

# Rating the Packers: Week 15 at Chiefs

## Wells shines at center, but little else went well for Packers

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Dec. 20, 2011

**Green Bay** - If a fan had no prior knowledge of the two teams playing Sunday at Arrowhead Stadium he might have thought the Kansas City Chiefs had a better record than the Green Bay Packers.

The Chiefs controlled play from start to finish. They were more physical, seemed more ready to play and had sharper game plans.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 19-14 defeat, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses::

### RECEIVERS (1 footballs)

The Chiefs' base coverage was Cover 2 Man (man-to-man underneath a two-safety shell). Cornerbacks Brandon Flowers and Brandon Carr pressed on the outside, nickel back Javier Arenas pestered from the slot and dime back Travis Daniels spent a lot of time on Jermichael Finley. Without Greg Jennings (knee), their best player against man, the WRs struggled to give Aaron Rodgers clean windows by separating from defenders. Jordy Nelson assumed Jennings' role as No. 1, playing 59 of the 60 snaps. His first of two receptions came against a prevent zone with 3 ½ minutes left. He also had two interference penalties and a false-start penalty that wiped out a 17-yard pass to Randall Cobb. For some reason, the coaches played Donald Driver (22) less than normal. He had one of the four drops. The best WR was Cobb (35), who drove up the field against the pesky Arenas and beat him twice for 29 yards with superior acceleration at the break point. Jones (44) seems more effective inside against zone than man. Finley played 49 snaps, including 26 from a three-point stance, one from the wing and 22 from the slot or wide. He will be charged with two drops: a short bootleg and a stick route. The two longest gains were made by Finley. On the first, he made a wonderful adjustment on a 41-yard pass that he expected outside but ended up inside. On the second, he beat Daniels inside even though he had inside leverage and, using a stiff-arm, ran 21 yards after the catch for a gain of 31.

### OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Not only was Scott Wells' this unit's best player, he was the best player on the team. The next top lineman was Josh Sitton, back after a two-game hiatus. Neither man allowed a pressure or a "bad" run. Fighting for a lucrative contract in Green Bay or elsewhere, Wells knows how to impress. He runs the show at the line. He never quits hustling. He's always looking for someone to block. He can reach, snatch and drive block like nobody's business, and he knows just when to leave the double-team on the DT to go get the LB. RT Bryan Bulaga gave up 1 ½ pressures to rookie OLB Justin Houston before leaving with a sprained kneecap on his 30th snap. Derek Sherrod played the next 18 before suffering a broken leg when OLB Tamba Hali inadvertently swung into him. LG T.J. Lang moved outside for the last 12. Sherrod started poorly, allowing ILB Derrick Johnson to play through his gap and halt John Kuhn on a third-and-1 dive. Sherrod also gave up three hurries, including two to Houston. Sensing weakness, Hali shifted sides and rushed one-on-one against Sherrod twice, and both times the rookie held him off. Given how poorly Sherrod played in August, this final showing was fairly encouraging. On the other side, Marshall Newhouse had a nightmare assignment: a much quicker opponent in Hali on his field with a lot of crowd noise. On Newhouse's 33 pass blocks against Hali, he was manned up on 19, helped by the LG 11 times, helped by a RB twice and helped by a TE once. Newhouse yielded 4 ½ pressures, including 1 ½ sacks and two hurries to Hali. After Newhouse gave up a full sack with 4 minutes left, it was like he quit operating by the book and just tried taking it to Hali. On the very next play, he bent his knees, exploded at Hali with a ferocious punch and pancaked him. To ascend, Newhouse will have to trust his technique and just go play. Lang was solid again.

## **QUARTERBACKS (2)**

Coach Romeo Crennel rushed four on 45.5% of dropbacks, three on 36.3% and five or more (blitzes) on 18.2%. The Chiefs' plan included the best of both worlds: good pressure with fewer bodies, good coverage with more bodies. Against this sage plan, Rodgers didn't produce. Given the clingy coverage, he had to be razor-sharp to make plays. His 18 incompletions in 35 attempts (48.6%) included four drops. This was far from a jailbreak situation, but Rodgers still seemed overly concerned about the rush, and it appeared that his eyes at times started to go to it. He was impatient on some routes, especially to Finley inside. He threw too early on a pair of check-downs. On the strip-sack that Lang eventually recovered, he backed up in the pocket, which isn't a good idea. Later, he ran into one of Hali's three sacks. Rodgers might be losing a little confidence in the back-shoulder game, too. He didn't turn the ball over, but Carr was inches away from picking his long overthrow to Jones. If Rodgers makes a better throw to Finley, it's a 49-yard TD. Rodgers insisted the wind wasn't a factor.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3 1/2)**

Mike McCarthy erred by not giving Ryan Grant more than 12 carries. Crennel was inviting the run, using a seven-man box with his cornerbacks playing with their backs to the line. Several times, he even played nickel against the Packers' base personnel. Plus, Hali kept circling way wide, leaving space to run draws underneath him. There was nothing wrong with Grant. He made Arenas miss on an 18-yard draw. He ran through an arm tackle by DT Amon Gordon for 13. He outran the speedy Houston to the corner for 6. He also leaked out of a protection to make a juggling catch for 22. He did make one bad cut on a fourth-quarter run for no gain. However, McCarthy must not trust Grant in protection because he didn't use him on a single third down. Kuhn, the more rugged pass blocker, played eight of his 33 snaps at FB and the other 25 as a one back. Minus James Starks and Brandon Saine, McCarthy debuted Cobb in wildcat formation on a 4-yard run.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (1)**

Mike Neal, the great hope of the D-line, is nowhere. Even short-handed without Ryan Pickett (concussion), the Packers used Neal for merely 12 plays. After an unimpressive first half, Neal didn't see the field again until halfway through the fourth quarter. Lined up at RE in the 3-4, Neal was buried into the ground by TE Leonard Pope as the ball carrier ran through his gap for 7 yards. That was the end of his afternoon. Listed at 294, Neal looks 10 to 15 pounds lighter. He's strong as an ox in the weight room but isn't playing with an anchor or a wide enough base. Neal did make his first play in 105 snaps this season, trashing LT Branden Albert and helping drag down Jackie Battle for 5. Otherwise, he was stalemated on his rushes and buckled on runs. Of his 71 snaps, coordinator Dom Capers played 38 in the 3-4 and 16 in the 4-4. B.J. Raji (64), the most effective player, and Howard Green (49) had snaps at both ends and NT, and hard-trying C.J. Wilson (52) worked at both ends. Jarius Wynn (32) generally worked alongside Raji in nickel. Raji's penetration wrecked a fourth-and-goal run from the 3. He was OK at the point; he didn't generate much pressure. The pathetic four-minute defense got off to a terrible start when Green got too high and was uncharacteristically driven five yards back.

## **LINEBACKERS (1 ½)**

Returning after a two-game absence, A.J. Hawk delivered some stiff shots in the box and on the goal-line. He also was responsible for the Chiefs' biggest play on their tone-setting 79-yard drive to open the game. The Packers were in man coverage when WR Terrance Copper ran a shallow crossing route away from the side of a screen pass. When Hawk went to jam Copper, RB Thomas Jones, who was Hawk's man, had the entire right side of the field by himself for a 27-yard gain. Chiefs offensive coordinator Bill Muir took advantage of the fast-flowing LBs with an assortment of reverses, bootlegs and screens. Rookie D.J. Smith had a very long day. In the first half, he couldn't seem to see over or get away from Albert on four or five runs. He was late arriving on some screens. He stayed square, failing to turn and get better depth on a 39-yard seam route to Pope. At times, it almost seems as if he's looking to hear yelling of instructions from the sidelines. He was late lining up wide on a 13-yard quick hitch to Dwayne Bowe. He's tough and made some tackles in the second half, but Desmond Bishop was sorely missed. On the outside, Clay Matthews, Erik Walden and Frank Zombo have been better. Matthews was active, ruining a reverse and a screen. He also dragged down speedy Dexter McCluster at the 2 with excellent matchup coverage. On 25 graded dropbacks, Matthews was single-blocked on nine, double-teamed on four, ran stunts on three and dropped into coverage on nine. At times, a RB was waiting for Matthews behind highly vulnerable RT Barry Richardson. Still Matthews has to muster more than just one-half of a pressure. Walden's feel for rush and reverses just isn't there. With the Chiefs in a bootleg part of the field, Walden didn't lay a glove on plodding TE Anthony Becht, who released cleanly to beat Charlie Peprah for 16 yards to set up the winning TD. Right in the middle of the series, the coaches then pulled Walden (61 snaps) and inserted Zombo for the final 10. He didn't seem any better.

## **SECONDARY (2 ½)**

Charles Woodson really threw his body around and made a series of jarring tackles. On the goal-line, he made a great read, running through and stopping Battle for minus-1 on what otherwise would have been a 3-yard TD. On the late slant-and-go to Bowe for 15, Woodson was on point being underneath to intercept a possible slant because Peprah was behind him. But because Peprah lacks boundary range, it was an easy completion for Kyle Orton. Woodson did end up on the ground on two coverage misfires. Tramon Williams made two sharp breakups on well-thrown balls down the sidelines. He also was responsible, along with Peprah, for the 33-yard corner route to Pope. Williams bit on the run fake in a Cover 2 situation when he needed to be playing it deep to short. With all the misdirection, Muir obviously was trying to make Williams and Sam Shields come up in run support. Neither one of them is at all physical. They either stay blocked or aren't real eager about getting in the mix. Morgan Burnett was borderline awful. He was looked out of center field again, this time on the seam to Pope. He also took a poor angle and got caught hopelessly inside on Steve Breaston's 25-yard reverse when it was his routine assignment to stay outside and contain it. His run support in the four-minute was ineffectual as well. He just isn't playing smart football.

## **KICKERS (4½)**

Tim Masthay averaged 53.4 yards (gross), 46.2 (net) and 4.19 seconds (hang time) in five punts, and four were inside the 21. From his end zone, he pounded a 71-yarder over Arenas' head. Earlier, he did a great job barely avoiding a block and still placing a 51-yard boot out of bounds at the 16. Mason Crosby's onside kick was placed well but wasn't high enough. His 59-yard miss (wide right) was nullified by penalty. His 54-yard miss (wide right) was hit well but didn't blow inside as Crosby expected that it would.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)**

Nelson made a tremendous effort trying to bat the onside kick in-bounds to where Jamari Lattimore and M.D. Jennings were in position for the recovery. Lattimore was effective overall. The near punt block by WR Jeremy Horne was the responsibility of LBs Rob Francois and Tom Crabtree. Two of Brett Goode's snaps weren't very accurate. Cobb had a pedestrian return. Jarrett Bush's holding penalty was the first on a punt return all season.

## **OVERALL (1½)**

*From the Dec. 20, 2011, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*