

# Rating the Packers: Week 17 vs Bears

## They're In

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*  
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**Green Bay** — They're in.

On an icy afternoon as Chicago coach Lovie Smith stood up for the integrity of pro football when he had little to play for, the Packers beat the Bears, 10-3, largely because they were able to protect Aaron Rodgers and their archrival couldn't protect Jay Cutler.

Thus, for the third time in his five-year career, Mike McCarthy has Green Bay headed for the NFC playoffs.

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

### **RECEIVERS ( 1 ½ )**

Back-to-back dropped passes by Greg Jennings and James Jones in the final minute of the first half were just awful. Sometimes Jennings doesn't trust his hands on long passes over his shoulder and tries to body-catch the ball instead of snatching it. After dropping what would have been a 50-yard TD, Jennings ran an excellent wheel route against backup CB Zack Bowman for 46 and a dig against CB Tim Jennings for 33. For a smaller receiver, Jennings is fearless with the ball. He seldom just goes down. If moving fast north-south means exposing himself to crazy shots, Jennings accepts it as an occupational hazard. The drop by Jones, on third and 4, was his eighth. Jones has never been a reliable blocker. But when he did sustain well against Tim Jennings on a WR screen, Jordy Nelson didn't read it properly, went outside and was piled up by the diminutive cornerback a yard short on third and 15. Donald Driver didn't lose a fumble on a reception from 2005-'08 before losing two in 2009. His first of 2010 came when nickel back D.J. Moore made a textbook strip. The group was reminded all week that forcing fumbles is the trademark of the Bears' secondary.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE ( 3 )**

DE Julius Peppers, who hurt the Packers with 4½ pressures in Week 3, split Chad Clifton and Daryn Colledge for his only pressure this time. Clifton had Peppers on his side about 75% of the time, and Mike McCarthy offered help on just 20% of his rushes. Clifton didn't have a real good December. This ranks as one of his best showings. He was grooved in, took away the outside with his rhythmic sets and kept Peppers at bay. Peppers seemed frustrated by Clifton and put it on cruise control in the late going. Scott Wells was very good in protection but had some problems with underrated NT Anthony Adams in the run game. At the other end of the performance spectrum were Bryan Bulaga and Colledge. The Packers were penalized just four times, and all four (two holds, two false starts) were on Bulaga. Sometimes Bulaga stops moving his feet, and when he does bad things happen. Colledge gave up two "bad" runs, 1½ pressures and missed a tackle on Charles Tillman that would have shortened his long interception return by 24 yards. At times he was late to the second level, at other times he overextended against LBs. He played soft. Instead of bending at the knees he's bending at the waist.

## **QUARTERBACKS ( 3 )**

D-coordinator Rod Marinelli blitzed on just 21.6% of dropbacks, making Rodgers and his receivers beat him with long drives. Rodgers didn't get much help from the receivers but he wasn't sharp, either. With second and goal from the 2, he oversold a seldom-seen fake QB sneak and then threw a lousy pass to Brandon Jackson. On third down, he had Driver open in the end zone but bolted the pocket prematurely and ran into a sack by Tommie Harris. The other sack took 5.7 seconds and was mostly on Rodgers. His incompleteness to Jackson on a third-and-2 check-down was pretty weak as well. Even though Marinelli had his unit containment-conscious, Rodgers wanted to win with his legs and it just didn't work. He was late with the ball on Tillman's interception and overthrew Jennings for what would have been a 72-yard TD. Rodgers did make two special throws. When DE Corey Wootton blew by Colledge and was in his face, Rodgers stepped to his right and zinged a 25-yarder to Nelson. Later, he looked off SS Danieal Manning just enough in a classic Cover-2 scenario to complete the 46-yard sideline strike to Jennings.

## **RUNNING BACKS ( 1 ½ )**

Rookie James Starks (17 snaps) got the call over Dimitri Nance and did some good things. With his back turned to Brian Urlacher on a check-down, Starks hurried away from him when Rodgers moved and turned it into a 12-yard reception. He stepped over trash, spun in traffic and showed the kind of power that Jackson doesn't possess. John Kuhn's four carries were worth 1, 0, 0 and minus-1 yards. He ran right into the back of Wells on one carry. Nine of his 19 snaps were at FB, where Quinn Johnson played 18.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE ( 4 )**

Jarius Wynn's shared sack with A.J. Hawk was almost totally the result of Hawk's well-timed blitz past LG Chris Williams. However, Wynn had a big second half with three hurries, including two against LT Frank Omiyale. This was the pass rush that the coaches have been seeing from him in practice. B.J. Raji, who played 63 of 67 snaps, was a real handful for undersized C Olin Kreutz and the guards. Kreutz made sure to double-team Raji on most passes, but still Raji moved bodies and didn't let Cutler sit on the spot. When Raji moved to RE for a few snaps, he beat Omiyale wide for what would have been a sack if Kreutz hadn't fanned back. Ryan Pickett (37) played well, too. He drew a holding penalty on RG Roberto Garza on the first play after Tillman's interception. Pickett wouldn't budge and kept finding the ball carrier. Howard Green (17), the ultimate wide body, showed some burst getting past Williams and Garza for a sack.

## **LINEBACKERS ( 3 ½ )**

Free agent Erik Walden blew off the ball and around Omiyale for a critical red-zone sack in 2.7 seconds. Frequently used to "spy" Cutler on three-man rushes, Walden delayed 1.8 seconds and slipped in for a sack when Garza inexplicably blew the pickup. He also made hustle plays downfield, flattened down the line and seemed aware in coverage. However, Walden wasn't nearly as effective against the run. He got jacked backward at the point and on a TE crack-back block, didn't set a strong edge and was hooked more than once. Rob Francois replaced him for a fourth-quarter snap in a run-down situation. Besides the half-sack, Hawk had one other hurry in his 15 pass rushes. The Bears' longest gain, a 27-yard dump-off to Matt Forte, was there because Desmond Bishop prematurely dropped coverage to rush up and meet the scrambling Cutler. Bishop is more effective taking on blocks than Hawk, Nick Barnett or Brandon Chillar. Barnett and Chillar still would be the best of the ILBs matched on a back one-on-one. Clay Matthews solved rookie RT J'Marcus Webb later on, beating him for a sack and three pressures.

## **SECONDARY ( 5 )**

Dom Capers felt comfortable rushing five or more on 46.8% of dropbacks because he knew that Tramon Williams and Sam Shields had WRs Johnny Knox and Devin Hester blanketed. Knox, a demonstrated Packers killer, was shut out and Hester's only catch (for 16) came against Shields. When Shields learns to stay square and trust his speed, he'll gain improved vision to the football and have more chances for interceptions. As it was, he smothered Cutler's back-shoulder fades. Williams is almost never penalized because his timing is so superb when the ball arrives. This was Charles Woodson's kind of game. Capers sent him off the slot and inside on pressures 15 times, and Woodson responded with a sack against FB Brandon Manumaleuna in 3.5 seconds and several break-ups. He played without regard for his well-being, leaping over blockers clawing to get at Cutler. Capers kept Nick Collins deep most of the way and he responded with a game-saving interception. Charlie Peprah took a bad angle and missed Rashied Davis on a 21-yard completion. He picked off an end-zone floater and was physical, as usual.

## **KICKERS ( 4 ½ )**

Tim Masthay was devastatingly effective against Hester, limiting him to two returns in eight punts. His averages were 43.5 yards (gross), 36.6 (net) and 3.97 seconds of hang time. Despite the cold and wind, he placed the ball remarkably well toward the sideline and had four inside the 20. Chicago's Brad Maynard was almost as good, averaging 45.5, 36.8 and 3.77 on eight punts. Mason Crosby hit two high popups and one deep kickoff for a touchback.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS ( 4 ½ )**

Williams' 41-yard punt return turned the tide toward Green Bay. Pat Lee ran harder than Shields in recent weeks and might have found a home. Jarrett Bush and Lee were exceptional as punt-team gunners. LS Brett Goode made the tackle on both of Hester's returns, limiting the damage to 35 yards.

## **OVERALL ( 4 )**

### **PLAYER OF THE WEEK: CB-KR Tramon Williams**

The Packers were going nowhere fast until Williams returned a third-quarter punt 41 yards. Not only that, but he helped shut out Johnny Knox, allowed just two completions for 16 yards, broke up two passes and was in perfect position for two interceptions before Bear players got in the way.

## **PLAY OF THE WEEK**

Middle of the third quarter. Fourth and 1 at the Chicago 33. Bears lead, 3-0. Brad Maynard gets off a 52-yard punt with 4.35 seconds of hang time that Tramon Williams fields at the 15 between the hash mark and the numbers on the right side. No defender is within 18 yards of Williams with the exception of CB Zack Bowman, who has run through the double-team block of Pat Lee and Brett Swain and is 8 yards away. Bowman keeps sprinting, takes a frontal swipe at Williams and misses. Williams moves laterally to his left along the 15. Because Williams typically runs out of bounds, he might have surprised the Bears by making a sharp cut between the hash mark and numbers on the other side. There's a clear gap in the coverage and Williams accelerates into it. Matt Wilhelm blocks LB Pisa Tinoisamoa, and Dimitri Nance blocks RB Garrett Wolfe. When Maynard draws near by the sideline, Williams ducks inside of him. He does run out of bounds with TE Kellen Davis giving chase but not before gaining 41 yards to the Chicago 44. It's the longest return by Williams since Week 5. Six plays later, the Packers kick the tying field goal.

## **STAT OF THE WEEK**

The Packers finish the season with two victories in which they scored 10 or fewer points: 9-0 over the Jets, 10-3 over the Bears. The last time that happened was 1946: 10-7 and 9-0, both over Detroit. The last time the Packers did it three times in a season was 1931. From 1979 to 2009, the Packers won with 10 or fewer points just three times: 9-7 over Minnesota in 2006, 10-0 over Buffalo in 2002 and 6-3 over Philadelphia in 2000. Coaches Phil Bengtson, Dan Devine, Forrest Gregg, Lindy Infante, Mike Holmgren and Ray Rhodes never won such a game. Vince Lombardi won three: 6-3 over Los Angeles in 1965, 9-7 over Detroit in 1962 and 9-6 over Chicago in the first game he coached.

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