

Grading The Green Bay Packers Coaching/Personnel: Doubters of Green Bay Packers GM Ted Thompson, coach Mike McCarthy relegated to silence

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Those who doubted whether General Manager Ted Thompson and coach Mike McCarthy had what it took to win it all — and there were plenty of them — have been relegated to silence.

McCarthy took a roster built by Thompson, overcame a slew of injuries and triumphed in two must-win games just to make the playoffs.

Then, instilled with a dose of confidence from McCarthy, the wild-card Packers won three road playoff games to reach Super Bowl XLV, where Thompson's hand-picked quarterback, Aaron Rodgers, and a playmaking defense led them to a 31-25 victory over the Pittsburgh Steelers for the team's first title since Super Bowl XXXI.

So it should come as no surprise that in the Green Bay Press-Gazette's annual postseason report card, the Packers earned high marks in both coaching and personnel. In fact, both McCarthy and his coaching staff and Thompson and his personnel staff received straight As.

There were more high grades for the players, too. Six players received a grade in the "A" range — double the total from last season, when only cornerback Charles Woodson (A), safety Nick Collins (A-minus) and quarterback Aaron Rodgers (A-minus) were in that category. This year, there were two straight As — Rodgers and outside linebacker Clay Matthews; and four A-minuses — Woodson, cornerback Tramon Williams, right guard Josh Sitton and receiver Greg Jennings.

Sustaining greatness in the NFL is just as hard as — if not harder than — achieving it. Ten teams have represented the NFC in the last 10 Super Bowls. But with Thompson and McCarthy at the helm, the Packers appear to be built for long-term success.

Coaching Grades

Fifteen players, including six starters, went from the active roster to the injured reserve list during the season.

Opening-day starters missed 86 regular-season games to injuries. Key reserves missed another 74 games because of injuries. Still, coach Mike McCarthy and his staff managed to find the right combinations and by season's end had the best team in the NFL.

McCarthy, offensive coordinator Joe Philbin and quarterbacks coach Tom Clements directed the league's fifth-ranked passing game. Early-season struggles were erased after a meeting of the minds between McCarthy and Aaron Rodgers.

Adjusted to the loss of Jermichael Finley by going back to receiver Greg Jennings. Got just enough out of the running game in the playoffs to keep teams honest but exploited mismatches in the passing game, especially in the divisional playoff win at Atlanta and in the Super Bowl against the Steelers.

On defense, coordinator Dom Capers didn't blink in the face of injuries and got enough out of the rotation at right outside linebacker to keep productivity up. Capers' usual variety of packages and blitzes kept opposing offenses guessing.

Cornerbacks coach Joe Whitt developed Sam Shields into one of the top nickel corners in the league, while Darren Perry dealt with the loss of two starting safeties (Atari Bigby and Morgan Burnett) and got Charlie Peprah to play well in their place.

On special teams, coach Shawn Slocum overhauled his schemes, turned Tim Masthay into one of the league's more productive punters and helped cut penalties nearly in half.

Personnel Moves

Six seasons into his tenure as general manager, Ted Thompson put together a Super Bowl champion while assembling a team that's built for sustained success.

His latest draft class produced four players who started at various points this season (tackle Bryan Bulaga, safety Morgan Burnett, tight end Andrew Quarless and running back James Starks) plus a contributor in defensive end C.J. Wilson. Hit home runs with rookie free agents like Sam Shields and Frank Zombo.

In-season pickups of defensive end Howard Green (from waivers) and linebacker Erik Walden (off the street) held together a battered defensive front seven. Gambled by not trading for running back Marshawn Lynch but had the foresight to see that a running game wasn't crucial.

Wisely extended the contracts of young, playmaking defensive starters Desmond Bishop and Tramon Williams during the season. Roster depth could be at all-time high when next season begins.