packers and Miami Dolphins were configured Sunday, the Packers performed reasonably well even to take the visitors into overtime.

That's just the facts of life in the National Football League, when one team is missing eight starters due to injury and the other team is missing two.

Will there be better times ahead for the Packers? That depends on their injury report and the capability of the offense to develop into a force without Jermichael Finley and Ryan Grant.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 23-20 loss to Miami, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3)

James Jones was good in 2007, bad in '08, good in '09 and bad so far in '10. Early on, he dropped a free-play streak route 35 yards downfield. Then Jones ran a lazy third-and-15 slant route that CB Jason Allen jumped and nearly intercepted. He must get his body in front of Allen's, even forcing a collision, to prevent that ball from being picked. Finally, he took a poor outside release against Allen, ended up too close to the boundary and gave Aaron Rodgers almost no place to throw. When Rodgers' forced pass came up short, Jones just let Allen pick it off without so much as laying a glove on him. At that point, do anything, even take a penalty, to get that ball out. Basically benched after that, Jones' snap count of 21 paled to Jordy Nelson's 47. Nelson and Greg Jennings (58 snaps) both ran some excellent sideline routes in which they drove defenders off. Jennings schooled talented CB Vontae Davis for six catches and 133 yards, including an exquisite out-and-up route for an 86-yard TD. Donald Driver (48 snaps) was limited by a thigh injury. Another great catch was made by TE Tom Crabtree (16), who beat multi-talented ILB Karlos Dansby on a seam route and then ran over FS Chris Clemons for 33 yards. His in-line blocking was much better than his blocking from the backfield. Andrew Quarless (24) is going to be used much the same as Finley was.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

This was the third game in a row in which Chad Clifton played well. OLB Cameron Wake started out rushing over him but couldn't get anywhere. In fact, Clifton didn't yield a pressure or "bad" run all day. His date with Minnesota's Jared Allen will decide if he's really back. On the other side, rookie Bryan Bulaga wasn't all that bad, finishing with one sack, 1½ knockdowns, one penalty, no hurries and no "bad" runs. Wake got under Bulaga's pads and bull-rushed him two or three times down the stretch, but the damage never got out of hand. Josh Sitton was clean in protection and pretty good blocking for the run. For the second week in a row Scott Wells missed an inside linebacker blitzing to his left and gave up a sack. Daryn Colledge did some good work getting up to the LB level but had two "bad" runs and couldn't get ILB Channing Crowder blocked on a promising screen.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

Rodgers has been responsible for 5½ sacks in the last three games after not taking any in the first three. On the first of his two full sacks Sunday, Rodgers took a seven-step drop and then bolted the pocket in 2.8 seconds. DE Randy Starks, who was stymied by Clifton, stepped inside and recorded a gift sack. On the second, Rodgers gave the pass play merely 2.0 seconds to develop even though the pocket was fairly firm. OLB Koa Misi made the sack 1.3 seconds later. Miami coach Tony Sparano said if Rodgers had escaped Misi it might have been a 30-yard run. For Rodgers, pocket management is about judgment, rhythm and patience. Plus, by bolting, he's taking unnecessary hits. Watching a workmanlike QB like Chad Henne makes you realize how well Rodgers can spin a ball. But he's in a rut and his team needs him out of it now.

RUNNING BACKS (3½)

Given Brandon Jackson's much improved running and superb pass protection, it's no absolute that Seattle's Marshawn Lynch is the better back. Jackson has stopped the hunting and pecking that was giving him a terrible reputation last month. In recent weeks, he's pressing the hole, finding creases, getting low behind his pads and squirting forward north and south. On Sunday, he showed nice bounce on a toss, followed his blocks alertly on a 19-yard screen and made some tacklers miss in the flat. Mike McCarthy probably will be running him more. Korey Hall allowed a partial sack trying to cut Wake in what was an awful matchup. Want to know about Hall's ability to cut as a lead blocker? Just ask Dansby.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1½)

B.J. Raji played 78 of 81 snaps, including a season-high 32 at NT in the base 3-4. Run or pass, he was double-teamed all day. Raji had his share of mediocre plays. LG Richie Incognito went belly-to-belly with him and didn't give up a pressure. But one thing about Raji, he doesn't stay blocked for long. He is quick to shed, has shown amazing endurance and is highly athletic for his size. Cullen Jenkins played 70 snaps, and his only pressure came after a flush by OLB Brady Poppinga. Jenkins was unable to solve LT Jake Long, RT Vernon Carey or anyone inside. Forced by necessity to play the run way too many downs with a broken hand, Jenkins got washed at times. Rookie LE C.J. Wilson (30) drew a brutal matchup for his starting debut in the 340-pound Carey. Initially, Wilson was on the ground too much. Later he warmed to the occasion and didn't seem so overwhelmed. By the fourth quarter, the coaches went with RE Jarius Wynn (17) and put Jenkins at LE over Carey.

LINEBACKERS (2)

Not having Clay Matthews (hamstring) was a crippling blow. Coordinator Dom Capers ended up blitzing on 29% of passes, but only one time with more than five. Based on level of play, the ranking at OLB was Brad Jones, Poppinga, Frank Zombo and Rob Francois. Jones smelled out a reverse, played across the line at times and set the edge more effectively this week. His rush was non-existent. Poppinga's tackling power against the tandem of Ronnie Brown-Ricky Williams was sorely missed after he left with knee damage late in the second quarter. Zombo just has to become more sudden in his play. Francois looked like someone making his NFL debut. Inside, Desmond Bishop and A.J. Hawk played almost every snap. Bishop made a great read on a screen, then deployed along the sideline to break up a third-and-2 pass to WR Davone Bess. He did lose his man, TE Anthony Fasano, on the 22-yard throwback screen for a TD. Otherwise, Bishop made his physical presence felt. Hawk settled in after over-pursuing on Brown's 12-yard run to start the game. He missed just one tackle. His tackles seldom are crushing but he always sticks his nose in there. He's just a little stiff and doesn't have much range.

SECONDARY (3)

Nick Collins probably played as well as he has this season. Yes, he's still looking for his first interception after dropping three in Weeks 3-4, but if he keeps breaking on the ball as well as he did Sunday the picks should come just by the law of averages. With Brandon Marshall the marked man, the Packers ended up having Tramon Williams cover him more than Charles Woodson or nickel back Sam Shields. After getting tossed aside by Marshall without a flag on an early 13-yard completion, Williams didn't press the big man the rest of the game. Williams' revenge came in the form of a terrific interception when he broke on the ball with purpose and speed. It's hard to say if injuries are a factor in Woodson's uneven play. He couldn't keep his feet on a 23-yard catch by Marshall in man coverage, was on the deck again on a 19-yard fade to Brian Hartline, couldn't keep up with Marshall on a 19-yard sideline route and was late reacting on a 2-yard TD to Bess. He also drew two penalties. Woodson's steely presence still galvanizes his teammates, but they need much better coverage from him. Returning from a two-week calf injury, Shields wasn't good enough. He took a bad angle on Fasano's TD and was way out of position on a crucial 8-yard pass to Bess in OT.

KICKERS (2½)

Tim Masthay had drop punts downed at the 9 and the 12. He had punts with hang times of 3.47 and 3.09 seconds. And, with the Packers backed up in overtime, he managed a 37-yard net with 4.22 hang. The Packers need better. Mason Crosby hit from the 46 and 26 despite considerable wind and averaged 67.4 and 4.02 on five kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

Quinn Johnson beat LB Bobby Carpenter with a swim move and partially blocked a punt. Jordy Nelson was removed after one KO and replaced by Pat Lee, who at least showed some courage on a couple returns. There were too many loose defenders running free inside on KO returns. Jarrett Bush, Hall and Lee led OK coverage.

OVERALL (3)

Player of the week: WR Greg Jennings

Vontae Davis, one of the up-and-coming cornerbacks in the NFL, lost a unanimous decision to Greg Jennings. All six of Jennings' receptions, which totaled 133 yards, came with Davis in coverage. It was third highest yardage game in Jennings' career.

Play of the week

Late first quarter. First and 10 at the GB 14. Miami leads, 7-3. From a weak-I formation, Aaron Rodgers fakes a handoff to Brandon Jackson off left tackle, bellies deep in the pocket and sets up at the 7. The Dolphins counter with a four-man rush, although elite rusher Cameron Wake is dropping into coverage. It's essentially a two-man route. On the left, Donald Driver runs an over route against CB Jason Allen. FS Chris Clemons is near the line, leaving SS Yeremiah Bell in the middle of the field. Bell decides to come up and help on Driver, who is surrounded by four defenders when the pass to Greg Jennings is released. On the right side, CB Vontae Davis is playing seven yards off Jennings in man-to-man coverage. Jennings runs hard at Davis to the 28, gears down and takes a step or two as if he's going outside. Exercising extreme patience, Jennings then cut back inside at the 31 and takes off straight downfield, leaving Davis two or three steps in arrears. Rodgers' pin-point pass, released after 4.1 seconds, travels from the 7 to the Miami 45. Jennings doesn't even have to break stride, catching it in his fingers. With nobody else in the back end of the field, Jennings veers to the left making it more difficult for Davis to gain ground. The cornerback is still three or four yards behind Jennings when he finishes off the 86-yard TD.

Stat of the week

Miami's Brandon Marshall catches 10 passes for 127 yards. It is the most receiving yards by an opposing player in Dom Capers' 23 games as the Packers' defensive coordinator. His predecessor, Bob Sanders, coached 50 games in three seasons and allowed eight receivers to gain at least 127 yards. 2006: Detroit's Roy Williams, 138; 2007: Carolina's Drew Carter, 132; Dallas' Terrell Owens, 156; the Giants' Plaxico Burress, 151; 2008: Detroit's Calvin Johnson, 129; Atlanta's Roddy White, 132; Houston's Kevin Walter, 146; Jacksonville's Dennis Northcutt, 127.

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