

Rating the Packers: Week 8 vs Jaguars

Packers have little to feel good about

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Two teams each missing eight starters met Sunday at Lambeau Field.

The Green Bay Packers defeated the Jacksonville Jaguars, 24-15, primarily because they blocked a punt for a touchdown. Other than that play and the final score, the Packers had almost nothing to be proud about based on their performance.

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

RECEIVERS (1½)

Minus Jordy Nelson (hamstring) for the first game and Greg Jennings (groin) for the fifth game, James Jones filled their shoes as the split end and continued to distinguish himself. With teammates dropping balls around him, Jones caught seven of the eight thrown to him. He reaches midseason without a drop in 57 targeted passes. That's unreal. Jones beat backup CB William Middleton for 23 yards on two crisp sideline comebacks and exploited a blown coverage for the team's longest gain (31). With the Jaguars hanging around, he went basketball mode to outmaneuver Middleton on an underthrown deep pass and get the 38-yard interference call. Jones played all 66 snaps before sitting out the final kneel-down. Meanwhile, Randall Cobb played a career-high 57 snaps, including 19 on the outside of the formation. That was far too little information to generalize about Cobb's future, but it would appear his best work will come from the slot. Credit the Jaguars' secondary, which was minus three starters. The unit tackled well, and no matter how many moves Cobb tried he couldn't spring himself. Late in the third quarter, Cobb danced too much on a second-and-1 quick pass, failed to gain and, when a third-down run was stuffed, the Packers had to punt. Jarrett Boykin (23) and Donald Driver (22) split time as the No. 3. When D-coordinator Mel Tucker tried to cover Driver in the slot with FS Chris Prosinski, the old pro beat him to the corner and Aaron Rodgers delivered a perfect 4-yard TD pass. On Boykin's only catch, he went backward instead of forward. Playing hurt (shoulder), Jermichael Finley (36) was up and down. D.J. Williams lined up in the backfield on 20 of his 24 snaps, did a lot of in-line blocking and never had a bad miss. He tried to finish, too. His toughness has improved this year. Williams marred his solid showing with a terrible drop downfield.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

NT Terrance Knighton and Tyson Alualu dominated the run inside. T.J. Lang's punch and power has been diminished because of a damaged right elbow that forces him to play with a brace. It's a huge factor why the run game went nowhere. On the outside, Marshall Newhouse seems satisfied with stalemates blocking for the run. There is little semblance of finish or sustain in his game. He just doesn't give the extra effort. Jeff Saturday battled. He tries to cover up bigger men but doesn't get much movement and was brushed aside by Knighton at times. His glaring lack of speed also shows up in the screen game. Bryan Bulaga got pushed back by Alualu on a failed third-and-1 and, when the Packers were trying to run out the clock, was shoved 4 yards deep by DE George Selvie and the carry was for no gain. The most physical blockers were Josh Sitton and Evan Dietrich-Smith, who played two snaps in the backfield and two at TE. Sitton was most able to match the high-intensity level of the Jacksonville D-line. He tried to punish people. His only bad play was the sack by DE Jeremy Mincey on a spin move. Dietrich-Smith caved in Selvie on a successful third-and-1 and came across to trap NT C.J. Mosley on an 8-yard burst. Given Dietrich-Smith's youth and robust nature, it would be surprising if the coaches weren't at least talking about giving him at least some of Saturday's snaps. Newhouse was partially responsible for the other sack by being bulled back by DE John Chick, a hard-charging free agent. He allowed a team-high four pressures.

QUARTERBACKS (2 ½)

The Jaguars sat in a two-safety shell much like some earlier opponents and dared Rodgers to beat them with safe, perhaps boring throws. Ultimately, the outmanned Jaguars lost, but Tucker's strategy could hardly have worked better. He sent a mere four pressures (all five-man) in 42 dropbacks, a 9.5% rate that rivaled the Bears' even more conservative 7.9%. Not only was Rodgers sacked twice and knocked down four other times, the four-man rush surrounded him so consistently that he couldn't break free and run. It was pretty clear that Rodgers hoped to throw vertically, but on this afternoon that wasn't the way to go. He was affected by three or four drops, but his ball placement was slightly off and it didn't help the receivers. The next time the Packers see extensive two-shell, Mike McCarthy must be on guard to keep Rodgers from losing patience if not a degree of interest. As always, Rodgers made a few throws with a high degree of difficulty. He also fumbled on a sack, the first time that's happened since the Giants playoff game. He lost another fumble, this time on an inside scramble, but was saved by a penalty on Chick. Rodgers hasn't lost two fumbles since the Detroit game in September 2008.

RUNNING BACKS (1 ½)

There continue to be positives in the fledgling career of Alex Green. His effort and technique in pass protection generally are excellent. Regarded by some scouts as a fumbler out of Hawaii, he has shown no signs of that in 2012. And he doesn't hesitate in the least pounding into heavy-contact areas inside. At the same time, Green hasn't been able to make himself skinny, change a course, avoid a pile and bleed a 2-yard run into a gain of 6 or 7. More natural and experienced runners do that all the time, making their coaches and linemen all look better. McCarthy finally decided enough was enough, having gone five games in a row without handing the ball off on third and 1. Green converted two of three. He burst for 6 on the first, but with only S Dawan Landry standing between him and a long gain he was cut right down. Partially because Green was too impatient on slower developing runs the past two weeks, the Packers ran him more straight ahead Sunday. Let's face it. There wasn't much there. But Green also didn't help himself by slipping and tripping a few times. Look for James Starks to get a legitimate shot this week. It was hard to tell anything about him in seven snaps.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Part of the reason the Packers stymied the run game was the dramatic difference in talent between injured Maurice Jones-Drew and his backup, Rashad Jennings. Another was the stout effort of Ryan Pickett (35 snaps). When the ILBs swoop in for tackles, it's usually because Pickett has taken on more than 600 pounds of double team and not allowed them to get off to the LB level. Late in the game, Jennings had a pair of 5-yard gains when Mike Neal and Mike Daniels were on the field. There is just no way that would have happened if Pickett had been playing. Pickett gave up a first down by jumping offside on third and 1. The second-half injuries suffered by Jerel Worthy and Neal forced B.J. Raji to play 53 snaps, more than desired in his return from an ankle injury. Working against feisty but overmatched rookie LG Mike Brewster, a surprise starter, Raji either trashed him or walked him back several times. Brewster certainly isn't very good, but it might have been a sign of better things to come for Raji in the second half. Neal (25) certainly looks good, but other than one pressure he was rather ineffective. Daniels (12) didn't see the field until 9 minutes remained. Worthy (28) and Neal were the starters in sub packages. Worthy adds to the team speed but remains inconsistent.

LINEBACKERS (3 ½)

D.J. Smith's injury has moved Brad Jones from special teams only to playing every snap two weeks in a row. With his 5-inch height advantage over Smith, Jones (77 snaps) is able to see action in the backfield faster than his predecessor. He has an upright carriage but seems to trust his instincts and has a knack for slipping blocks without compromising gap integrity. He beat RG Uche Nwaneri, a rugged veteran, to the spot and stripped Jennings for the Packers' first takeaway via fumble all season. He also beat C Brad Meester on a blitz for a sack in 2.9 seconds. Jones still needs to get better depth on his zone drops, and his athletic limitations showed on a missed tackle in the flat on Jennings. Hawk (58) didn't produce in 14 pressures, brought everything he had but couldn't get Jennings down in the flat and was beat on a two-point pass that was thrown behind the receiver. The Jaguars double-teamed Clay Matthews on just 29.6% of dropbacks, relying on LT Eugene Monroe. Matthews had 4½ of the team's eight pressures, and 3 ½ came dipping underneath Monroe off the edge. Monroe got Matthews on a 21-yard run around the left side in which he lost containment. Dom Capers dropped Matthews 15 times, 8.2 times more than he averaged in the first seven games. Recognition skills make Matthews valuable in coverage. Erik Walden didn't get enough done against vulnerable RT Cameron Bradford.

SECONDARY (1 ½)

M.D. Jennings (62 snaps) replaced Morgan Burnett (77) at FS in the 3-4, Burnett replaced injured Charles Woodson at SS in the 3-4 and Jerron McMillian (34) replaced Woodson in dime. It would appear that Jennings has gained the edge on McMillian because of fewer mistakes. Plus, despite his thin frame, Jennings is active around piles, is tackling better and isn't averse to attacking a receiver downfield. McMillian had two poor plays: He lost leverage in man coverage against Justin Blackmon and gave up a 36-yard completion, and he missed Rashad Jennings in the flat to give him an extra 21 yards on a 24-yard play. His best moment came when he flew up to fill the B gap and cut down Jennings after a short gain. With M.D. Jennings filling his old center-field role, Burnett was free to roam the box and seek plays. He tackled well, recovered a fumble and shot past two blockers for a sack in 3 seconds. On the downside, T-G Guy Whimper was Burnett's man on his 1-yard TD catch, and Burnett didn't show much speed when Cecil Shorts ran by him for a 43-yard bomb that was overturned by replay. Young CBs Casey Hayward (70) and Davon House (55) made critical mistakes. Hayward lost leverage and was out of position on a 35-strike to Shorts. House got caught guessing on a route combination and let Shorts go free for an easy 24-yard completion behind him. Earlier, House guessed right on the same combination and made an outstanding breakup when the pass was thrown short. He was penalized on the play for hitting Blackmon, who supposedly was defenseless.

KICKERS (½)

From 2007 through November 2010, Mason Crosby never missed inside the 30. Since then, he missed from 29 off the left upright, missed from 29 off the right upright and, on Sunday, missed from 32 off the right upright. His boot started out straight and veered hard right, much like the 58-yard screwball that missed last week in St. Louis. He averaged 67.6 yards and 3.99 seconds of hang time on five kickoffs. Tim Masthay was ordinary on five punts, averaging 45 yards (gross), 41 (net) and 4.09 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

For the first time in 22 seasons, the Packers blocked a punt for a TD. House showed extraordinary timing and speed, and Dezman Moses made a secure end-zone recovery. The Packers had 10 men on the field twice: Boykin blew it on the block, and the replacement for the injured Neal on FG block wasn't there. Jamari Lattimore and Rob Francois led exceptional KO coverage. The fake FG failed because Masthay didn't throw to Ryan Taylor, who was wide open.

OVERALL (3)

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