

Rating the Packers: Week 14 at Lions

Dismal day in Detroit

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Green Bay — It all caught up to the Green Bay Packers Sunday at Ford Field.

The Detroit Lions had the more creative coaching, especially on offense. They were the more physical team, the more inspired team and the more resourceful team.

Green Bay has been short-handed for months. The lowly Lions were short-handed, too. It's always about a play here and there, but those plays stem from making do and having pride in one's performance. The Packers displayed little of that.

Here is a rating of the Packers in the 7-3 loss, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (1/2)

Of the Lions' four CBs, one could be categorized as a mediocre starter. The other two were veteran retreads and the fourth a rookie FA playing in his first game. The WRs not only didn't dominate, they produced merely 12 catches for 132 yards. Greg Jennings should have had 73 and a TD in one fell swoop but he found a way to drop a bomb behind SS Amari Spivey that turned into Aaron Rodgers' first interception in six games. The second-worst play was the fumble by Andrew Quarless at the Lions 35 to start the game. Because Quarless caught the ball against his chest, he wasn't able to tuck it away as cleanly as he would have snatching it away from his body. In that situation, he lacked confidence in his hands. At least Quarless (36 snaps) came back to run north-south with abandon on a 20-yard bootleg. Tom Crabtree (15) used poor technique giving up a 3.0-second sack to DE Andre Fluellen off a full play-action fake and then failed to get impressive backup DE Lawrence Jackson blocked on two runs. Donald Lee (nine) remains a non-factor. Based on body language, Donald Driver looked disgusted with Matt Flynn for throwing him some wayward balls. It's the kid's first real game. Support him. Don't show him up.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1/2)

Chad Clifton played as poorly against backup DE Turk McBride as he did effectively in Week 4 against starter Kyle Vanden Bosch (neck). He gave up 1 1/2 sacks, 1 1/2 knockdowns and was penalized twice (a holding call against McBride was nullified). Clifton looked just awful if not disinterested when DT Sammie Hill pulverized him inside on the third-and-1 that Matt Flynn turned the wrong way. On both sides of center, the group did a lousy job trying to pick up simple line twists. For one of the few times, Josh Sitton met his physical match and then some in Ndamukong Suh, who beat him for a sack and a partial knockdown. Let's call their 2010 series a 1-1 draw. When Daryn Colledge (knee) exited on the second play, Jason Spitz was overpowered by DT Corey Williams and then was benched at halftime for T.J. Lang. Spitz lacked balance, awareness and power. Lang anchored better than Spitz. However, on the final series, the only two runs went nowhere because of Lang. Bryan Bulaga was adequate in the run game but allowed 3 1/2 pressures. Probably the best of the bunch was Scott Wells. Coordinator Gunther Cunningham rushed five on just 11% of passes and never rushed six or more. With his front four kicking butt and taking names, he didn't have to blitz.

QUARTERBACKS (1)

Rodgers' seven-series stint, as futile as it was, might have turned out differently if Jennings had caught the long one. Then again, Rodgers had James Jones open behind Chris Houston for a 71-yard TD but missed him with a too-flat ball. Rodgers exited with a concussion on the second of his two scrambles, both of which he didn't slide. The suspicion here is that once Rodgers saw Drew Stanton careening through the Packers' secondary on designed runs he figured that he'd show people he was every bit the runner and athlete. Rodgers' recklessness might have cost his team another close game. Flynn made what appeared to be a pre-determined read on the goal-line and it cost him the killer interception by MLB DeAndre Levy. Obviously, there's no excuse for turning the wrong way on a running play. He also threw too many errant balls. But let's not be too harsh. Flynn didn't bat an eye against the Lions' menacing front. He took his shots, produced 11 first downs to Rodgers' two and fell just short.

RUNNING BACKS (1)

For the first time, Mike McCarthy tried to play three RBs: Brandon Jackson (31 snaps), James Starks (16) and Dimitri Nance (nine). John Kuhn also played 10 (five at FB) and Quinn Johnson had 13. Jackson is what he is: dependably ordinary. On Starks' first carry, he put his head down and rammed straight-ahead for 2 on a lead draw. Later, he ran into the back of Crabtree for minus-1, then slipped on a promising outside zone. McCarthy is confident enough now in Nance's command that he played him as the lone back in shotgun on two passing plays late in the fourth quarter. Nance finally got the ball on a screen pass and ran hard for 12.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1/2)

Most of the game was played with two 340-pounders, Ryan Pickett (50 snaps) and B.J. Raji (60), smack dab in the middle of a nickel defense. Raji ran into possibly the best guard he has faced in Rob Sims and had a long day with no pressures and about five running plays he'd like to have over. Dom Capers had the unit slanting as much as he has in nickel all season. Pickett was accountable for his gap and made nine tackles in one of his finest games. C.J. Wilson (11) blew his zone drop on the lone TD but made a good play in short yardage. Jarius Wynn (seven) had two decent bull rushes. Howard Green (16) was invisible. All in all, the group really misses the explosiveness of Cullen Jenkins, Mike Neal and Johnny Jolly.

LINEBACKERS (2)

The Lions basically were able to gain 4 to 6 yards every time coordinator Scott Linehan called a run. Probably the biggest reason those runs didn't rupture for longer gains was A.J. Hawk. Linehan presented a host of unscouted plays using Stanton and diminutive Stefan Logan carrying the mail. Hawk has grown in his role as Capers' surrogate commander of the defense. He kept his composure, didn't start overrunning things and made some good, hard tackles. RT Corey Hilliard made the first start of his four-year career and shut out Clay Matthews even though he had no help against him 73% of the time. Matthews' 4.9-second sack was of the garbage variety when Stanton panicked and slipped into his grasp. Sometimes Frank Zombo smells out reverses, sometimes he gets fooled. Zombo's value against the run was never more apparent than after he left with a sprained knee early in the fourth quarter. That's when the Lions ran effectively at Erik Walden, who was late reacting and did a lot of catching. When Zombo is engaged at the point, he has almost an Aaron Kampman-like ability to reach out with one arm and get in on the tackle. Desmond Bishop's speed limitation against perimeter runs was evident Sunday and in Atlanta.

SECONDARY (4)

Calvin Johnson is as physically gifted as any WR in the game. Yet, he couldn't do much of anything against Tramon Williams. Stanton essentially preferred to neglect his No. 1 weapon if the alternative was risking an interception by Williams. Johnson dropped a sideline route against Williams, but his other four targeted throws against him fell incomplete. Williams high-pointed Stanton's ill-advised wobbler in the end zone for an interception. On another bomb, Williams almost ran Johnson's route for him and might have intercepted if the big man hadn't grabbed him. Williams matched on Johnson in nickel, but on the seven snaps when Capers played 3-4 the CBs stayed on their side. It was on one of those seven plays that Linehan got what he wanted and Johnson ran past Charles Woodson in man coverage for 44 yards. It was a rough day for Woodson, who missed three tackles and got physically abused and run over twice by FB Jerome Felton on lead blocks. Nick Collins continues to show timing and striking ability as a blitzier. With Collins staying deep, Charlie Peprah mixed it up in the box and had a pick.

KICKERS (4)

Tim Masthay had a banner day in a dome, banging eight punts for averages of 50.5 yards (gross), 43.4 (net) and 4.44 seconds (hang time). By comparison, Detroit's Nick Harris averaged 4.60 hang in his eight punts. Mason Crosby hit from 42 yards and averaged 70.5 and 3.98 on two kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

If you're in the stadium, watch Jarrett Bush before the opening kickoff. He's usually the first player taking the field, bouncing around and seemingly still thrilled just to be playing the game that he loves. He's also excellent at what he does. Bush's ability to beat the Lions' blockers consistently was a major factor why Logan didn't enhance his Pro Bowl return resume at the Packers' expense. Sam Shields and Williams were effective on returns.

OVERALL (1)

PLAYER OF THE WEEK: CB Tramon Williams

Matched against Calvin Johnson for about 85% of the game, Williams took him completely out of the game. Johnson was the target of five passes against Williams. He dropped one 13 yards downfield and basically was blanketed on the others. Week in and week out, Williams is playing great football.

PLAY OF THE WEEK

Eight minutes left. Packers lead, 3-0. Second and 10 from the GB 13. The Lions send two WRs left and another to the right, with TE Will Heller lined up next to RT Corey Hilliard and across from Clay Matthews. It's a pass from shotgun formation, and Dom Capers rushes only three from his nickel defense and drops LDT C.J. Wilson back as the eighth man in a Cover 2 form of zone coverage. RB Jahvid Best loops through the line and checks down to the left. As Drew Stanton pump-fakes toward Best, Wilson makes the fatal mistake of moving eight yards toward Best. Wilson, who is playing injured Cullen Jenkins' position, is supposed to stay in the middle. If he does, it's doubtful that Heller scores. Heller blocks Matthews for a count, then releases into the right flat. After two steps Matthews jams on the breaks, sensing it might be a TE screen. He leaps and comes very close to deflecting Stanton's pass. Heller makes the catch at the 18 and charges up field. Desmond Bishop slices ahead and goes for the kill shot. While he succeeds in forcing Heller inside, he also overruns the play and fails even to get a piece of him. On the sideline, Tramon Williams is unable to extricate himself from Calvin Johnson. That leaves one man, Nick Collins, to make the tackle. But when Collins is cut-blocked off his feet by C Dominic Raiola, Heller surges forward. He plows over A.J. Hawk and Williams at the 2 and tumbles into the end zone. It's the decisive score.

STAT OF THE WEEK

Donald Driver catches two passes for 12 yards. That makes 18 straight games, counting playoffs, in which he hasn't had 100 or more receiving yards. His last 100-yard game was Thanksgiving Day 2009 in Detroit when he caught seven for 142. His longest streak of consecutive games without 100 yards is 19: the last seven games of 2002 and the first 12 games of '03, when he was struggling with a neck injury. Between then and now, his longest streak has been seven games. Driver ranks fourth in team history with 22 100-yard games. He added another in the playoffs.

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