

# Rating the Packers: Week 13 at Giants

## Rodgers, receivers rescue team

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

*Posted:*

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Green Bay - The fact that the Green Bay Packers continue to display various chinks in their armor and still stand 12-0 should tell us something about the caliber of football being played in this post-lockout season.

In their electrifying 38-35 victory over the New York Giants Sunday at MetLife Stadium, the Packers couldn't run or stop the run, dropped six passes and yielded 347 yards through the air.

But, when push came to shove, Aaron Rodgers and his receivers were there once again to save the day.

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

### **RECEIVERS (3 ½ footballs)**

Jordy Nelson makes the most of every chance he gets. He played 60.8% of the snaps (48 of 79) and had just four passes thrown to him. He turned those four opportunities into 94 yards. The athletic ability he showed twisting his body and catching those two sidelines passes in his hands, then having the presence of mind to get his feet down, was startling. On the decisive drive, he ran a precise "slugger" route (slant and go) against old pal Will Blackmon for 27 yards. It seems whenever Rodgers scrambles right, Nelson always becomes available to him along the boundary. The Giants generally played with their safeties back, which forces Greg Jennings (72 snaps) to work harder to find big plays. He had one of the unit's five drops, Randall Cobb (19) had one and Jermichael Finley (61) had three. Mike McCarthy and Joe Philbin are starting to design packages for Cobb. He threw his first option pass, he lined up in the backfield one time and he was used as a deep decoy on a few running plays to hold the back-side end. McCarthy has never been one for trickery, but the multi-talented Cobb might be worth the deviation. Just one of Finley's six receptions came out of a three-point stance. As a split receiver, he will get a little high and sloppy in his routes at times. Picking his poison, D-coordinator Perry Fewell didn't pay much attention to Donald Driver (34) and it cost him two TDs. Driver kept battling for 5½ seconds to get free in the corner against CB Corey Webster and then caught a bullet pass just in bounds for a 7-yard TD. That was a tremendous play. James Jones (34) never got a sniff all afternoon.

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

A year ago, Bryan Bulaga allowed one sack, two knockdowns and two hurries to DE Justin Tuck and also was beat for three "bad" runs. In their rematch, Bulaga gave up a hurry and one-half of a "bad" run to Tuck in the first series. After that, he shut him down. Now, Tuck hasn't been the same player in 2011 that he was 2010. Injuries have been his constant companion. Still, it was impressive how Bulaga handled Tuck just as he does most opponents. He does quite a bit of catching, but it works because of his excellent balance and size. Each week, Scott Wells is quick to the line out of the huddle and maintains an up-beat tempo. He mixes it up, helps both guards and always plays physically for his size. Matched against towering DT Chris Canty, T.J. Lang didn't have a "bad" run or a pressure. He shows pop in the run game but doesn't always sustain his blocks. For the first time since early in the season, the Packers actually pulled a lineman. They ran their version of the Power-O counter play with Lang leading around the right side. Lang did his job and the two plays gained 8 yards. DE Jason Pierre-Paul, the Giants' best defensive player, was way too quick for Marshall Newhouse, beating him repeatedly both outside and inside. On two "bad" runs totaling minus-7, Newhouse couldn't handle Pierre-Paul at the point of attack. Newhouse gave up 1½ sacks, three knockdowns and two hurries to Pierre-Paul and had another sack wiped out by penalty. Until Newhouse starts using his hands more consistently, he will struggle against top players. Making his first start, Evan Dietrich-Smith had a long day as well in allowing three "bad" runs and 2½ pressures. Twice in the second half he got beaten back-door by DTs on two runs totaling minus-4.

### **QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)**

McCarthy, just 2-13 in close games (4 points or fewer) started by Aaron Rodgers, put the outcome squarely on his ace's shoulders. On the first play, he threw a 10-yard dart to Finley that either had to be high and outside or would be snared by speedy LB Jacquian Williams for a likely pick-six. The 24-yard reception was thrown high and outside. On the next play, Tuck beat Dietrich-Smith badly and was charging up the middle directly into Rodgers' face as he waited for Nelson to break free on the "sluggo" route. Five years ago, Rodgers would have needed even more courage because the rules wouldn't have prevented Tuck from mashing him into the ground. Even knowing that Tuck would have to "hug" him or risk a penalty, Rodgers still had the guts and accuracy to make a perfect high and outside throw to Nelson for 27. On his first of four TD passes, Rodgers skipped away from Pierre-Paul after he bolted free of Newhouse and threw a dart to Finley. On the shocking interception by Chase Blackburn, it appeared as if Rodgers probably should have thrown the ball to Jennings in the first window before the backup MLB could get there. Later, he made that type of adjustment on some throws. Unlike last December, when Fewell blitzed Rodgers on 45% of dropbacks, he pressured just 13% this time. When Fewell played man coverages underneath a two-safety shell, Rodgers broke down the defense by running three times for first downs.

### **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

James Starks played 14 snaps in relief of Ryan Grant before reinjuring his ankle as he became tangled up with DT Linval Joseph carrying out a play fake late on the Packers' 25th play from scrimmage. The rushing production was brutal, especially against a defense that gave up 205 to New Orleans six days earlier. Thirteen of the 24 carries by RBs went to Grant, who still runs hard and generally makes the right read. He just isn't breaking many tackles. The more explosive option has become rookie free agent Brandon Saine, who showed more in his 21 snaps than Grant did in 29. Saine gained 27 on two screens and made a nice catch of a low pass. On Saine's best rush, Pierre-Paul shoved Newhouse back into his lap. Saine cut the other way and, when daylight appeared, slashed hard north-and-south for a gain of 5. Seven of John Kuhn's 22 snaps came as the single back on passing downs. He jarred Pierre-Paul a few times with chip blocks.

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

Purely as a pass rusher, B.J. Raji resembled his 2010 form for the first time this season. His five hurries, easily his top production, were the result of some exceptionally athletic moves. He spun, he worked his hands and he used an arm-over move. He also showed impressive bull rush, especially in a pancake power move right over the top of Pro Bowl RG Chris Snee. Raji's other four pressures came at the expense of LG Mitch Petrus, who didn't know he was starting until a few hours before kickoff when C David Baas (headaches) was declared out. Petrus plays without any base. He was completely overmatched by Raji. While it's true that three runs by New York totaling 37 yards came against the 3-4 defense when Raji was on the sidelines, it's also true that Raji got tied up and turned several times on other rushes. He can't allow this show of pass-rush activity to deter him from his first responsibility, which is staying square at the point. Other than Raji (58 snaps), nobody made a play. The snap breakdown was Ryan Pickett (43), Howard Green (26), Mike Neal (25), C.J. Wilson (10) and Jarius Wynn (three).

### **LINEBACKERS (3 ½)**

Clay Matthews' goal is to become a complete player. To do it, he knew that he needed to improve in coverage. In recent weeks, Matthews has been around the ball a lot more. On Sunday, he dropped eight times in coverage, and on one of them intercepted a flat pass for RB Ahmad Bradshaw and returned it 38 yards for a TD. He attacked that ball like he was shot from a cannon. As a rusher, Matthews had four of his 4½ pressures against rapidly fading RT Kareem McKenzie. Matthews has faced a string of unheralded RTs this season, but maybe not anyone that he could whip around quite as easily as the lead-footed McKenzie. Erik Walden was fine on the other side, taking all the snaps over Frank Zombo. Ranked last in the NFL in rushing and average per carry, the Giants pounded away between the tackles for 100 yards in 20 attempts (5.0). Subbing for injured A.J. Hawk, Rob Francois really had problems getting off blocks. He'd get tied up inside, then didn't have the speed or quickness to get back into the play. He did beat backup C Kevin Boothe for a tackle for loss on a run blitz. D.J. Smith, the replacement for injured Desmond Bishop, was really slow to see things in the first half before adjusting to the pace in the second half. He gave himself up once or twice to FB Henry Hynoski, didn't accomplish much in 13 pressures and made most of his tackles downfield. In Smith's defense, not only was it his first start but he also wore the electronically wired helmet and had to call the defense. One thing about Smith: He gives the coaches everything that he has.

## **SECONDARY (2)**

The day started badly when Charlie Peprah, backed off speedy TE Travis Beckum in the slot, moved up two steps on a play fake and then didn't have nearly the speed to stay with Beckum as he ran by him deep. When Eli Manning was able to look Morgan Burnett out of the middle of the field, Beckum had a 67-yard TD. Neither Peprah nor Burnett (two missed tackles) offered much in run support or coverage. Burnett must be even more vigilant about hunting interceptions at the expense of compromising the integrity of the defense. On the outside, Tramon Williams was in position to defend a 42-yard post to Victor Cruz but said he lost the ball in the lights. Then, on the Giants' first play of the second half, Williams let the slower Hakeem Nicks run past him on the same route and wasn't aggressive enough to get the ball out on a 51-yard completion. Later, Williams was more violent at the ball and broke up a long end-zone pass to Nicks. With the Packers playing 34 snaps of 3-4, Charles Woodson had to play outside far more than in the slot and the Giants had a chance to get at him. Neither Woodson nor Sam Shields even came close to defending short TD fades to Nicks. Shields showed tight coverage several other times. When Woodson left with a concussion early in the fourth quarter, Jarrett Bush took over and allowed a 22-yard pass to Cruz on a shake route.

## **KICKERS (4 ½)**

After missing from 43 yards, Mason Crosby cleared a major hurdle by winning the game from 31 as time expired. The five kickoffs he hit for length averaged 66.6 yards and 4.02 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay was magnificent. Using Aussie-style drop punts on three of his five, he averaged 44.2 yards (gross and net) and 4.45 hang time. He had punts downed or fair caught at the 14, 14, 1 and 13.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Bush was outstanding with two tackles, forcing a fair catch of Masthay's 55-yard punt and downing the punt at the 1. Finding himself in the end zone, he had the presence of mind to re-establish himself in the field of play before downing the ball. Brad Jones embarrassed himself, taking a dive near a shoving match involving TE Ryan Taylor. Back judge Steve Freeman dismissed Jones' ploy with a wave of his hand. Cobb made a mistake, fair-catching a spiral punt at the 6.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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