

Rating the Packers: Week 5 at Colts

Secondary was torched by Luck, Wayne

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers looked like a team Sunday that thought the game was over at halftime. For the Indianapolis Colts, whose fire and emotion put the Packers to shame, the game hadn't yet begun.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 30-27 defeat at Lucas Oil Stadium, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

RECEIVERS (1½)

Mike McCarthy went out of his way this week to get Jermichael Finley out of his funk. On the first play of his script, he split Finley wide left against LCB Cassius Vaughn, who along with nickel back Josh Gordy were pressed into duty because of injury. The ball went straight to Finley on a run-pass option from Aaron Rodgers, but all Finley could gain was 2. On the second play, Finley ran a basic Y-stick route for 3. Before departing with a shoulder injury early in the third quarter, Finley had another critical drop on a short pass that probably would have given the Packers a first down just into Colts territory with 1 minute left in the half. That was disappointing enough, but his blocking was even worse. On a toss, Finley was late off the ball and couldn't cut off LB Dwight Freeney at the point, which knocked the blocking askew and wrecked the play. On an 18-yard screen pass, Finley had a variety of opponents that he could have looked up and decked as Cedric Benson slammed for 18. Because Finley doesn't play like a tough guy, he really didn't block anyone. His blocking probably is getting worse. He also had a motion penalty. Tom Crabtree's snap count climbed to 30 in Finley's absence. Although regarded by the coaches as one of the most fundamentally sound blockers on the roster, Crabtree had a rough day. Even though Crabtree outweighs OLB Robert Mathis by 10 pounds, he turned his shoulders and made it too easy for Mathis to sack Rodgers in 2.6 seconds. He also had a penalty for holding Freeney and was displaced a yard or more into the backfield on several run blocks. D.J. Williams (22) was the best tight end. Jordy Nelson (62 snaps) dropped his fourth pass in five games and was held to two receptions by a weak secondary. The top performers once again were James Jones (64) and Randall Cobb (44). Jones isn't a burner, but he gets north-south in a hurry and is carrying himself with confidence. Cobb plucked an in route against Gordy and burst by FS Antoine Bethea like he wasn't even there on his 31-yard TD. Donald Driver (eight) had another drop and then was partially responsible for a "bad" run by not blocking Gordy. Benched for the majority of two quarters after that, Driver came back to catch a key 14-yarder in the final minute.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

Revved-up DE Cory Redding had a pair of sacks but they weren't because of Josh Sitton, who opposed him much of the day. Sitton did get enough of a piece of penetrating Redding on his fourth-quarter stunt-sack in which he bowled over Jeff Saturday. Sitton was the only O-lineman without a "bad" run or pressure. Both he and T.J. Lang, the other top performer, threw exceptional downfield blocks on the long screen pass. Sitton looked good on a trap block that sprung Alex Green for 9. Lang got movement on the goal line for John Kuhn. There's so much to like about Lang, who goes about his business with a controlled fury. In the second half, he was late getting onto the MLB and it led to a "bad" run. Newhouse did a fine job handling Freeney's spin move, which has been the bane of many a tackle over the last decade. He never set his anchor on Freeney's power rush for a sack and, at times, floundered on the back side. Bryan Bulaga was totally off-balance on Mathis' spin move for a knockdown and allowed 3 ½ pressures in all. Saturday's shotgun snapping has been as good as advertised. At 37, he must rely on his experience and will to perform at an acceptable level.

QUARTERBACKS (2½)

Greg Manusky blitzed Rodgers 32.5% in 2010 when he coordinated the 49ers and just 23% last season when he led the Chargers D. This time, after a conservative first half, he threw the book at the Packers and ended with a 38% pressure rate on passes. Manusky came with the pressure despite his shaky secondary. Trailing by 18 points at halftime, he had nothing to lose, and it worked perfectly. All five of the Colts' second-half sacks came on five-man rushes. Rodgers was responsible for 1 ½ of the five, holding the ball and coming across as indecisive. In those previous games against Manusky, his passer ratings were 135.1 and 145.8 and his combined completion percentage was 75%. At this point, Rodgers isn't throwing with his old pinpoint accuracy. McCarthy put Rodgers in the shotgun 44 times, hoping to spread the opponent and do brisk business on the perimeter. But after a solid first half, Rodgers just looked very common in the second. He did bolt for 57 yards. Despite being decked seven times, he just will not fumble. If Rodgers said his interception to Jones was tipped at the line, he would know better than anyone else in Green Bay. The bottom line on the timeout that cost the Packers a chance to kick a shorter tying FG is Rodgers didn't handle the situation properly.

RUNNING BACKS (2½)

The foot injury that knocked Cedric Benson from the lineup after 16 snaps curtailed the offense. You might ding Benson for a read or two, but he also made something out of nothing on a carry for 9. When OLB Justin Hickman beat TE Ryan Taylor inside, he broke Hickman's tackle at the line, ran into ILB Jerrell Freeman 2 yards downfield, ricocheted off and charged ahead for 7 more. Even though Benson is playing at 227 pounds, he has the ability to make himself small in the hole. After playing 10 snaps in his first 1 ½ seasons, Green was called upon to play 27 in Benson's stead. His 41-yard burst from an inverted-wishbone formation, which had been in mothballs since 2011, was beautifully blocked up front. But it would have been just a 10-yard gain if Green hadn't made two spectacular cuts that prevented SS Tom Zbikowski and Bethea from even laying a glove on him. It was somewhat surprising to see Green get caught from behind. Green was responsible for 1 ½ "bad" runs, including one for minus-2 when he got caught too close to Rodgers, tripped and crashed into the back of Crabtree. When Crabtree was pushed back several yards by Freeney, you'd like Green to adjust his path and track underneath instead of over the top. Green seems willing in protection, but it's fairly clear that he needs extensive work as a receiver. John Kuhn (21) got all the third-down snaps over Cobb.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2)

Fresh from a four-game suspension, Mike Neal played 33 snaps and more than held his own. In fact, his 3 ½ pressures were more than any other D-lineman had come close to generating in the first four games. Neal showed burst to the passer on his sack, but it was mainly due to Clay Matthews wiping out LT Anthony Castonzo and LG Jeff Linkenbach on an end-tackle stunt. Dom Capers' hope is that Neal and rookie Jerel Worthy (52) provide more speed, quickness and athleticism in sub packages than B.J. Raji, Mike Daniels and some others. We shall see if Neal can stay healthy and produce. Raji went out with an ankle injury on his 15th play after Linkenbach drove him several yards off the ball and put him on the ground. His departure was even more significant because there were an incredible 96 gradable plays for the defense. C.J. Wilson (57), Ryan Pickett (45) and Raji all had tremendous surge in denying a fourth-and-1 sneak by Andrew Luck. Pickett was first man off the ball. As the game progressed, the unit wasn't as effective against the run. Worthy was penalized twice for encroachment (one was offsetting). Capers paid the price for having Worthy and Neal on the field when Luck ran up the gut on a QB draw for a 3-yard TD. As run stoppers, they aren't in the class of Pickett and Wilson.

LINEBACKERS (2½)

LOLB Erik Walden was given his first start ahead of Nick Perry. He deserved it based on performance, range and knowledge of the scheme. It was interesting, however, that Perry played the final 10 snaps when the outcome was in doubt. This might very well have been Perry's top game. Let's face it. Illegal or not, Perry (47 snaps) absolutely knocked the heck out of Luck when the Colts lost track of him on a five-man pressure. Perry's calling card is stalemating TEs at the point. He is able to trash them and find the ball, but when that doesn't occur he has a knack for freeing one arm and slowing down the ball carrier. Walden (48) took an inside fake and then it was too late for him to prevent TE Dwayne Allen from catching an 8-yard TD pass in the flat. Otherwise, Walden was super in coverage, blowing up receivers at the 1 and the goal line. He also beat five different blockers for his five pressures. Week in, week out, Matthews just goes all-out. Given the effort he expends, it's incredible to think he played all 96 snaps. The Colts double-teamed him on 44% of passes, and in that setting Castonzo wasn't overrun. On the inside, A.J. Hawk continued to be active and aggressive. D.J. Smith was a step slow to the sideline and in pursuit several times. He was best as a rusher, coming up with four pressures in 18 blitzes. His lack of height might help there because teams lose track of him. When Luck lowered his head and gained 7 on third and 7, you'd expect an ILB to stop him dead in his tracks. Smith waited, then couldn't prevent his fall forward. Smith also cost the team a takeaway when he tried to advance a fumble by Luck instead of recovering it.

SECONDARY (1½)

Tramon Williams and his teammates had a fruitless day trying to keep up with Reggie Wayne. He dropped two interceptions and had a third overturned by replay challenge. O-coordinator Bruce Arians did a masterful job hiding Wayne in bunches and next to the line. Early on, Williams was late lining up and then didn't pursue the tackle on Wayne's 19-yard reception. He did have a couple of fine pass deflections. Sam Shields' solid performance shouldn't be downgraded by two questionable penalties. It should be, however, when he got caught peeking again in the backfield, and only Luck's overthrow to Donnie Avery saved him from a 49-yard TD. Shields was up and down against the run. That was a superb interception by Casey Hayward, and his hitting and blitzing weren't bad, either. Rookie Jerron McMillian's growing pains were evident in his lost coverage on Wayne's 29-yard catch behind him and the time Wayne pinned him inside to spring Donald Brown wide right for a substantial gain. T.Y. Hilton ripped a pass away from Charles Woodson for 26, Wayne beat him on a deep vertical for 30 and he had two more coverage penalties.

KICKERS (1½)

I cannot recall the last time that I saw Mason Crosby miss a kick that badly, including practice. The man had become a machine until the game was on the line and he duck-hooked from 51. The conditions, the snap and the hold were perfect. He also missed wide right from 52. Crosby's five kickoffs (all touchbacks) averaged 77.2 yards and 4.06 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay was sensational with seven-punt averages of 45.1 (gross), 43.3 (net) and 4.84 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Missed blocks by D.J. Williams, Brad Jones and Jamari Lattimore on three different returns prevented Cobb from big gainers. As it was, he still ran impressively. Rob Francois, Jarrett Bush and Jones were ringleaders of efficient coverage squads.

OVERALL (1)