

# Rating the Packers: Week 9 vs Cardinals

## Packers' depth is paying off

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 (4½)

Randall Cobb (53 snaps as a WR) was spectacular. The spin move that he put on Pro Bowl SS Adrian Wilson at the 4 on the alley screen was the difference between a TD and a FG. The release past CB William Gay to gain such immediate separation on just a 20-yard route for the second TD. The remarkable one-handed catch of a bullet high and behind him for 3 on third and 3. The guts that he showed circling back toward the line and taking out MLB Paris Lenon on Aaron Rodgers' long scramble. Everything he does is just so sudden. However, Cobb is human. His inability to put away a low sideline pass at midfield enabled Gay to rake it away for an interception and jump-started the visitors. After Nelson left on his 13th snap with a sprained ankle, James Jones had to play all 71 snaps. Rookie nickel back Jamell Fleming seemed almost afraid of Jones based on the cushion that he gave. Late in the first half, Jones made a magnificent play by vaulting over Fleming, who was in good position, and taking the ball over him for a 28-yard TD. Donald Driver had 20 snaps to Jarrett Boykin's 10 in the first half, but it was 13-4 for Boykin in the second half. Driver seems to have suffered a loss of confidence. He's struggling to make plays that he once made in his sleep. Give Boykin credit for sustaining his run block on rugged Patrick Peterson for more than 4 seconds on James Starks' fumble. If he had slacked off, as many WRs do, the recovery would have been by Peterson, not Aaron Rodgers. Driver needs to do a better job of blocking as well. Jermichael Finley, who played 18 snaps in-line and 17 from a two-point stance, had two passes come his way and caught one for 6. Tom Crabtree played 20 of his 32 snaps in the second half, but only one came from the backfield. On that play, he sold run action against Lenon and came free down the middle for a 72-yard TD that he'll never forget. If Crabtree does give up penetration as a point-of-attack blocker, he's usually scrappy enough at least to stay in front of his man. D.J. Williams (16), who left early in the second half with an unspecified injury, and Ryan Taylor (career-high 20 snaps) were more effective blocking this week than last week.

### OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

Josh Sitton always seems ready to play, but knowing that DE Darnell Dockett would be over him all day put Sitton on red alert. The numbers show that Sitton had the upper hand: no sacks, no hurries and no "bad" runs. Several times, Sitton and Jeff Saturday double-teamed Dockett in the run game before Sitton timed it well getting out on Lenon or WLB Daryl Washington. Sitton used his hands forcefully in pass protection and got real physical with Dockett. Early in the second quarter, Bryan Bulaga staggered awkwardly for a few steps after his foot brushed against Williams and left with a hip injury. Mike McCarthy's didn't hesitate, moving LG T.J. Lang outside and inserting Evan Dietrich-Smith inside. It was business as usual. Lang gave up one knockdown to OLB Quentin Groves. Earlier at guard, he was bowled over by DE Calais Campbell just as Saturday was getting beat by Dockett on a stunt. They need to protect longer than 3.2 seconds and were charged with the 10-yard sack. Lang kept caving in Dockett on the back side, enabling Starks to cut back. Just as Sitton was looking to gore defenders, so was Lang. They made for one aggressive right side of the line. Saturday couldn't sustain his block on NT Dan Williams after Sitton left to block Lenon on a failed third and 1, but there were many other runs in which his big effort kept his man from the ball. Dietrich-Smith was late to the LB level on another failed third-and-1, but he was solid in protection and blended in without a hitch. Marshall Newhouse did some excellent things as a pass blocker and controlling OLB Sam Acho on runs toward his side. He also missed about five cutoffs on the back side, an ongoing problem for the run game. He gets too high and isn't sound with his footwork.

## **QUARTERBACKS (3)**

Former D-coordinator Ed Donatell used to say that once a defensive lineman's legs are gone he is virtually useless for the remainder of the game. Rodgers' role in rendering the Cardinals' pass rush null and void early can't be overemphasized. On the 11-play, 84-yard TD drive in the first quarter, Rodgers kept frustrating (and fatiguing) rushers by scrambling away from them four times for 37 yards. Campbell and Dockett were just kind of out there after that. It wasn't particularly cold or windy, but by subjective count Rodgers threw eight inaccurate passes in 30 attempts whereas normally he might throw two or three. Arizona D-coordinator Ray Horton blitzed less than usual (31.4%). He started out playing aggressive man-to-man coverages, but after Rodgers ran so well against them he turned to more zone. Horton kept Rodgers off balance all afternoon. As Pittsburgh's DB coach in the 45th Super Bowl, he no doubt feared another offensive onslaught. What foiled the Cardinals were the individual efforts of the receiver on all four TDs. Even on an off day, Rodgers used his cadence to draw Arizona off three times and didn't take any gambles that might have sparked an upset.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

James Starks started and played extensively until his fumble late in the secondary that Rodgers recovered. He didn't return until the fourth series of the second half. The fumble was bad. He made a good cut on the play but lost it on a medium type hit by Lenon. Several times, Starks stuck his foot in the ground on outside zone plays, cut back and maximized what had been blocked. He stretched the defense wide and used his fresh legs to turn the corner. He also broke five tackles and had just one glaring misread. Even though Alex Green has far less experience than Starks, he is a much better pass blocker. Green's steady, take-'em-down-the middle protection was a key factor why Washington (eight sacks) never got to Rodgers. Green converted one third and 1 into the teeth of two unblocked defenders but came up short on another when he couldn't get "skinny" in the hole and find a way to the marker. Green had 41 snaps, Starks had 23 and Cobb had four. All Cobb did was carry three times for 29 yards. He makes one cut, changes gear in the hole and gets north and south.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

A.J. Hawk and Brad Jones should give half their paychecks to Ryan Pickett (30 snaps). Week after week, Pickett wades in against 625 pounds of double-team blocking, seldom gets turned or displaced and many more times than not makes sure both of the O-linemen stay on him instead of getting to the second level. Like Pickett, C.J. Wilson (19) doesn't have to play on passing downs this season and has been a fresh, consistent anchor in the 3-4. B.J. Raji (42) had some strong bull rushes against the weak middle of the Arizona line but wasn't able to finish, partially because his bad ankle limits his ability to make sharp cuts. Mike Neal (24) and Mike Daniels (19) played exclusively in the one- and two-lineman configurations on passing downs. Neal powered past LG Daryn Colledge for a sack and a knockdown, and Daniels beat the former Packer for a sack, too. It's just so much easier walking back Colledge than most guards. Neal got off the ball well.

## **LINEBACKERS (3½)**

Arizona coach Ken Whisenhunt wasn't going to get beat by Matthews. He helped LTs D'Anthony Batiste and, in the last three quarters, rookie seventh-round pick Nate Potter with TEs and RBs on 68.8% of dropbacks, the highest double-team rate Matthews has faced in the last 2½ seasons. Matthews had 2½ pressures in 35 snaps before departing (hamstring). On the other side, Erik Walden played all 66 snaps and was too much for rookie RT Bobby Massie with four pressures. Walden came off Massie's cut block, hustled to the flat and tackled RB La'Rod Stephens-Howling for minus-6. Not since Charles Woodson stopped Minnesota's Adrian Peterson for minus-6 in Game 9 last season have the Packers had a tackle for loss to that degree. Hard-trying Dezman Moses (43) had 1½ pressures and a batted ball. He also was late backing out into a zone drop and missed the tackle on the short pass that Larry Fitzgerald turned into a 31-yard TD. Jamari Lattimore debuted from scrimmage with eight snaps from LE but didn't get anything done. Jones took on the FB lead, scraped over the top nicely and delivered some punishing tackles. He's a step slow to the sideline but no more so than Hawk. With Hawk and Jones on the field, the defense is susceptible to play-action passes. Jones bit and wasn't able to get back on a 23-yard pass to WR Andre Roberts, and both were at fault on a 22-yard completion to TE Rob Housler.

## **SECONDARY (2½)**

The best play was made by Casey Hayward, who anticipated that John Skelton would throw inside rather than the flat and deflected a pass to Walden for an interception. It was almost the exact same coverage from which Woodson picked the Jets' Mark Sanchez in 2010. The rookie broke up two other passes and also caused a fumble. On the down side, Hayward struggled covering Roberts, a precise route runner with good but not great speed. Hayward looked so bad on Roberts' 40-yard post and 14-yard curl, you know other teams will test him, too. Tramon Williams shadowed Fitzgerald when he was outside and, with over-the-top safety help, held him without a catch. Both Williams and M.D. Jennings did a terrible job failing to tackle Fitzgerald on his jaunt to the end zone. Hayward missed two tackles, Jennings missed two and Jerron McMillian missed another when Housler beat him on third and 10. Morgan Burnett has been rugged and reliable replacing Woodson as the run-force safety near the line. Burnett did a fine job spilling Stephens-Howling to the outside at the 1, but Jarrett Bush, playing only in goal-line, tried to make the tackle a step or two too soon, missed at the 6 and it was a TD. Amazingly enough, Dom Capers never rushed a DB all afternoon. He blitzed just 14.6%, easily a season low.

## **KICKERS (3½)**

Tim Masthay used his head and his leg to keep Peterson, an elite punt returner, from averaging more than his 4.8 yards in four returns. Masthay's six-punt averages (three ended up inside the 20) were 42.5 yards (gross), 36 (net) and 4.43 seconds of hang time. Mason Crosby hit a good ball from the right hash but missed left from 44. He also connected from 33 and, on his four kickoffs for distance, averaged 70.3 and 3.8.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4½)**

Jay Feely tried to contain Cobb with low, driving kickoffs. He brought one back 44 yards to go with a 28-yard punt return. Rookie S Sean Richardson, who played in just his third game, has been a major plus in coverage with his size, speed and toughness. The Packers recovered their first fumble on a punt return since Game 9 of 2010 when Bush hopped on Peterson's muff. Perhaps one reason why Dave Zastudil, a reliable punter, was so awful stemmed from the Packers' decision to rush him early.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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