

Rating the Packers: Week 11 at Vikings

Packers have another dominant performance

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Green Bay — What looked like two of the most difficult games on the Packers' schedule turned out to be about their two easiest.

The dispirited Cowboys and Vikings, in the midst of horrendous seasons, proved to be little more than patsies in the final act for Wade Phillips and Brad Childress. Both coaches were cashiered one day after their teams were clobbered by Green Bay.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 31-3 victory over the Vikings, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4 ½)

Greg Jennings is one cool customer. He runs just about every route at the same speed, which is the ideal. CB Asher Allen isn't nearly as fast Jennings, so even in bump-and-run he had to tread cautiously. When Jennings broke off his route at 13 yards and came back to 11, Allen remained on his hip. Jennings then burst past Allen, and when FS Madiou Williams made the mistake of not taking away the sideline and charging at him, Jennings had a two-way go, made one cut and was gone. With Donald Driver (41 snaps) nursing a thigh injury, Jennings (55) knows he is the man and is on fire. His ball skills and confidence are to the point where he can keep his hands down on deep balls and not tip the cornerback that the ball is coming. James Jones (41) ran a lazy slant on third-and-4 against Chris Cook and had it broken up. A little later, Jones abused Cook on the right side for 39 yards on a go route and then for a 3-yard TD on a fade. Tom Crabtree (22) really sustained well as a run blocker. Donald Lee (18) blocked pretty well. Battling a sore shoulder, Andrew Quarless (10) lined up wide and wasn't asked to block at all.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

DT Kevin Williams, a Pro Bowl pick from 2006-'09, didn't have a tackle or pressure splitting time against Josh Sitton and Daryn Colledge. There's no question that Colledge was very good in protection. He is playing within himself, making good sets and almost never whiffing. Colledge didn't have any terrible plays blocking for the run, either, but as usual he was slow to the LB level and didn't look very athletic trying to swat moving targets. Sitton hitches up his pants and goes to work each Sunday. He'll get beat now and then, but he has the bulk to cover people up and the reactions to get half a body on his man and ride him past the QB. Aging NT Pat Williams made amends in his rematch against Scott Wells. After watching Wells control Williams in Week 7, the Packers might have asked him to man-block one too many times, especially given the noise level. The excess penetration against Wells hurt the ground game. Dome or no dome, Chad Clifton was an island again against Jared Allen. He wasn't as good this time (three pressures), but his performance was a winner. Bryan Bulaga didn't get his butt down and allowed a power-rush sack to Ray Edwards, but his overall protection actually was better in this meeting. LT T.J. Lang had a rough time in the last two series.

QUARTERBACKS (5)

After the entire offense got off to a poor start, Aaron Rodgers ignited the team with his arm and feet. On the comeback to Jennings, lesser QBs would never trust their velocity to deliver that ball against press coverage. But Rodgers is able to drive the ball across the field with pinpoint accuracy. On the 47-yard TD to Jennings against Cook, he took a shot in the back from rookie Everson Griffen on a spin move against Clifton but still threw a strike. Rodgers appeared comfortable against coordinator Leslie Frazier's 29% blitzing. He stuck to his progressions, took check-downs and didn't force things. He helped crush the Vikings' will by breaking containment for two or three big plays.

RUNNING BACKS (3½)

Brandon Jackson (34 snaps) broke five tackles, had 66 total yards and played another fundamentally sound game. He had chances for some longer gains but wasn't able to make the safety miss. As a receiver, Jackson catches the ball in his hands, tucks it in fast, gets north-south and squirts ahead. As a pass blocker, he bends his knees, squares up and almost always gets his hands inside. Unlike Adrian Peterson, whose half-hearted, feeble pass blocking twice allowed LBs to crush Brett Favre, Jackson almost never hurts his team. John Kuhn (11 at RB, eight at FB) stopped the blitz before it could even threaten Rodgers. In a change of roles, Dimitri Nance (14) assumed the short-yardage job from Kuhn. On his first third-and-1, Nance found MLB E.J. Henderson unblocked in the hole but smashed through him for the conversion. Nance looks like an NFL back with thick thighs, some shiftiness and adequate burst. For now, at least, he's getting the call over James Starks, a rookie whom the Packers remain extremely high on. Replacing injured Korey Hall, Quinn Johnson (24) wasn't bad.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Against the Jets, the unit slanted to confuse a top O-line. The idea this week was to stay square, eat up blocks and let the LBs wrestle down Peterson. In reality, the Packers aren't much of a 3-4 team because they're seldom in base. There were just seven snaps of it Sunday, which included five of big Howard Green's six snaps. B.J. Raji (47 snaps) played very well against the Vikings' interior, which became even more suspect when RG Anthony Herrera blew out his knee in the first quarter on a pull against Frank Zombo. Raji had a pair of first-quarter knockdowns, and Cullen Jenkins had 1½. Coordinator Dom Capers pressured more in the first half (64.7%) on passes than he has all season, which in turn minimized one-on-one rush chances for the D-linemen. Ryan Pickett played more snaps (21) on his tender ankle than he has since Week 4 and was just OK.

LINEBACKERS (4)

With the big boys keeping him clean, A.J. Hawk attacked the line of scrimmage more. He got beat on a 10-yard bootleg pass to FB Naufahu Tahi but never let Peterson exploit his gap. Peterson's long run (25 yards) was the result of Clay Matthews being out of his gap and becoming easy prey for RT Phil Loadholt. Matthews managed a team-high 3½ pressures and contributed in subtle ways, too. Eleven times on pressures Matthews was assigned the thankless task of steaming inside and mixing it up with the 300-pounders so someone like Charles Woodson (13 blitzes) could come free from the slot. He does it willingly, and his work in coverage generally has been more than adequate. Desmond Bishop might be a step slow on the watch but you wouldn't know it by the depth of his drop when he broke up a 15-yard in route to WR Greg Camarillo. It was one of his best plays of the season. Frank Zombo has had his share of problems in space (see two missed tackles). However, Zombo almost always gets his hands inside blockers and sets a mean edge.

SECONDARY (4)

Charles Woodson and Tramon Williams forced game-changing turnovers. Woodson shot out of nowhere with a right-hand tomahawk chop to strip rookie RB Toby Gerhart, who was trying to get two arms on the ball but didn't quite have time. Then Williams showed his stealthy side, waiting patiently for Favre to fire a second-window slant to Percy Harvin that he swiped at the GB 18. Earlier, he blew up a slant to Greg Lewis with great timing and a jarring hit. After future foes see Sam Shields peeking in the backfield twice for big plays, they're going to get after him with bootlegs, play-action and double moves. He completely left his man (Sidney Rice) on a 20-yard bootleg that could have been a longer gain. There were six missed tackles, including three by safeties. Nick Collins flashed excellent speed and timing on three rushes.

KICKERS (4)

Pledged to contain Harvin, Mason Crosby popped up three kickoffs, hit two deep (66.0, 3.94 hang time) and mis-hit another that turned into an effective line drive. Tim Masthay's effort to speed up his get-off times paid dividends twice when rushers broke in quickly and he still got the ball off. He demonstrated good control (two inside the 20) and hang time (three fair catches). His five-punt averages were 39.2 (gross), 38.2 (net) and 4.07 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Atari Bigby's diving tackle probably saved a 97-yard TD by Harvin on the opening KO. Not only did Shields debut as the starting KO returner, Shawn Slocum tried a reverse to him on the opening punt return. It didn't go anywhere, but it was a good idea. Jarrett Bush's extra effort off the edge resulted in a holding penalty on TE Jim Kleinsasser and wiped out a 51-yard FG by Ryan Longwell.

OVERALL (4½)

PLAYER OF THE WEEK: QB Aaron Rodgers

The Vikings were the ones who swept the Packers last year but Brett Favre also swept Aaron Rodgers, outplaying him in both games. This time around, the Packers swept the Vikings and Rodgers outplayed Favre twice. Rodgers has erased the stigma of 0-2 against Favre. It's a critical step in his development.

PLAY OF THE WEEK

Opening kickoff. Just before the play, the Packers break from a cluster near the middle of the field and, from left to right, line up with Brett Swain, Anthony Smith, Brandon Chillar, Atari Bigby, Nick Collins, Mason Crosby, Pat Lee, Quinn Johnson, Erik Walden, Matt Wilhelm and Jarrett Bush. Bigby and Collins are the designated safeties, meaning they hang several yards behind their eight teammates looking to prevent a break-out return. Collins veers hard to his right when the ball is kicked, in effect aligning one safety on each side. Crosby's 67-yard boot hangs for 4.08 seconds and is fielded at the 3 by speedster Percy Harvin. Crosby places the ball even with the numbers on the left side of the Vikings' return formation. Harvin races straight ahead to about the 20, trying to draw the defense to him. He succeeds. When Harvin cuts right, two players – Smith and Chillar – are too far inside and lose their leverage. At this point, Bigby is waiting on the Vikings' left hashmark. The Vikings' blockers can account for everyone except Bigby. As Harvin slices across the field, Bigby dives and clips his legs. Harvin takes another step or two before falling to the ground at the 27 for a 24-yard return. The Packers have no one on the right side of the field. Smith might have a chance but LB Heath Farwell is in position to block him. In all probability, it will be a 97-yard touchdown unless Bigby trips Harvin up. As Bigby briefly dances a jig, Harvin slams the ball down in disgust. It turns out to be the best chance the Vikings have for a TD all day.

STAT OF THE WEEK

The Packers' 53-yard touchdown drive at the end of the first half is their first in that situation since the Baltimore game in Week 12 last season. In the first nine games, their end-of-half production included five non-chances, one field goal, one field-goal missed and two interceptions. Thus, they now have 10 points. Counting playoffs, the Packers' end-of-half point totals under coach Mike McCarthy were 25 in 2009, 26 in '08 and '07, and 16 in '06. Green Bay scored one TD in 2006, two in '07 and '08, and one in '09.

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