

Rating the Packers: Week 16 vs Bears

It's all about the offense for Packers

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers have outscored their opponents by 197 points but have been out-gained by 78 yards.

Green Bay's imbalance was there for millions to see Sunday night in its 35-21 victory over the Chicago Bears that earned the Packers No. 1 seeding in the NFC playoffs for the first time in 15 years.

Aaron Rodgers and his supporting cast, minus the top three tackles and wide receiver Greg Jennings, made the most of merely 51 snaps. Their per-play average of 7.1 yards was the best since Week 4.

On the other hand, the Packers yielded more than 400 yards (441 to be exact) for the eighth time in the last 10 games. The defense against the run couldn't have been more wretched.

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

RECEIVERS (4 footballs)

James Jones, Randall Cobb and James Starks never saw the field in the opening nine-play, 80-yard drive from no-huddle mode. Instead, the Packers went right down the field with Tom Crabtree as a conventional TE on eight plays and as a WR on one, Jermichael Finley with his hand down three times and split wide on five, Donald Driver on the right side nine times and Jordy Nelson on the left side eight times and in the right slot once. Against this, the Bears couldn't substitute much from their 4-3 base personnel. The mismatch came against Finley, who had three receptions for 20 yards. On the final two, he was covered by SLB Nick Roach. The 2-yard TD came when the Bears sent SS Major Wright out to cover Crabtree wide right and Roach out to cover Finley wide left. Roach had no chance when Rodgers checked to Finley on a one-step slant. The game-changing play was Nelson's 55-yard TD. Although the Packers have run the same two-man route off play action four or five times, SS Major Wright still was too shallow and too wide in a two-high shell. Nelson got him leaning outside, then burned him to the post. Jones showed surprising burst on a 12-yard crossing route in which he ran away from CB Charles Tillman and outflanked Wright in the middle. You've got to admire Crabtree's chutzpah when he went grill-to-grill with DE Julius Peppers after one early play. Nelson led with 31 snaps, one more than Driver. The only drop was by Finley.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Other than the final 12 snaps last Sunday in Kansas City, T.J. Lang hadn't played RT in more than a year. With LT Marshall Newhouse coming off a poor outing against OLB Tamba Hali, the Bears might have figured Peppers was in for a field day wherever he lined up. By the time Peppers sat out most of the fourth quarter, he had played about 75% of the time over Newhouse and 25% over Lang. His other snap came over Josh Sitton. Peppers had 1½ hurries (against Newhouse) and no tackles. He did push Newhouse deep into the backfield on a carry for no gain by James Starks. The Packers gave Newhouse more help than normal, which made sense. Newhouse was much steadier than a week ago. Operating mostly against DE Israel Idonije, an underrated veteran, Lang gave up one-half hurry (to Idonije) and no "bad" runs. Lang moved his feet reasonably well to the outside and kept his hands inside. When Idonije threatened to turn the corner, Lang was able to maintain some semblance of leverage and Rodgers stayed safe. Just as he has done much of the year at LG, Lang was able to provide a physical presence in the run game. Other than the one-half hurry by talented Henry Melton against Scott Wells, the Bears' four DTs went nowhere on the rush. Sitton is rounding back into form, and Evan Dietrich-Smith really battled in pass protection and didn't get beat once. Both Sitton and Dietrich-Smith had a "bad" run when beaten by Melton.

QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)

D-coordinator Rod Marinelli blitzed even less (18%) on passes than in the Week 3 meeting. The Bears also played more eight in the box in the first half as if expecting Mike McCarthy to run the ball. When the makeshift O-line gave Rodgers superb protection (no sacks, one knockdown), he picked apart Marinelli's scheme with five TD passes. Three were at the expense of CB Zack Bowman, who made his first start when Tim Jennings was benched. There were only three or four of 29 throws in which Rodgers wasn't on target. The bomb to Nelson that covered 62 yards in the air was a thing of beauty. On the next series, Rodgers split Brian Urlacher and Lance Briggs on a 12-yard scramble, completed two third-and-long passes and then found Jones in the corner for a 7-yard TD. That made it 28-10 and, after one more TD, Rodgers turned the last 8 minutes over to Matt Flynn.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

Ryan Grant was impressive for the third straight game, which in a way minimizes the team's concern about James Starks. If Grant had remained the same pedestrian back that he had been for the first 12 games, the Packers might be in trouble. After sitting out two weeks with a recurring ankle injury, Starks returned only to leave late in the third quarter because the ankle flared up. Before that, Starks showed evidence of a young player who really misses practice. In the second quarter, Starks made a poor read, got strung out trying to go wide and gained just 1. On the 21st of his 23 snaps, Starks went the wrong way and Rodgers had to eat the ball. Grant also short-circuited on a running play, making the same kind of mistake and forcing Rodgers to tuck and run. However, in his other 20 snaps, Grant played well. He timed his release perfectly on a first-quarter screen, burst through traffic and got everything he could from a well-executed screen of 32 yards. On an outside zone run of 24 yards, Grant bounced around Peppers and Roach. When SS Major Wright showed up 15 yards downfield, Grant went collision-seeking and ran him over to gain an extra 9. The third-and-1 carry by Grant failed when Sitton and Crabtree didn't block their men. A month ago, the chances of Grant being offered a new contract seemed unlikely. The Packers still might decide to move on, but if Grant can sustain or even exceed this performance level it could be a very tough decision. Brandon Saine gained an extra 5 yards on his only carry with the 295-pound Melton on his back. John Kuhn didn't have a touch in 20 snaps.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1/2)

The Packers will be hard-pressed to get past the first round of the playoffs with a unit playing this poorly. Mike Trgovac's D-lines have always been long on intensity, but it wasn't that way this time. On play after play, the Packers played too high, got knocked back off the line, washed inside or failed to get off blocks. The only spark came from C.J. Wilson (36 snaps), who started for a second straight week at LE for Ryan Pickett (concussion). He had six tackles, mainly because he showed some pop and desire coming off RTs Lance Louis and Frank Omiyale. Wilson also beat C Roberto Garza with a bull rush for the only knockdown by a D-lineman. When Pickett's in uniform, he plays the 1-technique (shoulder of the center) in some base fronts whereas B.J. Raji plays the 3-technique (outside shoulder of the guard). Without Pickett, Raji has to play the 1-technique, which isn't his forte. The Bears ran for 199 yards in 42 rushes (5.0), and Raji, in 54 snaps, was credited with one-half tackle. He didn't stay square on a consistent basis. The Bears' long rush, a 20-yard burst off the left side by Kahlil Bell, opened wide when Howard Green (19) was shoved several steps inside by LT J'Marcus Webb. When the Packers played nickel expecting run, it was Wilson and Raji. When pass was expected, it was Jarius Wynn (39) and Raji. After playing just four snaps in the first three quarters, Mike Neal got 19 in garbage time. It took six games, but Neal finally got his first pressure with a nice spin move against LG Edwin Williams.

LINEBACKERS (1 1/2)

Clay Matthews easily was the best player on defense. The Bears made a living running away from him. He did make several tackles chasing the ball carrier down from behind. When the Bears did come his way, Matthews set a strong edge and sometimes used up more than one blocker. His instincts are incredible. Twice he sniffed out screens on zone drops, swooping up to force a fumble from Kahlil Bell and tackling FB Tyler Clutts for a 2-yard gain on another. His greatest play was the interception at point-blank range. When Matthews recognized a flat pass coming behind him, he backed away from Bell's attempted cut block, leaped and hung on to the ball. On the other side, Erik Walden was benched seven plays into the third quarter. Besides Matthews, the OLB snap counts were Walden (36), Vic So'oto (24), Brad Jones (17) and Jamari Lattimore (eight). Walden is a tough guy. He also plays too high, loses leverage and just isn't very aware. So'oto did have two late pressures. He also was stumbling around, sometimes with his head down as he crashed pell-mell into blockers. He's green as grass. Jones and Lattimore both lack size and made no impact. On the inside, A.J. Hawk was awful. Despite his size and strength, he plays small and doesn't shed blocks. He was late recognizing blocking combinations, didn't move well laterally and failed on some run-throughs. After missing three games, Desmond Bishop's timing was way off. He was reckless and had a few big hits but also missed four tackles.

SECONDARY (1 ½)

There were five missed tackles, including two by Sam Shields. This just isn't a good tackling unit. Despite the 34 carries by RBs, the only big hit by the safeties was Charlie Peprah's forced fumble against Bell. Morgan Burnett isn't providing a physical presence and must curb his ongoing tendency to vacate the middle in one-high looks. When Dom Capers blitzed CBs, Peprah didn't have the cover skills to handle WRs. Charles Woodson had great coverage against Earl Bennett on the deep seam route that was intercepted by Peprah. Late in the game, Woodson went for a pick even though Burnett had his flat responsibility covered and the result was TE Kellen Davis being wide open for a 1-yard TD. Blown coverages like that have been too common all season. Capers used Woodson at safety three times in the base 3-4. He tackled fearlessly. Williams had a good day in coverage other than the 9-yard option route to Bennett that ruptured into 49 when Williams fell down and then whiffed on the tackle.

KICKERS (4½)

Hampered by lower-leg injuries for more than a month, Devin Hester lacks some of his devil-may-care attitude and quick-cutting ability. Still, Tim Masthay did what he could to keep Hester under wraps, averaging 44 yards (gross), 42.3 (net) and 4.08 seconds (hang time) in four punts. Three were inside the 20. Masthay's first punt, a 48-yard Aussie that was too low (3.53), was returned 7 yards by Hester for his only punt-return yards. Mason Crosby tried to kick deep on five of his six kickoffs and averaged 66.4 and 3.81. Hester averaged 23.4.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4 ½)

This was one of the few times in Lovie Smith's eight-year tenure that the Packers did more than just hold their own. Jarrett Bush (four tackles) and Pat Lee (two) kept beating blockers to keep Hester under control. Randall Cobb has become more patient; he's more willing now to take a touchback. But when Robbie Gould's boot carried just to the 1, Cobb brought it back 34 yards to set up a TD. After having two shaky snaps last week due in part to the winds of Arrowhead, Brett Goode had a very low punt snap.

OVERALL (3½)

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