

Rating the Packers: Week 9 vs Cowboys

Packers head into bye on a real big high

Posted: Nov 9, 2010

Green Bay — The Green Bay Packers were a unified, lethal force Sunday night in their 45-7 slaughter of the Dallas Cowboys at Lambeau Field.

Taken literally, the Cowboys didn't quit, but an examination of their desultory performance showed many players taking the easy way out. That is, turning down tackles, not finishing blocks, forgetting assignments and not always playing to the whistle.

So the Packers are 6-3 and riding a wave of prosperity heading into their open weekend. And the Cowboys (1-7) will play out their ruined season under an interim coach after Wade Phillips was fired Monday afternoon.

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

RECEIVERS (4)

Operating against primarily man coverage with either one or both safeties deep, the WRs were open all the time. The Cowboys' secondary didn't break up a pass. Mike Jenkins was beaten by Greg Jennings on a 33-yard up and by James Jones on a 22-yard sideline route, Terence Newman (bad ribs) was beaten by Jones on a double move for 31 and Orlando Scandrick was beaten by Jordy Nelson on a back-shoulder fade for 27. With Donald Driver (thigh) sidelined, Jennings lined up inside another split receiver on 33 of his 59 snaps and caught all seven of his targeted throws. This was the fifth time in six weeks that Nelson (66) played more than Jones (44). The hail of third-down conversions began when Nelson used his big frame to get inside Jenkins on a third-and-2 slant for 3. Nelson and Jones each dropped an inside breaking route, and Jones fumbled after a 13-yard reception on the first series only to watch Nelson recover. Minus Andrew Quarless (shoulder), Tom Crabtree (37) and Donald Lee (28) uneventfully split time.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

In the first half, when it was still competitive, DeMarcus Ware lined up 24 times over Chad Clifton and 12 over Bryan Bulaga. Clifton pancaked Ware on the first run, setting the tone. If one wanted to nit-pick, you could give Ware two hurries against Clifton. Really, Ware wasn't a factor as Clifton totally took away Ware's patented inside surges. Because three- and four-man routes were successful, the Packers were able to keep in extra blockers and assist the line. Josh Sitton turned in another of his power-packed showings. He was just about flawless in protection, and in the run game he was punching DTs down to Scott Wells and getting out on LBs even more efficiently than normal. Some slower centers require more double-team help than the Packers had to give Wells against quick NT Jay Ratliff. Bulaga kept his man (Ware, OLB Anthony Spencer) from pressuring the passer. In the run game, Bulaga packs initial thrust but falls off blocks and sometimes overextends. He just doesn't seem sure how to play yet. Daryn Colledge is doing his primary job - protecting the passer - rather well. As a run blocker, he just isn't a down-and-dirty guy. He was on the ground way too much, had a miss at the point and on a back-side cut, and wasn't a physical presence.

QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)

Afforded excellent protection and easy-to-read coverages, Aaron Rodgers apart Phillips' blitzes (40% five or more, 12.5% six or more) with pin-point accuracy. Rodgers was in complete command of the pocket. Even when he sensed Clifton giving ground to Ware on bull rushes, Rodgers trusted the protection, kept his eyes downfield and worked through his progression. His accuracy deep has been surprisingly hit-or-miss in Weeks 1-8 but he dropped in two beauties. He also hurt the Cowboys three times on runs: 5 yards when a screen failed to develop, 27 when the Cowboys were in man coverage underneath and had their backs to him, and 12 when the pocket collapsed. The only sack was on him for a bad read. He also went the wrong way on a bungled running play (minus-2), maybe the first time that's happened in his NFL career.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

The combined rushing (26-92) and receiving (6-38) for Brandon Jackson (39 snaps) and John Kuhn (26) was the equivalent of a strong day for Ryan Grant, which is exactly what Mike McCarthy wants. Jackson froze ILB Sean Lee on an inside screen for a 9-yard TD and froze Newman on a 14-yard burst. When the 260-pound Spencer smashed into him from the side at the 2, the 216-pound Jackson moved the pile into the end zone. On check-downs, he tucks the ball away and gets what he can in a hurry. Watch Jackson before the snap. When Crabtree was alongside him, he'd be pointing out whom to block. He's one smart player. There was a night-and-day difference between the secure pass blocking of Jackson and Kuhn and the uncaring pickups of Felix Jones and Tashard Choice. Having played just six snaps in the last five games, Quinn Johnson was just so-so in a season-high 27 snaps leading against ILB Bradie James, one of the few Cowboy defenders that came to play.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Coordinator Dom Capers rushed five or more on 42.9% of passes, a season-high. There were 15 pressures by defensive backs, tying the season-high against Washington. When DBs are rushing, the D-line's job is to occupy blockers and clear out areas. That's one reason why the entire unit had just one sack (C.J. Wilson) and one pressure (Howard Green). Ryan Pickett did make two exceptional plays before leaving after seven snaps with another ankle injury. B.J. Raji (31) was good early against the run. Despite his massive number of snaps, Raji has held his weight at 336. Cullen Jenkins (31) was quiet.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Raji split a double team on the Cowboys' second failed third and 1 and was all set to swallow up Marion Barber for lost yardage when Clay Matthews beat him to the ball carrier after slashing inside TE Jason Witten. Matthews does a lot of that because he's so sudden off the ball, gets into high gear so quickly and lives to finish. By his standards, Matthews didn't have an enormous rush day (one sack, one knockdown, one hurry, 1 ½ deflections). Yet, because of incredible hustle and instinct, he was in the right place at the right time when A.J. Hawk batted a pass right to him for a pick-6. He just doesn't stay blocked for long. Playing almost every snap, Hawk has missed just one tackle in three weeks. When Choice got in at the end, Desmond Bishop embarrassed him for three pressures. Witten beat Bishop's shoddy coverage for a 30-yard reception.

SECONDARY (4½)

When Charles Woodson has to play LC in the base 3-4, especially from an off position, he hasn't been anything special. Miles Austin ran right by him for what would have been a 61-yard TD if Jon Kitna hadn't overthrown it by a mile. But the Packers played only six snaps of base, enabling Woodson to sneak around from the slot. From there, he's all-world. On the first third-and-1, Capers made a prescient call sending Woodson screaming in. When the Cowboys didn't even account for Woodson, he tackled Barber from behind for no gain. Besides being such a gutsy, face-up tackler, Woodson made the utmost of his five pressures off the edge with a sack in 2.4 seconds, a pressure and a partially batted ball. Tramon Williams made a wonderful read on an end-zone inside route by Roy Williams and was in position for a magnificent pick, but dropped the ball. The Cowboys went after nickel back Sam Shields with Dez Bryant. Shields missed two tackles, appeared to be peeking in the backfield instead of watching Bryant on a 2-yard TD, and didn't get much of a re-route against Bryant on a 41-yard go route that probably was more the fault of Nick Collins for lingering too long inside. But Shields' one-handed, wrong-handed pick was fantastic. Atari Bigby's 26-play debut was satisfactory. Charlie Peprah did nothing to lose his job.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby had adequate trajectory and a 54-yard attempt on track before it was blocked. He had connected from 60 at that north end in pre-game. His seven kickoffs averaged 65.7 yards and 3.98 seconds of hang time. Both of Tim Masthay's punts were Aussie-style and effective. They averaged 45.0 (gross), 43.0 (net) and 4.13 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

These units hadn't forced a fumble, let alone caused a turnover, all season. Then Jarrett Bush played through Choice's feeble block to knock the ball from KR Bryan McCann into the arms of Collins, who went 26 for a TD. Bush also managed to make a dicey recovery of a fumble by Bryant on a punt. Brandon Underwood was another impressive core player. Shields remarkably outran the pursuit angles for 49 on his first NFL KO return. The FG block was the result of sub-par blocking by T.J. Lang and Clifton. Dallas had KO returns of 29, 33, 34 and 28 yards. At times, Williams is too focused on returning punts the distance at the expense of solid 12-yard returns.

OVERALL (4 ½)

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

In the realm of special teams, Jarrett Bush hit a grand slam. Late in the first half, Bush latched on to KR Bryan McCann and hung on until he finally coughed up the ball, which Nick Collins returned for a touchdown. In the fourth quarter, Bush evaded two blockers, tight-roped the sideline and made a tumbling recovery of a fumbled punt by Dez Bryant.

PLAY OF THE WEEK

Mid-second quarter. Third and 1 at the Dallas 48. Packers lead, 14-0. The Cowboys are in an unbalanced line to the left, with RT Marc Colombo switching sides and lining up between TE Martellus Bennett and LT Doug Free. On the right side, there's only guard Leonard Davis alongside TE Jason Witten. Actually, the Packers are in an improper defense, their nickel, to confront a jumbo set with two tight ends, three running backs and no wide receivers. Before the snap, RB Felix Jones shifts from the left slot to a location directly behind Marion Barber, giving the Cowboys a power-I backfield. The play is a run by Barber in the A gap where Ryan Pickett is located. The Cowboys get a devastating double-team block on Pickett by C Andre Gurode and Davis, pancaking him onto his back and out of the game with an ankle injury. As good as that block is, the Cowboys fail just as miserably on two other blocks. Opposed by Clay Matthews, Witten's job is to close off the B gap. However, when Matthews slams into that gap, Witten is late off the ball, actually steps up the field instead of to his left and never even lays a glove on Matthews. On the back side, B.J. Raji splits a double-team block by Free and LG Kyle Kosier and is headed right for Barber, who is taking the handoff from Jon Kitna. But before Raji can make the play Matthews beats him to it. He jars Barber with a frontal form tackle, lifting him up and onto his side for a loss of 3 yards. The Cowboys punt, and 3 minutes later find themselves trailing, 28-0.

STAT OF THE WEEK

The Cowboys' first and only first down by rushing comes with 12 ½ minutes remaining on Felix Jones' 8-yard run. The last time the Packers held an opponent to just one rushing first down was Week 6 of 2004 against Detroit. In the last 20 years, the Packers have allowed one rushing first down in 15 games, counting playoffs. In the Packers' history, they've prevented an opponent from registering a rushing first down four times. Those games were against Chicago in December 1994, against Detroit in December 1972, in Philadelphia in November 1962 and against the New York Giants in October 1933 at Borchert Field in Milwaukee, the first game played by the team in the city and the only game played at that venue.

From the Nov 9, 2010, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel