

Rating the Packers: Week 7 at Rams

Green Bay's passing attack overwhelming

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Not too many years ago, teams that couldn't run the ball or stop the run usually didn't win in the National Football League.

Those days, of course, are long gone. And the Green Bay Packers were Exhibit A on Sunday when they averaged 2.7 yards per rush and allowed 4.9 yards per carry.

Still, they defeated St. Louis, 30-20, because of how far superior they were in the passing game.

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

RECEIVERS (4½)

The Rams started out playing press man, but after Jordy Nelson beat CB Janoris Jenkins twice for 67 yards in the second series and nickel back Bradley Fletcher on a back-shoulder fade for a 3-yard TD, they played off basically the rest of the afternoon. The Packers' spread sets forced CB Cortland Finnegan to the slot, where he was a constant thorn against the run game but wasn't a factor outside, where his value might have been even greater. Randall Cobb did make three catches for 26 yards with Finnegan playing off coverage against him. Finnegan went to Nelson's head three times on tackles, and was penalized once. He was trying to get under his skin, but Nelson can't be dissuaded from the task at hand. Game after game, the big man is a portrait of concentration. James Jones led with 65 snaps, followed by Nelson (57), Cobb (44), Donald Driver (11) and Jarrett Boykin (five). Jones caught six of the team-high 10 passes thrown his way and came close to three other balls in the end zone. He still hasn't had a drop this season. Although Jones is as muscular as they come, he remains mostly a finesse receiver. It's his style, and it's been plenty effective, but just once it'd be nice to see him let loose and power right through a DB. Most of Jermichael Finley's 41 snaps came on passes, partly because he's playing with a shoulder that's taped close to his body. The heavy-duty blocking goes to Tom Crabtree (29) and Ryan Taylor (seven), and D.J. Williams had six snaps. Crabtree couldn't get DE Robert Quinn blocked on the toss that Aaron Rodgers alertly aborted before he tucked and ran. On the final series, Taylor missed WLB Jo-Lonn Dunbar and a running play went nowhere. Too many times lately the TEs haven't helped the running game.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

This might have been Bryan Bulaga's best performance of the season. Matched against a fine end in Chris Long, Bulaga didn't have any of the 11 "bad" runs and allowed just one-half of a pressure. "Bryan played a good game," Long said Sunday. "I just never got in a rhythm." Credit Bulaga for taking away Long's bull rush, his up-field charges and his inside move. Bulaga was penalized for pancaking Long inside, but that was a lousy call. The other tackle, Marshall Newhouse, actually was fairly solid in the run game. However, he had major problems in pass protection, giving up 1½ sacks, 2½ knockdowns and one hurry to Quinn. On the Packers' second snap, Newhouse took a poor set, turned his body, had to cross over and Quinn blew around him. Jeff Saturday did a good job as a pass blocker and sorted out traffic. He also had the presence of mind to make the shotgun snap when Rodgers' cadence caught the Rams offside three times. However, Saturday was unable to make reach blocks on rookie DT Michael Brockers two or three times and was displaced by DT Kendall Langford on another "bad" run. At least Saturday was efficient in protection, but neither T.J. Lang nor Josh Sitton fared well in either phase. Lang was bull-rushed by Brockers for a sack in 2.9 seconds and bull-rushed by 339-backup Kellen Heard for one hurry and beat by Quinn for another. Like Saturday, Lang was responsible for 2½ "bad" runs. He was shoved by Brockers on a run for minus-2 and didn't get the job done pulling on two carries. Sitton, who yielded two half pressures and 1½ "bad" runs, pulled ineffectively on one stutter play and was late getting off to MLB James Laurinaitis on a zone run. In general, aggressiveness and downfield hustle was in short supply.

QUARTERBACKS (5)

The first series, a three and out, was bad enough. But if Rodgers was like most QBs, he would have fumbled inside the 5 on his first dropback and the Packers would have been down, 7-0. Quinn came roaring from the blind side and smashed into Rodgers. Many fumble right there. Rodgers regrouped, looked for Nelson and then Quinn tomahawked down on his right forearm. The ball was loose for a split-second but those big, strong hands saved the day. Rodgers secured the ball as Quinn rode him down with all 265 pounds. How cool is Rodgers? After getting up and rearranging his chinstrap, he said to referee Bill Vinovich, "Facemask." Rodgers' ballhandling and mechanics are just so superior. Each handoff is precisely placed, and he never flubs a shotgun snap as Sam Bradford did. Quinn was threatening his back all day, and the Rams DTs steadily pushed the pocket. Four times Rodgers stood in despite heavy pressure and fired completions totaling 43 yards. When the Rams closed to within a TD with 8:50 left, Rodgers made a great fake so Cobb could get out scot-free for 13 on a shovel pass. He capped that decisive drive by moving left outside Quinn and, spotting Cobb raising his arm two steps behind dime back Trumaine Johnson, zinged a 41-yard pass that was in the air merely 1.8 seconds. He threw a line drive across his body into a tight window where only Cobb could get to it. It's almost all shotgun these days in Green Bay. Rodgers' first pass from a normal dropback came with 14 minutes left. The Rams played extremely hard. They just got gunned down by the QB.

RUNNING BACKS (2)

Alex Green is playing like the young back that he is, one hailing from a vastly different offense at Hawaii. It might have been revealing that by far his best gain (15 yards) in 20 carries (for only 35) came on a counter when Lang pulled right on Long and Green shot off the block. Then he stiff-armed Finnegan and picked up an additional 5. At this point, Green can't be his own blocker. Maybe he never will be. With the offensive line routinely getting displaced, Green usually just caves in when the pack converges. He slipped twice, once with a big gain staring him in the face. He had the team's only dropped pass. His pass protection was solid. Green played 46 snaps, John Kuhn played 23, Cobb played five, James Starks didn't get in, and there were five "empty" sets. Kuhn was reliable in blitz pickup and rushed three times for 16 yards from an up-back position. On his 9-yard gain, he waited for Bulaga to wash down Long and cut off him. In the Giants' playoff game, he was less patient, bumped into Bulaga and fumbled. He also ran through Dunbar for an extra 5 on a 16-yard check-down. On his first snap at RB, Cobb seemed trapped in the middle of the line, hunted for an opening and found a crease for 19. On perhaps the biggest play of the game, he ran an option route on third and 7, made Dunbar miss and gained 8. Starks remains a project in pass pro, and he was bad in Houston. Still, visions of how he attacked zone runs in late 2010 should not be forgotten.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1)

Minus B.J. Raji (ankle), the base DEs were Jerel Worthy (49) and C.J. Wilson (32), the NT was Ryan Pickett (28) and the subs were Mike Daniels (18) and Mike Neal (nine). It's becoming a tired refrain, but even though Bradford dropped back 37 times this unit didn't have a single pressure. Considering the Rams were starting three backups on possibly the worst O-line in the NFL, the production void wasn't real good. Pickett made the best play, shouldering past a reach block by C Rob Turner for minus-5. He also was wham-blocked on an early run for 6 and, along with Worthy, got moved by double teams on Steven Jackson's too-easy 6-yard TD. Worthy loves anticipating the snap count. He also makes the defense faster with his lateral pursuit. He just isn't consistent at the point. Wilson was fairly invisible, and on the 56-yard WR screen by Chris Givens he went completely against his all-out style of play and pulled up in pursuit. Neal outran Turner to wreck a third-down screen, hurt his knee and wasn't the same upon his return. Daniels was OK against the run but can't win on his rushes.

LINEBACKERS (3)

Making his first start inside, Brad Jones played all 60 snaps and wasn't bad. He recognized plays, took calculated chances on his fills and generally exercised good low-block shield. Dom Capers sent him 14 times as an extra rusher; while Jones didn't do any damage, Capers knows he has the capability to get small between blockers and no doubt envisions him augmenting the rush. Despite his vast experience, A.J. Hawk (37 snaps) remained in his base and nickel role. When Hawk waited instead of attacking Givens on a 14-yard reverse, he ended up missing the tackle. He also missed Daryl Richardson on an 11-yard toss and left the middle vacant on Jackson's TD. The best player was Erik Walden, not Clay Matthews. Four times Walden came off TE Lance Kendricks to make tackles, and two other times he quickly shed RT Barry Richardson. Both Walden and Matthews had three pressures, and Walden tackled Givens 65 yards downfield after turning back off his rush. Despite being double-teamed on a season-low 21.7% of dropbacks, Matthews never came close to dominating LT Joe Barksdale or LG Shelley Smith. On the Rams' longest run (19 yards), Matthews was thrown into the path of Charles Woodson, knocking him down and possibly breaking his collarbone. That's purely speculation, but it was a jarring collision and one that Woodson never saw coming.

SECONDARY (3)

Woodson (50 snaps) made two really nice reads on third down, thwarting the third-down screen with Neal. He did stay blocked too long on Givens' 56-yard burst. M.D. Jennings (27) and Jerron McMillian (21) switched off at safety and at least didn't miss any tackles. Morgan Burnett missed two; sometimes it seems he could be more of a physical force if he would just pull the trigger and look to punish ball carriers instead of tackling low all the time. Casey Hayward's first start and Davon House's first NFL exposure from scrimmage went fine. Hayward made Bradford pay for an off-balance deep throw, turning back at just the right instant in front of Givens for a pick. Earlier, Hayward appeared to be peeking in the backfield on Austin Pettis' double move and probably got away with a 20-yard interference penalty. He did give up two 15-yard completions to Brandon Gibson. He didn't blow anybody up, but he did get people down. House (23) challenged receivers with his height, his length and his suddenness. He had a rough final series and looked green as grass on Pettis' 3-yard TD catch. But a team such as Detroit probably would kill to have a talent like House on the roster. Tramon Williams would have had a sack or, at the very least, prevented a 19-yard flea-flicker if he had just kept blitzing at Bradford. Given his speed and ability, Williams has a tendency to let inferior WRs beat him.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby's onside kick was incredibly high and absolutely perfect. He hit from 47, 23 and 48 and sent a screwball way wide right from 58. His six-kickoff averages were 72.8 yards and 3.65 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay put two more inside the 20, averaging 38.7 (gross, net) and 4.75 on three punts.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4½)

Jarrett Bush and Jennings waylaid Johnson on the onside kick close to the right sideline, and then Jamari Lattimore hustled from left of center to make the recovery. Fresh from not playing at all on defense, Bush exuded energy on his 18 special-teams snaps. His enthusiasm has to be infectious.

OVERALL (4)

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