

# Rating the Packers: Week 10 vs Vikings

## Defense throws plenty at Vikings

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel  
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**Green Bay** - Based on game plans, the Minnesota Vikings played like the team that was 8-0 and the Green Bay Packers played like the 2-6 club.

The Packers employed some new run forces to contain Adrian Peterson. They blitzed different players from new spots. And they played with a bit of devil-may-care intensity typically associated with the underdog.

When the Vikings came in status quo, they were stampeded out of Lambeau Field, 45-7. It was the most lopsided of the 102 games in the border series, surpassing the 35-point spread the Vikings imposed on the Packers (42-7) in September 1986 at the Metrodome.

In that game, quarterback Randy Wright fainted on the field during the game because of dehydration and had to be relieved by Vince Ferragamo, who after taking a few shots began calling some of his old plays from his days with the Los Angeles Rams.

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

### **RECEIVERS (4 ½ footballs)**

The Vikings sat back in soft zones, trying to hide their slow, mediocre defensive backs. They basically had no chance. Jordy Nelson (41 snaps) seems to play faster and faster each week. Need a play on fourth and 2? Let Nelson shoulder aside nickel back Asher Allen. Need a receiver open after scrambling for 6.8 seconds? Leave it to Nelson to break his route back to the corner away from FS Husain Abdullah for a 4-yard TD. See CB Cedric Griffin playing off at the Minnesota 17? Turn a run into a quick hitch and let Nelson stiff-arm Griffin into submission en route to the end zone. The Packers' longest run (15 yards) broke largely because Nelson dominated Griffin near the sideline. Griffin is a physical corner, too, but just not physical enough to cope with Nelson. Setting the tone early on third and 8 was Donald Driver (35) with a difficult grab for 22 yards on a back-shoulder fade against Allen. Randall Cobb (21), who has worked mostly from the slot, went wide right and caught two comebacks for 29 yards. On the first, it was strange to see him run out of bounds rather than make some kind of move inside. Cobb also cost the Packers a timeout when he wasn't lined up correctly. James Jones (19) got a break when his fumble went out of bounds. Greg Jennings (47) also fumbled but was saved when officials ruled him down. Jennings beat zone coverage for a 24-yard TD and then dropped a 12-yard skinny post. Jermichael Finley (false start) drew the team's only penalty. In 52 snaps (23 in-line), he was the target of four balls, including a 31-yard over route in which he exposed decorated CB Antoine Winfield's declining speed. Mike McCarthy often shifts or motions Finley in hopes the defense declares itself. He's one heck of a decoy. Week after week, Andrew Quarless (24) blocks very well for the run. He pancaked SLB Erin Henderson once and controlled him on another run.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)**

You wouldn't know it by the two Green Bay games, but Vikings LDE Brian Robison has as many QB hits (23) as RDE Jared Allen. After registering two flushes in the Oct. 23 game, Robison was limited to just one this time by Bryan Bulaga. In terms of balance, footwork and hand placement, Bulaga is getting better and better. He is passing off stunts very well. And he was the only O-linemen without a "bad" run. Bulaga just kind of steers defenders for the run. On the other side, Allen was double-teamed on 36% of drop-backs and didn't dominate Marshall Newhouse as he did in their first meeting. The sack by Winfield was set up by Allen on a stunt against Newhouse. Otherwise, Newhouse allowed Allen just one other pressure, and his only "bad" run came on a lead draw when Allen came off him. Newhouse played a little soft against Allen, probably because of nerves facing the NFL's sack leader. But no matter the opponent, Newhouse has never gone in the tank. Based on his standards, Scott Wells was pretty average. He played a role in two "bad" runs and was responsible for a hurry when he snapped the ball prematurely on a pass from shotgun. Neither guard, Josh Sitton nor T.J. Lang, was all that good. Sitton had 2½ "bad" runs, including a run for minus-4 when he let rookie DT Christian Ballard charge through and smear James Starks. Lang punched Ballard off the ball on a successful QB sneak (Daryn Colledge never would have done that) but was knocked backward several other times.

### **QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)**

The Vikings would have been hard-pressed to play the 24-yard TD pass to Jennings any better. They were in four-across zone coverage, and Erin Henderson didn't really bite on Aaron Rodgers' play-fake. There was almost no window at all to deliver the ball to Jennings as he sprinted inside. Rodgers' pass cleared Henderson by maybe 2 feet. It hit Jennings in stride ahead of the safety, giving him time to make an evasive move if the other safety had come across. When the safety didn't, it was an easy TD thanks to the type of throw the receivers have just come to expect from their quarterback. Coordinator Fred Pagac blitzed 29%, hoping Rodgers might become impatient and throw into coverage. That never happens. Rodgers did make a freaky miscue, dropping the ball without being hit on the first play. He made the recovery. Rodgers simply ended up on the ground too much. Early in the third quarter, he scrambled inside and took a blind-side shot from Allen that might have KO'd some QBs. He just shook it off. Still, Rodgers will have to take it upon himself to minimize his exposure to shots. His hard count got DE Everson Griffen to jump offside three times. Matt Flynn entered with 10½ minutes left, made two nice throws and scrambled underneath the rush for a 3-yard TD.

### **RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)**

Ryan Grant started once again and played the first five snaps before Starks entered. In eight carries, Grant gained 6 yards. His long gain, 3 yards, required a fine effort when Allen knocked Lang back into Grant's lap and he had to cut back. Otherwise, he didn't get anything done. In the second quarter, he showed a glaring lack of decisiveness when he tried to bounce a run outside and was chased down to the corner by Allen. Neither Grant nor Starks was consistent in protection. Grant lunged and missed a blitzing Erin Henderson, who pressured Rodgers. Later, Starks drifted outside instead of first checking inside and allowed Erin Henderson to flush Rodgers untouched. With the ball, however, Starks did some outstanding things. On a third-and-7 check-down, he made one cut to elude Erin Henderson, made another cut to slip WLB Chad Greenway and got the first down. As the game wore on, Starks kept plowing it up against a prideful run defense. Starks' decision at the end of the half to run out of bounds before a punt indicated his lack of football savvy.

### **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

For almost two years, B.J. Raji's playing time has suggested that his coaches regard him as indispensable. In the first halves of the first eight games, Raji had never sat out more than three snaps. On Sunday, he played 27 of 34 in the first half even though Ryan Pickett missed five snaps with a knee injury. Raji, who finished with 41 snaps, didn't make a play all day against LG Steve Hutchinson, his physical match. When Adrian Peterson had successful carries, it often was at Raji's expense. Pickett (24) continued to be the stouter and more disciplined shock absorber. Pickett did lose contain on Christian Ponder's 13-yard scramble but he was held by RT Phil Loadholt. Tired of waiting for his D-linemen to beat blockers, Dom Capers blitzed on Ponder's first eight drop-backs. C.J. Wilson (32) found the ball carrier four times and had a pressure against backup RG Joe Berger. Jarius Wynn (29) showed slight improvement rushing, too.

### **LINEBACKERS (4 ½)**

With Capers sending five or more on 73.2% of drop-backs, the most that he has in Green Bay, the No. 1 rusher was Desmond Bishop. He beat Loadholt off the edge for a sack, surged through unblocked for two knockdowns and had 2½ pressures when Peterson and RB Toby Gerhart weren't strong enough to hold him off. Bishop is just so explosive on contact. Rather than leap for a possible batted ball, Bishop just accelerated into Ponder's chest twice. It was surprising the rookie wasn't injured. But Bishop isn't out of control, either. On another occasion, he bear-hugged Ponder to avoid a flag-fine. The entire unit came off blocks and rallied to Peterson, holding him to 3.6 yards per carry. The only missed tackles (two) were by A.J. Hawk, but he held his own and didn't get beat in coverage. Clay Matthews had a pair of sacks, beating a double-team by a pair of RBs in 2.4 seconds and then the slow-footed Loadholt in 3.4. Yet, those were Matthews' only pressures. After two strong rushing games Erik Walden was blanked. Against the run, his technique remains somewhat inconsistent but his effort has been off the charts.

### **SECONDARY (4)**

The only three missed tackles by the unit all were charged to Charles Woodson. He was run over by rugged little man Percy Harvin, missed Harvin in the flat and failed to bring down Peterson on a toss. Late in the third quarter, Woodson was beat but he spun out and somehow ended up where the ball was. Had he made that simple catch, it would have been a 67-yard TD return. Beyond those four plays, Woodson was terrific. He rushed nine times, his second high of the season, setting up one of Matthews' sacks and registering a knockdown. He also flew around the field, closing quickly and violently on receivers and ball carriers. Not only did Capers listen to Woodson's suggestions, he also paid attention to Morgan Burnett. Despite his broken hand, he wanted to rotate into the box from the deep middle more often to get more involved in the game. Unlike the first Vikings game, when Charlie Peprah was the line-of-scrimmage safety, Burnett shared the duties this time and was active and pretty physical. Beat by Denver's Brandon Lloyd for 44 yards on a flea-flicker six weeks ago, Burnett stayed home on Ponder's ill-advised long pass into coverage that Tramon Williams flagged down for an interception. Sam Shields got beat on a 22-yard corner route when he didn't play deep-to-short on third and 13. Overall, he was solid.

## **KICKERS (4)**

Mason Crosby kicked off four times with the wind (76.3 yards, 3.87 seconds of hang time, all touchbacks) and four times into the wind (55.5, 3.94, no touchbacks). Into the wind, he changed up his technique and the Vikings bobbled two of his four pop-ups. His field goal was from 25 yards. Tim Masthay's two punts were long, fairly low and well-covered. They averaged 49.5 (gross), 43 (net) and 4.0 (hang time).

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Cobb got his team off to an electrifying start, running through an arm tackle by LB Kenny Onatolu on a punt and accelerating 80 yards for a TD. The big blocks were by D.J. Williams, M.D. Jennings, Jarrett Bush and Ryan Taylor. Later, Cobb failed to look in a towering punt by Chris Kluwe (50, 4.65) and lost a fumble to FB Ryan D'Imperio. Two plays later, he out-flanked the Vikings on a KO return and ran right over the top of Asher Allen along the sideline for 55 yards. A gutsy performer, Bush matched up on the 273-pound Griffen and prevented him from wrecking the return game. Pat Lee continued his excellent coverage with three tackles.

## **OVERALL (4 ½)**

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