

Rating the Packers: Week 3 at Bears

Packers loaded for Bears

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel
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Green Bay - Lovie Smith was more than just a Packers killer in his first four seasons coaching the Bears. He also tamed Brett Favre.

Before Smith was hired in 2004, Favre owned Chicago to the tune of 20-4. Against Smith's teams, Favre went a mere 2-6 to finish 22-10, or a winning percentage of .688.

The change from Favre to Aaron Rodgers altered the tenor of the series. After beating the Bears, 27-17, on Sunday at Soldier Field, Rodgers improved to 6-2 (.750) against them.

At the same time, Smith's record in the rivalry slipped to 8-8 just as Mike McCarthy's improved to 7-5.

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

RECEIVERS (4 footballs)

Greg Jennings played 57 of the 70 snaps on offense, lining up on both sides, in the slot and as No. 3 to a three-receiver side. No matter where he was, the Bears couldn't cover him. He caught a career-best nine passes, including six for 78 yards in the Packers' first 10 plays. He beat Charles Tillman on a comeback for 12. He ran a slant against Tim Jennings for 19 and didn't even take a shot from strong safety Craig Steltz, exposing the backup's lack of closing speed. He caught a hitch, stepped away from Steltz as he charged up out of control and turned it into an 11-yard gain. He ran another in against Jennings for 19. With the Bears threatening to make a game of it, Jennings twisted his body for a high throw on a crossing route and turned it into 25. Finally, he got off clingy coverage by Tillman for an 11-yard catch on another third and 5. The Bears, especially Steltz, couldn't contain Jermichael Finley, either. He beat FS Brandon Meriweather, LB Lance Briggs and Steltz on his three TDs. Once again, Finley's blocking was up and down. He often hesitates, such as when he didn't go after Brian Urlacher aggressively and James Starks got smeared by the middle linebacker after a short gain. For the second week in a row Jordy Nelson had more playing time (42-34) than Donald Driver. Nelson always seems to make himself available to Rodgers on scrambles. He also avoids his exposure to fumbles by going down when surrounded after the catch. Driver dropped one of the two balls thrown to him and was shut out for only the third time in his 10 years as a starter. James Jones, who had 24 snaps compared to Randall Cobb's 15, isn't playing very fast.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2½)

The unit's top player through three games is Scott Wells. Chad Clifton, T.J. Lang, Josh Sitton and Marshall Newhouse each had two penalties whereas Wells didn't have any. He also didn't give up a pressure and was responsible for just one-half of the 10 "bad" runs charged to the O-line. In pass pro, Wells can go one on one, help out, punch and pass. As a run blocker, the contrast between him and C Roberto Garza, the Bears' best O-lineman, was striking. Wells played with so much more quickness and strength. After Bryan Bulaga sprained his left knee on the 11th play, Newhouse went the final 59 snaps. His regular-season debut went OK.

Newhouse's athletic ability showed early when he handled a variety of line games. Opposed most of the time by cagey LE Israel Idonije, he maintained his poise. Even when Julius Peppers came over in the third quarter, Newhouse didn't rattle. His high intelligence showed. The one line-related sack went to Newhouse on a stunt by DT Henry Melton. He also had 3½ "bad" runs, which was far too many. The plan was to help with Peppers. Clifton allowed two of his three pressures to Peppers and didn't have a "bad" run. Big and burly, Sitton was OK. Both Sitton and Lang came off double teams and took Urlacher where they wanted him to go, paving the way for half a dozen substantial runs. However, Lang was way too inconsistent in the run game. His four "bad" runs included a miss of Briggs that precipitated Starks' fumble. Sitton brutalized backup cornerback Zack Bowman when he showed up in the box on a play in the second half.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

Rodgers parried the defense as coordinated by Rod Marinelli with a hard count that drew the Bears offside four times. If it also messed up his own linemen, that's their problem. The Packers practice cadence all the time because in games it provides Rodgers invaluable information on coverage and blitz. His most notable completion was the shot to Finley that finished off the opening drive. Thrown inside in the second window, Rodgers threaded the ball among three defenders on the money to his tight end in the back of the window. It takes nerve, talent and touch even to try that throw, let alone hit it. As always, Rodgers made several plays on the move. It's probably when he's at his lethal best. Uncharacteristically, Rodgers ran into the other sack and a pressure. The Packers' first interception of the season was the result of Rodgers perhaps getting a little lazy with his feet on the throw and Urlacher making a wide receiver-type catch. He also had two delay penalties.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

For the first time since the start of training camp Ryan Grant looked like a better back than Starks. His best gains were cutting back on inside zone plays. This was the ball carrier the coaches were hoping to see again after his ankle injury of 2010. One time, he made a crisp cut away from a blitzing Briggs and gained 11. On another run, he made Briggs miss in space. Of Grant's 17 carries, you might be able to question just one of his reads. Talk about tough. He played the entire game despite a bruised kidney. As effective as Grant was in 31 snaps, Starks was equally ineffective in 38. He looked unsure of himself, as if he didn't trust what was in front of him. He made a poor cut on a draw for minus-1, didn't see an opening on the first play of the third quarter and was tackled by Melton for no gain and hesitated on another draw and barely made it back to the line. Catching a swing pass in the left flat, he didn't make a move and got knocked down easily by Briggs. On the fumble, Starks gave Briggs an inviting target by toting the ball under his inside arm. Starks has got to get back to hurting people going north and south.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Ryan Pickett and B.J. Raji afforded coordinator Dom Capers the luxury of using his 3-4 base on just nine of the 54 snaps. Pickett (19 snaps) and Raji (49) could not be moved. A second-and-goal run for no gain against the nickel defense by luckless Matt Forte typified their might at the point. Raji occupied LG Chris Williams and Garza, while Pickett took up RG Chris Spencer and RT Frank Omiyale. With all four linemen used up, it was relatively easy for Desmond Bishop to surge ahead and make the tackle. When Garza tried to execute a reach block on Pickett that Wells executes all the time, Pickett drove him 3 yards into the backfield and then tackled Forte for minus-2. Raji's two hurries illustrated how beastly strong he is. On the first, he put Garza on his back and drew a holding penalty. On the second, he stomped all over Williams, a former first-round pick who plays too high and lacks horsepower. When Williams turned Jarius Wynn loose, he had the presence of mind to shoot ahead and sack Jay Cutler. Later, he beat LT J'Marcus Webb for a sack on a stunt. Wynn got looked off by Cutler when he dropped and drifted on Dane Sanzenbacher's 4-yard TD catch. Once again, Wynn played far more than C.J. Wilson (39-9).

LINEBACKERS (4)

Matthews had one of his finest games as a Packer, registering four hurries, 3½ knockdowns and 2½ tackles for loss. On the rush, he did almost equal damage against Omiyale and Spencer. The Bears double-teamed Matthews on 44% of dropbacks and did hold him without a sack. Despite exerting far more energy because of the nature of his position, Matthews tends to wear out blockers in the fourth quarter. On a pair of aborted counter plays, Matthews shot across the line and beat the pulling guard (Williams) to the punch, which probably demoralized Forte and coordinator Mike Martz. Erik Walden needs a ton of fine-tuning in coverage and the defense overall. He did set a mean edge, especially a stuff of Forte for minus-1 when he shoved back TE Kellen Davis. Limited to just one hurry, Walden cost Tramon Williams an interception by roughing Cutler. Neither Bishop nor A.J. Hawk got much from their combined 10 rushes. The Packers don't have as much speed at inside linebacker as some teams, which has been a factor in their leaky pass defense. After playing extensively in Carolina, Brad Jones missed the tackle on his only snap.

SECONDARY (3½)

Capers moved Morgan Burnett from strong safety to free safety as an accommodation for Charlie Peprah, the replacement for Nick Collins, who has proven to be better-suited near the line. Burnett keeps demonstrating that he can be a complete safety, intercepting two passes off the hash. On the first, Burnett trusted his eyes and vacated the middle at the right time when Cutler pump-faked right and threw deep right to Roy Williams. Then he came across and, when the ball was thrown a bit inside, vaulted high for a leaping pick. His second interception, reading an overthrow by Cutler from deep in a two-safety shell, wasn't as spectacular, but many safeties have dropped that same type of ball. Burnett had a bad open-field miss on Davis' 32-yard touchdown, as did Sam Shields. There also was another miss by Shields, who just isn't playing well. Woodson replaced Peprah at safety a few times in the base defense, giving Capers a better player in coverage. Late in the second quarter, Capers made a major coverage decision after Johnny Knox was wide open on the deep sideline for 40. Playing zone, neither Woodson nor Shields got proper depth to help Peprah, who got turned and burned on the play. After that, Capers played nothing but man-to-man under his two-deep looks. Williams, Shields and Woodson all had plays in which they were beat deep but for various reasons the passes weren't completed. Jarrett Bush's sack might have been the best play of the game. Blitzing off the slot to Cutler's right, Bush defeated Forte and then actually trashed the 315-pound Omiyale. Nobody plays harder than Bush.

KICKERS (4)

Tim Masthay did his job, neutralizing Devin Hester. Although it affected distance, he used drop kicks on all six of his punts and averaged 38.2 yards (gross), 33.3 (net) and 4.22 seconds (hang time). The Bears went for blocks on the first two punts, but Masthay's fast get-off times saved the day. Mason Crosby hit from 37 and 28 yards and averaged 69.5 and 3.74 on six kickoffs. Chicago's start after KOs averaged the 20.8.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

Hustling as always, Bush was the player held by Bears CB Corey Graham that made Knox's incredible 89-yard punt return a footnote in history instead of a pivotal play. Still, as the man on special teams, Bush should have sorted out the deception. What if Masthay had screamed at his teammates? Could he have been heard over the crowd noise? Despite excellent hang time by Adam Podlesh, Cobb doesn't seem to like fair catches. If his decision-making remains sharp, he will do damage.

OVERALL (4)

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