

Rating the Packers: Week 3 at Seahawks

Capers' plans overwhelm Chicago again

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Green Bay - The sun rose Tuesday, as it did Wednesday and will each day of the Green Bay Packers' season.

As heinous as the final seconds might have been Monday in Seattle, all the Packers can do is look ahead rather than back. Since winning 19 games in a row, they're 3-4 in their last seven after a crushing 14-12 defeat against the Seahawks.

At this point, the Packers are a team with little identity. At CenturyLink Field, the passing game - the crème de la crème in the National Football League - was barely passable given atrocious protection and a lousy performance by the wide receivers.

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

RECEIVERS (1)

From snap to end, here were the times of Aaron Rodgers' eight sacks: 3.0 seconds, 2.9, 3.7, 4.5, 4.3, 5.4, 2.6 and 4.9 seconds. Time after time, CBs Brandon Browner and Richard Sherman manned up against Jordy Nelson, Greg Jennings and James Jones and made them look ordinary. The best by far was Jones, who caught five of his seven targeted throws for 55 yards (four first downs). He handled the tight, aggressive coverage better than his teammates and was much better after the catch, too. Recognizing that Jones was playing well, position coach Edgar Bennett played him almost as much (50 snaps) as Nelson (54) and Jennings (53). Jones showed again how good of a low-ball catcher he is. He also got north and south in a hurry and was very aware of the first-down markers. Jennings returned after a groin injury but wasn't sharp. Early in the second quarter, the Seahawks didn't cover down in the slot on second and 2, so when Rodgers flipped Jennings a quick pass behind the line there were 8 yards between him and SS Kam Chancellor. Instead of making sure of the first down, he danced and gained just 1. After a sack on third down, a promising drive ended with a punt. With Donald Driver out of the game plan, most of the slot work goes to Jennings. It's a whole new world there compared to his years as the split end, and it's not clear the change will be compatible with his age and skill set. Nelson didn't gain much separation, either, in a disappointing showing. After playing just three snaps in the first half, Bennett inserted Driver on the 13th play of the second half. When the old pro couldn't hang on to a humming 10-yard pass in the middle of the end zone, he was done for the night. Strangely, Randall Cobb was in for merely five snaps as a WR and three as a RB. The only pass play for 20 yards or more was a 31-yard strike to Jermichael Finley, who made a fine catch with FS Earl Thomas all over his back. Finley isn't afraid to block; his frame and his footwork remain limitations. After using 1.2 tight ends per snap in the first half, Mike McCarthy averaged 1.6 in the second half.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1)

Bryan Bulaga and Marshall Newhouse have been getting beat too much inside since the exhibition games. That's the shortest route to the QB and just can't happen. Bulaga appeared to play without any confidence against rookie DE Bruce Irvin, who beat him inside for two sacks plus a hurry. On the first third down, Irvin knocked Bulaga back and off his feet with an arm bar to the chest. Whereas Bulaga had one of the worst days of his career with three sacks, one knockdown and two hurries for a total of six pressures, Newhouse allowed 2½. Newhouse was fairly solid in protection except for whiffing on DE Chris Clemons' inside charge for a sack. At times, Newhouse was late off the ball. That was part of the reason he did such a poor job cutting off the back side in the run game. He was responsible for three of the six "bad" runs, with an even split between point-of-attack blocks and back-side blocks. It's hard even to run an offense when your third-year tackles aren't able to protect inside. The guards and C Jeff Saturday were much better. T.J. Lang was extremely physical, cutting defenders down and then screwing them into the turf. On Cedric Benson's TD, he and Saturday pancaked DT Clinton McDonald in the hole. Lang really made an effort to get downfield and he got consistent movement in-line. His only miss in the run game came when he was late getting off a double-team to prevent SLB K.J. Wright from smearing Benson for minus-3. Josh Sitton wasn't as physical as Lang but he didn't have a pressure or "bad" run, and he had a tough opponent in DT Jason Jones. Saturday kept blocking his man for the third-quarter rushing attack. He's better in-line than at the LB level, where his limitations in speed and athletic ability are more pronounced. The Packers wouldn't have had a chance if Saturday didn't hop on Benson's late fumble among a sea of Seahawks.

QUARTERBACKS (3½)

The odds were against Rodgers. His coach had an awful, pass-heavy game plan. The noise was excessive. Hungry pass rushers kept beating the tackles inside. His WRs weren't getting open. Of the eight first-half sacks, Rodgers was charged with 2½. He was indecisive and held the ball too long on occasion. Maybe he was stunned his receivers weren't separating. Rodgers didn't run as often as usual, perhaps because Irvin and Clemons are much faster than typical DEs and might have run him down. Normally, a QB will start to get antsy in the pocket after taking that many shots. Instead, Rodgers only seemed to play harder and with more focus, and by the fourth quarter he was mastering his tormentors. Once again, Rodgers didn't fumble because of his iron-clad, two-handed grip on the football. The go-ahead drive that he engineered in the fourth quarter might have been his most impressive of the season. Man, that was a courageous scramble on third and 1 at the goal-line. He sold out against WLB Leroy Hill and McDonald, stretched the ball forward and picked it up.

RUNNING BACKS (2)

Against Chicago, Benson gave up a sack by not executing his assignment properly on a screen pass. In Seattle, the screen game remained a mess. It's a vital weapon to take the edge off a pass rush, but Benson is far from an accomplished receiver and it hurts the offense. Unlike Seattle's Marshawn Lynch, one of the NFL's most violent ball carriers, Benson is more natural. One time Clemons beat Bulaga inside right where Benson's course was headed, but after taking the handoff he paused, adjusted to the defender in his face and worked outside for a 5-yard gain. If Newhouse had done a better job on the back side, Benson would have gained far more than 45 yards in 17 carries. Late in the game, the Packers were in an I-formation with a first down at their 7. Browner blitzed hard off the play side, eluded John Kuhn's block and slammed into Benson at the 2. Staying upright, he took another step or two up the field and then fumbled. Despite being in good health, Alex Green wasn't used. Apparently because of protection issues, Cobb played sparingly. Kuhn took 45 snaps, including a whopping 30 as a FB in the I-formation.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

This was Ryan Pickett's kind of game. Seattle wanted to press its ground game, and it was up to the base defense to stop it. Working against a top player in C Max Unger and tough guys in LG Paul McQuistan and RT Breno Giacomini, Pickett (30 snaps) was credited with nine tackles. Pickett occupied two blockers much of the time and often extricated an arm to slow down Lynch. After 10 days of intense preparation, the D-linemen stayed on their feet better than other Seahawks' opponents. B.J. Raji (32) is seldom as consistent taking on blocks as Pickett but gave great effort this week and was solid. Raji was cut down a time or two, but that happens. C.J. Wilson (15) played in base only. The Packers continued to play rookie Jerel Worthy (29) even though he almost never makes anything happen. He was the lone D-lineman in Dom Capers' "psycho" package, and fellow rookie Mike Daniels had just three snaps. Late in the game, the Seahawks ran Lynch right at Worthy on fourth and 2 and, when he played too high, McQuistan and LT Russell Okung pancaked him. No D-lineman had a pressure.

LINEBACKERS (3½)

Okung, the sixth pick in the 2010 draft, held up better against Clay Matthews than 49ers LT Joe Staley did on opening day. Matthews had 4½ pressures, but just 1½ came against Okung. Matthews gave Okung more problems in the run game, jumping underneath him once or twice to make plays. Matthews' speed and reckless disregard for his body make him a tremendous threat to teams that don't bother blocking him on runs to the far side. Matthews did lose contain on the last play, enabling Wilson to have 6.7 seconds before releasing the TD pass. Nick Perry started at LOLB, but in the end Erik Walden played more snaps, 32-29. Perry continues to feel his way. He was caught peeking in the backfield early and TE Anthony McCoy slipped behind him for a 9-yard gain. Walden plays with more overall speed, but Perry showed a burst chasing down Wilson for a sack. Perry's pass rush remains pedestrian. A.J. Hawk played hard; he was one of the main reasons Lynch's long gain in 25 carries was just 9 yards. D.J. Smith lost his cool and took a 15-yard penalty for retaliating after McQuistan drilled him. Smith's contributions against the run are contingent to a large extent upon the D-line. Often, he just gets engulfed when guards are able to come off on him. When Capers rushed five or more on just 25% of passes, Hawk didn't have a single blitz for the first time since the 2009 playoff game.

SECONDARY (3½)

You could say that M.D. Jennings showed more on the final play than he has at any time in his brief career in Green Bay. He got up, hung in the air, attacked the ball and caught it. Charles Woodson spends a lot of time these days directing the secondary, a role in which he seems fairly content. His holding penalty and the obvious late pass-interference penalty that wasn't called indicate his ability to cover is waning. He also would prefer going for the strip than taking on ball carriers head-on. Sam Shields made his second start at RC and had another impressive game. After last season, it's remarkable watching him mirror WRs downfield. Not only isn't he shying away from contact, he's supporting the run without hesitation. Rookies Jerron McMillian (sub-package safety) and Casey Hayward (dime back) had strong performances, too. They're both active against run and pass. Tramon Williams was way too late recognizing the play-action pass to Golden Tate, who turned him in a circle before catching a 41-yard TD. It was Williams' coverage all the way.

KICKERS (3½)

Former Packer Jon Ryan had a better game than Tim Masthay, whose averages were 44.5 yards (gross), 43.7 (net) and 4.27 seconds (hang time). Masthay had two punts with sub-3.5 hang time. Mason Crosby hit FGs of 29 and 40 yards and averaged 70.5 and 4.01 on four kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2½)

Cobb had his second fumble on a punt return in three games. Late in the game, on Masthay's poor punt, the disciplined coverage of M.D. Jennings, Brad Jones, Dezman Moses and Brett Goode resulted in a return for minus-1 by dangerous Leon Washington. Jarrett Bush and Rob Francois drew major penalties, and Brandon Saine was illegally downfield. After being beat once as a holdup man on the punt-return team, Bush made amends with a beautiful downing of a punt.

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