

Rating the Packers: Week 16 vs Giants

Packers dominate Giants in all facets

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Green Bay — The ghosts are gone, the demons exorcised and a score has been settled.

Three years after they were pounded physically by the New York Giants in the NFC Championship Game, the Green Bay Packers whipped the Giants physically and every other way Sunday at Lambeau Field.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their must-have 45-17 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

Usually on play-action, the ball goes deep to Greg Jennings (52 snaps). This time, the Packers took advantage of the unusual side-pedaling bail technique of the Giants' cornerbacks (Corey Webster, Terrell Thomas), and Jennings ate them up on comeback and post-corner routes. All of Jennings' routes look the same, so his opponents are always thinking deep. But Jennings was so explosive coming back down the stem of his route that when he made the catch they were 4 to 5 yards off. Then they had a devil of a time trying to tackle him because he's so fast and has superior change of direction. He made a spectacular catch in his fingertips for 36 behind Webster and a fine snatch of a high slant against Webster for 16. James Jones (20) showed his increasing savvy, breaking off an end-zone route perfectly and presenting himself to Aaron Rodgers for a 3-yard score. But Jones dropped a bomb behind Thomas that probably would have been a 71-yard TD and a 20-yard back-shoulder fade. Jones' lack of concentration is maddening for the coaches. Perhaps the most difficult catch of all was made by Donald Driver (45) with one hand from the slot on third 3. Jordy Nelson (36) used that long stride to outrun all three safeties for an 80-yard TD and then went up aggressively to claim a 38-yard take-off route over Webster. He had a bad fumble stretching for a first down on third and 8. The TE blocking was effective.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Coordinator Perry Fewell didn't blitz as extensively as he did the week before against the Eagles but still sent five or more on 45% of passes and six or more on 22.5%, which was the most against Green Bay since Dallas in Week 9 last season. The lineman most responsible for sorting it all out was Scott Wells. Not only was Wells on top of his game mentally, he was the only lineman who didn't yield a pressure or "bad" run. After three so-so games Chad Clifton bounced back to limit athletic DE Osi Umenyiora to just one hurry. The toughest matchup (DE Justin Tuck) fell to Bryan Bulaga, and Tuck won going away. Bulaga yielded one sack, two knockdowns and two hurries to Tuck, and also was beat for three "bad" runs. After an initial kick step or two, Guards Josh Sitton and Daryn Colledge played their typical games. For Sitton, he mauls for the run and stays in front of people for pass. For Colledge, it's a constant struggle using his technique against his opponents' greater strength and athleticism.

QUARTERBACKS (5)

It could be argued that the biggest difference in the Packers from that heart-breaking night three years ago was the level of quarterback play. Afforded almost equally sound protection, Rodgers (139.9 passer rating) was as sharp as Brett Favre (70.7) was out of it. He played a game of cat-and-mouse with Tuck, three or four times ducking under Tuck's edge rushes and then making the Giants pay with two scrambles for 26 yards, Favre-like pump fakes and accurate darts thrown on the move. Because the run game was adequate, Rodgers was able to throw 16 times off play-action, six more than in any other game this season. Whereas Eli Manning seemed to have trouble with the cold weather, Rodgers threw with such velocity that it obviously didn't even faze him. He handled the check-with-me calls at the line well. He did it all two weeks after suffering a concussion.

RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)

John Kuhn (14 snaps at RB, 14 snaps at FB) was the story for the second week in a row. It's to the point where foes will have to game plan for Kuhn in the red zone. In New England, he kept going airborne. This time, he dipped his pads and bulled through people. Brandon Jackson (48) missed a crease or two. But even when Jackson shows his limitations with the ball, he's always terrific in blitz pickup. So is Kuhn. They were a comforting sight for Rodgers given the fact the Giants had KO'd five QBs. Once again, Mike McCarthy gave a uniform to Dimitri Nance (11) rather than James Starks, and Nance did run a little more decisively. The blocking of Quinn Johnson (33) was just OK.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Veteran C Shaun O'Hara sat out two months with a foot injury and is playing poorly. Still, B.J. Raji (45 snaps) had a lot to do with it. Raji trashed him for a sack. He kept walking back O'Hara and LG Rich Seubert, who had been playing very well. Raji wasn't the only reason coach Tom Coughlin was so disappointed in his ground game. Beefy teammates Ryan Pickett (28) and Howard Green (22) stayed square, too. Neither DE offered anything on the rush, but on stunts and blitzes they're just trying to occupy blockers. Raji's 45-pound weight advantage on O'Hara really showed. Even when the Giants got into Raji's chest, he wasn't staying blocked for long. Jarius Wynn (23) and C.J. Wilson (20) played the fourth quarter and weren't bad; Wilson had two pressures and Wynn had one-half.

LINEBACKERS (4)

RB Brandon Jacobs' lost fumble spoke volumes about Clay Matthews. The reason why Jacobs got out on his 21-yard run was the fact that Matthews was thinking pass and got shoved way wide by RT Kareem McKenzie. OK, so there goes Jacobs. Most OLBs wouldn't chase that play, and even if they did it might be half-hearted. Matthews jammed it in reverse, began to sprint and caught Jacobs off guard far downfield. He poked the ball out from behind and Nick Collins won a wild scramble for the recovery. By his standards, Matthews didn't have a great day (5 tackles, 1 pressure). He also got caught inside on Manning's 12-yard scramble. However, he played very well at the point of attack and caught some runs by flattening across with his unreal pursuit. The Giants double-teamed Matthews a lot (55% of passes), which has been about the norm in the last four games. A.J. Hawk intercepted a pass and dropped another. He and Desmond Bishop exhibited the kind of unselfish gap discipline that's essential to stop a ground game of the Giants' caliber. On the right outside, fourth-stringers Rob Francois and Erik Walden split time and fared pretty well. Francois beat LT David Diehl with a spin move for a knockdown and showed some strength on bull rushes. Walden is the more athletic of the two, moved well in coverage, showed more pop at the point and was fairly quick off the ball.

SECONDARY (4 ½)

Tramon Williams is beatable. Mario Manningham scored an 85-yard TD when Williams misjudged the ball, tried for the interception and fell off and missed the tackle. He also drew his first pass-interference penalty of 2010. When the Packers moved a safety into the box, Manning audibled to his pet back-shoulder fade routes to Hakeem Nicks. Williams was all over the first two, which fell incomplete. Williams reacted well on an errant deep ball for an interception, as did Collins and Sam Shields. Collins took one for the team, playing 60 minutes despite rib damage. Collins also dropped an interception that he probably would have returned for a 52-yard TD. Shields gave up a 21-yard sideline completion in Cover-2 when he played too shallow. When Manning went back to it two plays later, Shields stayed back and notched his pick. Charles Woodson blew past Manningham on a called run blitz, using his long arms to strip Ahmad Bradshaw, and Atari Bigby recovered. On Nicks' 36-yard TD, Woodson made a poor decision trying to jam the bigger man rather than playing off and keeping away from his strength. When Nicks powered by him and Woodson tried to grab, he slipped and it was over.

KICKERS (4)

Despite the cold, Tim Masthay's five punts had averages of 41.6 yards (gross), 39 (net) and 4.06 seconds (hang time). New York's Matt Dodge had average hang of 3.43. Mason Crosby hit from 31 and kicked off eight times, averaging 61.3 and 3.83.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

Shields isn't selling out on kickoff returns, fielding the ball cleanly or making much happen. The problem is, there's no real alternative to replace him unless Starks receives a shot. CB Brandon Underwood and Kuhn were the leaders in keeping the Giants' lousy return game in check.

OVERALL (5)

PLAYER OF THE WEEK: WR GREG JENNINGS

Greg Jennings ran exquisite routes. He made a finger-tip catch. He snagged a high slant. He gained 53 of his 142 yards after the catch. He made a solid cornerback, Corey Webster, look bad. That's what a dominant WR looks like.

PLAY OF THE WEEK

Two minutes left, first half. Second and 2 at the NY 8. Score tied, 14-14. It's base against base: the Packers' two WR, two RB, one TE set against the Giants' 4-3. In the I formation, RB Brandon Jackson stands at the 15 and FB John Kuhn is in a three-point stance at the 12. It's a simple dive to Kuhn off left guard. As the ball is snapped, DT Chris Canty's left foot goes out from underneath him. Down goes Canty, flat on his belly at the point of attack across from Daryn Colledge. The most difficult block is made by Scott Wells, who wheels around DT Barry Cofield and pins him inside. With no need to even bother with Canty, Colledge is free to come out fast and block MLB Jonathan Goff. Chad Clifton blocks OLB Michael Boley. Tom Crabtree takes DE Osi Umenyiora. Josh Sitton shoves Cofield, who topples on top of Canty. Bryan Bulaga comes off on OLB Keith Bulluck. The Packers don't block DE Justin Tuck, but influence him just enough with an end-around fake to Donald Driver from Aaron Rodgers. Two arms wrapped tightly around the ball, Kuhn hammers past the Canty-Cofield pile and encounters contact for the first time at the 4 from Goff and Tuck. He surges ahead to the 1, where S Antrel Rolle tries to hit him high. Bowling over Rolle and Bulluck, Kuhn crashes a yard deep into the end zone. Kuhn bounces up, raises his arms up his head in the TD signal for just a split-second and runs hard off the field. The Packers have the lead, one they will not relinquish.

STAT OF THE WEEK

The Packers gain 515 yards. Their high in Mike McCarthy's five seasons had been 493 against Arizona in the playoffs last season. The 515 is the team's highest since gaining 548 at Oakland in 2003. In his six-year tenure, Mike Sherman surpassed 500 yards twice. In his seven-year tenure, Mike Holmgren surpassed 500 yards once (Chicago, 516, 1994). Lindy Infante surpassed 500 once (Dallas, 502, 1989) in his four years and Forrest Gregg surpassed 500 three times in his four years. Bart Starr's high was 569 at Tampa Bay in a 14-14 overtime tie in 1980. The Packers' record is 628 against Philadelphia in 1962; the 569 against the Bucs ranks second. According to Elias Sports Bureau and NBC, this was the first time the Giants had yielded more than 500 yards since October 1980 against San Diego.

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