

Rating the Packers: Week 8 at Jets

Defense, kicking game beat Jets

Posted: Nov 2, 2010

Green Bay — The Vikings almost beat the Jets three weeks ago at New Meadowlands Stadium. Two weeks ago, the lowly Broncos led most of the way in Denver before the Jets prevailed, 24-20.

As vulnerable as the Jets were with Mark Sanchez at quarterback, few expected the injury-riddled Packers to beat them at home coming off a bye. But in many respects, the Packers beat the Jets at their own game. They were the more physical team, especially on defense.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 9-0 victory over the Jets, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses::

RECEIVERS (1 ½)

Other than the opening sequences of the third quarter, coach Rex Ryan didn't match CB Darrelle Revis against Greg Jennings. Instead, he played a lot of zone. It's difficult to match Jennings, partially because on 27 of his 61 snaps he was inside with at least one other WR lined up outside him. He had six catches for the third game in a row after having had just 14 in the first five games. He overmatched nickel back Drew Coleman, and when the Jets foolishly didn't put anybody in his face Aaron Rodgers got him the ball in a hurry. Jordy Nelson was next with 49 of 64 snaps, James Jones had 42 and Brett Swain had a career-high nine. Donald Driver (16) aggravated a thigh injury two minutes into the second quarter and didn't return. There were four drops: Driver on an out, Jennings on a hitch, Jones on a 40-yard go route behind Antonio Cromartie and Andrew Quarless on a 15-yard seam route on third and 10. The blocking by both the WRs and TEs wasn't good enough. On back-to-back plays in an abominable four-minute situation, OLB Calvin Pace blew up Quarless and then Donald Lee on two carries for minus-1.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

No tackle ever just skated through his rookie season without turbulence. Bryan Bulaga encountered some Sunday. He started the game poorly, struggling to match the strength and savvy of old pro DE Shaun Ellis. He had problems frontside, backside and in protection. The Jets do a ton of things, and Bulaga appeared to be a step slow all day. Slot CB Dwight Lowery had a free-run sack of Rodgers when Bulaga didn't pick him up. He was late off the ball and let ILB Bart Scott fly across his face to slam John Kuhn for minus-2. Chad Clifton's streak of good games ended at four. He couldn't even get aging Jason Taylor blocked on a failed third-and-1, gave up 1½ pressures and drew a critical false-start penalty on first down at the N.Y. 26 in the fourth quarter. Given the crowd noise, Scott Wells relied on guards Josh Sitton and Daryn Colledge to identify rushers at the line, and the communication generally was good. But Wells had too many shaky plays (parts of two "bad" runs and 3½ hurries), and Colledge played a prominent role in three "bad" runs. Sitton was good, not great. When Colledge had a shoe problem in the second quarter, Jason Spitz replaced him for four snaps.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

If Rodgers had been forced to play in his first two seasons, it's entirely possible he would have looked like Sanchez does now. By no means was Rodgers sharp throwing the ball or on top of his game, but almost everything about his game is so much better than Sanchez's. Ryan ended up rushing five or more on 35.9% of passes, six or more on merely 5.1%. The Jets' four-man rushes were tame, and Rodgers had some good looks downfield. His receivers didn't help him much, but he didn't help himself with some flutterballs and off-line throws. In recent weeks, Rodgers has been getting so much weight out on his front foot that he almost seems out of balance. His second delay-of-game penalty of 2010 came at the Jets 40 in the third quarter and helped kill a drive.

RUNNING BACKS (2½)

Brandon Jackson (38 snaps) has had his share of injuries. What running back hasn't? But the more Jackson performs as featured back, the more you appreciate his toughness. He takes these hellacious shots three or four times every week, but the man never flinches. There isn't a self-promoting bone in his body, either. He adroitly checked down twice for 17 yards and turned the corner behind Korey Hall's crunching cut blocks a few times. He also ran with his eyes down now and again. John Kuhn (23) is a one-cut, lower-the-head hammer. But when Taylor beat Clifton badly inside, Kuhn showed the ability to change direction and still make 4 yards.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Instead of asking the front three to stay square and eat up blocks, Dom Capers effectively employed a slanting, gap-oriented scheme that probably confused the Jets' fine O-line. At times, it appeared as if B.J. Raji (62 of 72 snaps) and Cullen Jenkins (36) were on roller skates when they actually were moving into predetermined lanes. What little pressure the Packers had inside came against LG Matt Slauson. Jenkins didn't get anywhere against RG Brandon Moore, who packs a heavy punch. He was limited by a strained calf. Raji drew a holding penalty on all-pro C Nick Mangold but otherwise didn't make much happen against him. Newcomer Howard Green played 34 snaps in all, including 25 at LE and four at RE in the base 3-4. It's not easy holding ground and staying off the deck against Moore and RT Damien Woody, but Green held his own. Rookie C.J. Wilson (35) worked mostly at RE in base and performed surprisingly well, too. Deficiencies against brute force limited time for Jarius Wynn (six) and Michael Montgomery (three).

LINEBACKERS (4½)

From top to bottom, this bunch came to play. Desmond Bishop always did pack a wallop. The more he plays, the more disciplined he is becoming on run fits. Capers has become more at ease keeping him on the field in passing downs. On two occasions he was matched up outside and broke up passes to the gifted pair of Jerricho Cotchery and Dustin Keller. Brandon Chillar's playing time has diminished as a result of Bishop's improved matchup coverage, but Chillar did play well. He showed body snap whipping LaDainian Tomlinson in 3.2 seconds for an edge sack, and then shed Moore on a screen. A.J. Hawk is growing into the mantle of leadership that calling the defensive signals brought to Nick Barnett. Besides sorting out the Jets' unbalanced line and "wildcat" formation, Hawk made great plays deflecting a pass on a deep zone drop, drawing a holding call on RB Shonn Greene with an inspired blitz and slipping a block to chop down Tomlinson on a promising Power-O in the fourth quarter. Cotchery did beat Hawk for a 49-yard completion. Rough-and-tumble Frank Zombo was solid as an oak setting the edge and keeping the ball carriers hemmed in. Clay Matthews had a sensational spin sack against Woody in 2.6 seconds but didn't get much else done as a rusher facing 27% double-teams. Erik Walden showed some chase at RE on a handful of passing downs.

SECONDARY (4½)

As usual, Tramon Williams was outstanding. He gave up a few completions this week, but it took a great WR like Santonio Holmes to do it, and his coverage was tight. The slant-and-go for 32 yards to Braylon Edwards wasn't Williams' fault. He forced a fumble, recovered a fumble and ripped a slant away from Cotchery for an interception. Williams stayed on the right and Charles Woodson stayed left in base. In nickel, Woodson manned the slot, Williams played left because that's Sanchez's throwing-hand side and Sam Shields played right. Woodson stole an interception from Keller and was physical as all get-out. So was Charlie Peprah. One time he took down Moore and FB Tony Richardson so the unblocked Bishop could tackle Tomlinson. He was out of position on a 40-yard bomb to Keller but didn't get down and returned to make two exceptional breakups near the end. Speedy Brad Smith couldn't believe how fast Shields closed on him to turn a developing reverse into a gain of merely 3. However, Shields got lucky when Holmes dropped a crosser against him.

KICKERS (5)

Tim Masthay was off-the-charts good. Punting eight times, he placed five inside the 20 (18, 14, 13, 10, 5) and didn't give up a return yard. His averages were 44.0 yards (gross), 41.5 (net) and 4.54 seconds (hang time). His touchback was 1 yard away from being downed at the 1. Mason Crosby hit from the 20, 41 and 40. He missed from the 45 on the right hash, at the same end where swirling winds helped cause Nick Folk to miss from 37. His three-kickoff averages were 68.3 and 4.06.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Anthony Smith stopped a run from punt formation with alertness and speed. Pat Lee, before he sprained his ankle, and Jarrett Bush were effective punt gunners. The return game was uneventful. The only bad play was Brad Smith's 47-yard KO return.

OVERALL (4)

Player of the week: P Tim Masthay

Masthay hadn't made anyone forget Jeremy Kapinos in the first six games. After a solid outing against Minnesota, he uncorked one of the finest games any Packers punter has ever had. He won the critical field-position battle almost by himself. The last punter to win was Jon Ryan in Week 16 of 2007.

Play of the week

Mid-first quarter. No score. Fourth and 18 at the Jets 20. P Steve Weatherford has run for first downs four times in his five-year career so the Packers talked about a fake all week. They were in a seven-man box, giving returner Tramon Williams at least a fighting chance with a double-team on the right against gunner Marquice Cole. From left to right, the Packers' front was Brett Swain, Matt Wilhelm, Tom Crabtree, Erik Walden, Donald Lee and Brandon Chillar. Standing up right behind the line was Anthony Smith in the role of "mack safety." After a thigh-high snap from Tanner Purdum, the athletic Weatherford set out from the 6. Swain was occupied with a blocker, and on the play side gunner Dwight Lowery ran Sam Shields out of the area where Weatherford was headed. Smith was at the 15 when he was the first to spot Weatherford faking. With Jets special-teams coach Mike Westhoff gesturing for Weatherford to hurry, Smith dashed across, dove and hit him in the lower legs at the 34. Weatherford kept his footing and went down at the 39 and officials signaled first down. In the coaches' booth, the assistant coaches informed Mike McCarthy to throw the challenge flag. He did, and it was clear on replay that Weatherford's left foot was out of bounds at the 37. When referee Jeff Triplette sided with the Packers, the gain was shortened to 17 yards and it was Green Bay's ball at the NY 36. Mason Crosby kicked a 20-yard field goal, providing all the points that the Packers needed.

Stat of the week

This was the 21st shutout recorded by the Packers since 1950. Fourteen of their shutouts took place in home games and only seven in road games. Before Sunday, the Packers had posted these six road shutouts in the last 60 years: December 1960, 13-0 at Kezar Stadium in San Francisco; November 1962, 49-0 at Franklin Field in Philadelphia; October 1966, 17-0 at Wrigley Field in Chicago; December 1973, 21-0 at Soldier Field in Chicago; October 1977, 13-0 at Tampa Stadium in Tampa; October 1991, 27-0 at Tampa Stadium in Tampa.

From the Nov 2, 2010, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel