

# Rating the Packers: Week 1 vs 49ers

## Packers not positioned properly against San Francisco

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - The San Francisco 49ers proved Sunday at Lambeau Field why they gave the New York Giants a much better game than the Green Bay Packers did eight months ago in the playoffs.

Other than quarterback and wide receiver, the 49ers seem to have an edge over the Packers at every position group. When the Packers didn't even play particularly well at their strongest positions, it was no surprise that the 49ers prevailed as a 4½-point underdog in the opener, 30-22.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the 49ers, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

### **RECEIVERS (2½)**

Ed Donatell, fired as defensive coordinator in Green Bay after the 2003 season, had the secondary that he now coaches in San Francisco primed. Other than a pair of tackle-breaking runs by James Jones, the receivers paid a price after almost every reception. Greg Jennings, who suffered a concussion in August, wasn't his normal aggressive self after the catch. He gained 18 of his 34 receiving yards after the catch; Jordy Nelson's YAC was 15 of 64. The 49ers played a lot of Cover-2 Man, and FS Dashon Goldson delivered some withering shots. For the first time since 1999, Donald Driver wasn't even in the game plan. He ended up playing the final three snaps only after Jennings pulled a groin. Otherwise, he would have had a "DNP" after his name. Even after one of the top four WRs would run a deep pattern, Mike McCarthy still wouldn't insert Driver. If Jennings can't go Thursday, it will be interesting to see if McCarthy uses Driver or Jarrett Boykin. Out of 68 snaps, Nelson played 65, Jennings played 63 and Jones played 58. Randall Cobb went 15 at WR and 20 at RB. On two occasions, Jones made two members of the 49ers' great tackling secondary miss. YAC used to be a weakness for Jones, but he posted a career-best mark last year and he's off to a tremendous start. However, Jones wasn't able to separate from CB Tarell Brown or nickel back Chris Culliver on take-off routes, and he drew an interference penalty for pushing off against Culliver on a third. Sometimes it seems as if Jermichael Finley is worried too much what he might do with the ball. He needs to just focus on the catch. A tough grader would ding him for two drops. Of Finley's 58 snaps, 48 were from a three-point stance, three were in the backfield and just seven came split wide.

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

Marshall Newhouse won't face a more difficult assignment than RDE Justin Smith and ROLB Aldon Smith. Let's charge Newhouse with one hurry against Aldon Smith, but that might be nit-picking. Justin Smith is the gold standard when it comes to run defense, power rushing and stunts. The 49ers probably ran 20 stunts, but not once they did beat the tandem of Newhouse and Lang. Newhouse held up much better physically than expected. Justin Smith manhandles many LTs, and while there was considerable push it wasn't ever a flat-out walk-back. Lang anchored very well, passed off the stunts and even got movement against Justin Smith on a 4-yard run, the longest by a back all afternoon. Remarkably, LDE Ray McDonald probably played every bit as well as Justin Smith. Although Josh Sitton didn't give up a single pressure and had no "bad" runs, he struggled mightily staying in front of the powerful McDonald. Neither Bryan Bulaga nor Jeff Saturday was on his game. Bulaga allowed two pressures and two "bad" runs, and also was penalized twice. Saturday was just OK in the run game and yielded four pressures, including two each by McDonald and LOLB Ahmad Brooks.

## **QUARTERBACKS (2)**

Aaron Rodgers opened last season with 12 straight passer ratings of over 100. He was on fire. After a ho-hum August, he lost a decision to one of the NFL's finest defenses. The 49ers are going to be better than a lot of quarterbacks, just like they were better than Rodgers. Defensive coordinator Vic Fangio fooled Rodgers for the only turnover in the game and the result was the game-changing interception by LB NaVorro Bowman. Amazingly enough, it was the only pass in the pocket that started with Rodgers under center. Otherwise, he was in shotgun on 63 of 68 plays. Has it reached the point where Rodgers is no longer comfortable taking a five-step drop? With the proliferation of no-huddle and spread offense, who knows? Rodgers also was responsible for the sack by CB Carlos Rogers because he didn't get the ball out. The next time Fangio tried the same blitz, Rodgers completed a 5-yard pass. SS Donte Whitner was inches away from a 23-yard pick-6 when Rodgers made another misread and threw off his back foot. Not only was his patience off, so was his accuracy. He missed Jennings on the sideline and threw behind Finley twice. Early in the third quarter, Rodgers decided to launch a 68-yard bomb to Nelson even though Goldson didn't bite on the bootleg action. It was third and 1. There had to be another option rather than airing it out into double coverage and punting. The 49ers hid their intentions until very late in the play clock and confused Rodgers just enough. That's almost impossible to do.

## **RUNNING BACKS (2½)**

With Alex Green (knee) not playing, Cedric Benson started and played 25 snaps. A third-and-1 was his only snap on third down. John Kuhn took 13 snaps, including none at fullback in the first half and five in the second half. The major development was McCarthy's decision to use Cobb on the majority of passing downs after the first series. Cobb lined up in the backfield 20 times and then motioned out to receiver on seven. In all, four of his catches came from out of the backfield, four came as a WR and one came when he shifted outside. On one play, he made two of the 49ers' crisp tacklers miss on an 11-yard gain. The Packers will have to scheme to prevent the 192-pound Cobb from doing much blitz pickup. It'll be worth it, however, because Cobb is such an exciting player in the open field. Benson was just kind of swallowed up whole by the 49ers' front.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (1)**

When the 49ers wanted to move on the ground, they did. When they wanted to pass, this unit didn't pose the least problem. The only pressure was by B.J. Raji early against C Jonathan Goodwin. Playing on a bum ankle, Raji was active in the first half but much less so in the second. In all, he played 52 of 66 snaps. At least he threatened the pocket. Ryan Pickett played 47 snaps, including 12 at NT on the 29 plays that Dom Capers used the 3-4 base front. It was Pickett's first game back from a calf injury, and he was so-so. C.J. Wilson made two tackles in the first quarter on back-side pursuit but suffered a groin injury and departed after 12 snaps. At first, the Packers replaced Wilson with rookie Jerel Worthy in the base. Worthy played 35 snaps in all, but Phillip Merling played five snaps more than Worthy in the second half and finished with 26. At this point, Worthy hasn't shown the quickness or the strength to beat good linemen. Rookie Mike Daniels was inactive.

### **LINEBACKERS (3)**

The 49ers double-teamed Clay Matthews on just 28% of passes, figuring that LT Joe Staley, their best O-lineman, could handle the assignment. Look for Matthews to start seeing more doubles immediately because Staley couldn't handle him. Matthews had a great summer and, based on Sunday, probably is playing better than he ever has. He beat Staley for 2½ sacks, including 1½ on speed rushes and another on a bull rush. When Staley set outside to protect the edge, Matthews would knock him straight back, trash him or knock him to his knees. He finished with 4½ pressures whereas Nick Perry had one. Perry displayed surprising awareness, ruining a naked pitch and end-around by staying at home. Now he needs to expand his limited pass-rush repertoire and set a much firmer edge against the run. On Frank Gore's runs for 21 and 23 yards, both LG Mike Iupati and FB Bruce Miller were able to turn the corner cleanly because Perry was hooked so badly at the point of attack. Maybe he needs to line up wider. It was way too easy. On the inside, A.J. Hawk came to play and made a host of tackles. His best play came on third and 1 when he burst through an opening inside and, together with Charles Woodson, halted Gore for no gain. D.J. Smith struggled seeing over the 49ers' towering O-line and missed three tackles. He's a lot better slipping blocks than getting off them. Neither player did much on their combined total of nine blitzes. Dezman Moses played about five snaps but didn't factor.

### **SECONDARY (1½)**

Tramon Williams got off to a disappointing start in what he hopes is a comeback season. By comparison, the 49ers' cornerbacks were so much more aggressive. By missing Michael Crabtree on the sideline, Williams gave up an extra 12 yards. With a chance to slam Mario Manningham in front of the Green Bay bench, he stayed back and permitted the former Giant to pick up 11 and a first down. The Packers need him to be outstanding, not mediocre. On the other side, Jarrett Bush played on base downs, Sam Shields played on sub downs and Casey Hayward didn't play at all. Bush and everyone else in the secondary seemed petrified of Randy Moss' speed and played soft coverage. Challenge the guy and see what he has left at 35. Shields showed willpower by sticking his face into Gore on a swing pass and stopping him just short on third and 2. Both Bush and Woodson had third-down penalties to keep drives going. On Gore's 23-yard TD run, Woodson's job in secondary containment is to turn him back inside. He slipped charging downhill, arrived too late and then was upended by Miller's cut block. Later, Morgan Burnett fanned on Gore at the 2. Woodson had an impressive 1½ sacks out of just five rushes. Out of position on Moss' 14-yard TD and then making a feeble attempted tackle on Gore's 21-yard run, M.D. Jennings was benched in the middle of a series for Jerron McMillian.

### **KICKERS (4½)**

Tim Masthay's six punts, including four end-over-end Aussie style, averaged 48.2 yards (gross), 41.5 (net) and 4.51 seconds of hang time. He also put four inside the 20 and had one touchback. Mason Crosby parked three of his four kickoffs for touchbacks, averaging 72.5 and 4.05.

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (4½)**

Cobb broke a 75-yard punt return for a TD against a special-teams unit that ranked No. 1 in the NFL last season. The key blocks were delivered by Brad Jones, Brandon Saine and Terrell Manning. It sure looked like Manning blocked RB Anthony Dixon in the back, but the officials picked up their penalty flag. Cobb also muffed a punt but picked it right back up. Shields drew one penalty and probably should have had another for an illegal block in the back. Instead, the refs called it on 49er C.J. Spillman, which made no sense whatsoever. The Packers knew that David Akers would have to kick his record-tying 63-yard FG low to get it there. The only defender with his hands up was the squatty Raji.

### **OVERALL (2½)**

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