

Rating the Packers: Week 14 vs Lions

Win about more than defensive TD

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - The Detroit Lions stormed into Lambeau Field on Sunday night as if they owned the joint.

Despite their disappointing record, the Lions remained a cohesive force motivated by revenge and lacking just three of their preferred starters. On the other hand, the Green Bay Packers were down eight starters as they attempted to get back on their feet after the Lions broke to a 14-0 lead.

Some might say it took a lucky play - Matthew Stafford's wacky fumble that was returned by Mike Daniels 43 yards for a second-quarter touchdown - to save the Packers.

It took more than just that. Green Bay absorbed the Lions' knockout punch and then asserted themselves on both lines in the second half.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 27-20 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3)

Minus Jordy Nelson (hamstring), the roles were clearcut. Greg Jennings (46 of a possible 53 snaps) and James Jones (49) generally were outside, and Randall Cobb (41) played inside. Jarrett Boykin (five) and Donald Driver (three) also played, including two snaps each when Mike McCarthy played a five-WR set for the first time all season. The longest reception (38 yards) was made by Cobb in an all too familiar situation. When Aaron Rodgers breaks through the line, he invariably looks for Cobb because the results have been remarkable. Cobb just has a knack for breaking off routes and finding the softest spot among defenders. He broke a tackle by SLB Justin Durant 16 yards downfield and weaved his way for 22 more to set up the clinching field goal. The Lions refused to get beat by Jennings or Jones to the deep outside, sticking to their two-safety shell for 60 minutes. On a 27-yard zone-beater to Jennings, it took a great throw by Rodgers to complete. Cobb's 24-yard reception came on a spectacular one-handed grab on a corner route from the slot. Jermichael Finley played 15 of his 26 snaps either in the backfield (six) or in a three-point stance (nine). In the third quarter, he was supposed to lead from the backfield on one of the LBs in front of Alex Green. Finley didn't lay a glove on either one and, after Green was demolished, gestured as he is known to do as if it wasn't his fault. D.J. Williams, who is much lighter than Finley, has made himself into a creditable blocker because he's hungry and tough. Finley doesn't really seem to care about blocking. Tom Crabtree and Williams, each of whom played 13 snaps, blocked DEs three times at the point of attack for runs totaling 35 yards.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

Once again, the plan was to have Jeff Saturday help Josh Sitton with Ndamukong Suh and leave Evan Dietrich-Smith one-on-one with Nick Fairley. On Suh's 28 pass rushes, he was blocked man-to-man by Sitton (seven times) and RT Don Barclay (once). He was double-teamed by various combinations of players 16 times, including 11 by Sitton-Saturday, and also ran four stunts. Saturday didn't allow a pressure and Sitton gave up just one. Sitton had one-half of a "bad" run against Suh; otherwise, he kept him away from plays in a savvy display of discipline and technique. On the other hand, Saturday was involved in four of the six "bad" runs: three halves and one full for a total of 2½. He's giving away so much size, strength and athletic ability, and his ability to get off to the second level remains a major problem. To his credit, Saturday handled the wet ball without incident. Probably the best performers were Dietrich-Smith and Marshall Newhouse. Dietrich-Smith failed to get his hands inside and got walked back by Fairley for a sack and a knockdown. But he didn't allow another pressure and joined Barclay as the only starters without a "bad" run. Dietrich-Smith was decisive to the second level, pulled and hit well on the move and finished blocks. Fairley had to leave late in the fourth quarter with a shoulder injury suffered when Dietrich-Smith worked to the whistle and ended up on top of his talented adversary. Newhouse blunted everything that Kyle Vanden Bosch tried. He also came off hard in the run game and got some movement. Newhouse finished with 1½ pressures and 1½ "bad" runs. As for Barclay, who made his first start, he was much better blocking for run than the pass. He's persistent and won't back down. Actually, backup Willie Young gave Barclay more problems than Cliff Avril. Young registered three of the 6½ pressures against Barclay. Rookie Greg Van Roten debuted from scrimmage with five snaps, including two from the backfield, two from TE and one from the wing. As far as No. 6 O-linemen go, he wasn't nearly as agile or effective as Dietrich-Smith in Games 6 and 8.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

You could chart pass rushes for years and not find a situation comparable to D-coordinator Gunther Cunningham not blitzing even one time in the Packers' two-game total of 66 dropbacks. What plays Rodgers made, he made with his legs. The go-ahead TD was little short of incredible. Both Newhouse and Barclay were bull-rushed into his lap; Newhouse was knocked flat on his back by DE Lawrence Jackson. Somehow, Rodgers scampered out of it, saw coverage floating away from him and took off on a 27-yard TD jaunt. He made several other big plays throwing on the move. Jackson made Rodgers pay earlier with a strip-sack in the red zone by blind-siding him as he was trying to run out. Rodgers made alterations in play selection about 50% of the time in the first half and many more in the second half. He had three or four errant tosses, but the wet ball accounted for some of that. Rodgers glared at Fairley and flipped the ball away after the DT hit him in the neck after a scramble. Later, Fairley smashed him down on his neck after the ball was away. Rodgers' durability remains the key to the Packers' season.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

Green, who played merely six snaps in Detroit three weeks earlier, led John Kuhn (20), DuJuan Harris (seven) and Ryan Grant (two) with 32. Green gets to top speed in a hurry, doesn't hesitate to run downhill and is capable of beating the safety. His second effort was impressive. He also didn't get both hands up fast enough on a botched check-down and tripped on the back of Barclay's leg on a shovel pass that he fumbled. Harris, who counted 10 touches among his 48 snaps from scrimmage for Jacksonville in 2011, ripped into FS Don Carey at the end of his opening 11-yard toss. The contact and speed of the play were eye-opening.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Minus Mike Neal (shoulder) and C.J. Wilson (knee), the Packers had just four stalwarts and didn't play a snap of 3-4 for the second time against Detroit. Ryan Pickett (45) was good, not great, against RG Stephen Peterman. B.J. Raji (65) proved very hard to handle for LG Rob Sims, the best of the Lions' three linemen inside. Besides his game-changing TD, Daniels (32) was more effective off the bench than Jerel Worthy (23). Pickett was buckled a time or two and spent more time on the ground than normal. The coaches must take Pickett's health seriously, and if in fact he is wearing down GM Ted Thompson needs to make roster moves designed to relieve the burden and prepare him for the post-season. Raji drew two penalties after having none in the last eight games. He also kept beating Sims with power and athleticism, probably was the team's most effective rusher and kept yanking ball carriers down by the shoulders. The Packers shut off the run game in the second half by effectively slanting their front eight or 10 times. Daniels and Worthy each had a pressure but Daniels was more stout than Worthy, who seems to play small against double teams.

LINEBACKERS (2)

Dezman Moses probably played his finest game at Ford Field when neither Jeff Backus nor rookie Riley Reiff could handle his pass rush. Backus took the rookie to school this time and limited him to one pressure in 70 snaps. On the other side, Erik Walden (71) engaged in a struggle with RT Gosder Cherilus. Judged by the two meetings, they don't like each other. Walden stayed at home on a reverse, usually set a physical edge and had two pressures. Playing in his fourth game, Frank Zombo (27) had problems. On his first play, he waited instead of forcing the issue and destroying QB Matthew Stafford on a reverse, and suffered the embarrassment of being cut off his feet. Then Stafford got Zombo again four plays later on a naked bootleg. If it's a dive play, Zombo can't make the tackle, anyway. He needed to take a step or two up field whether the Lions had shown it on tape or not. Neither A.J. Hawk (53) nor Brad Jones (83) was equipped to excel in a blood-and-guts affair on a slow track. Jones made a few tackles before linemen could get to him but he also played too high at times. Hawk had a few good sticks but wasn't playing downhill hammering people like top ILBs do. Dom Capers blitzed just 20% of the team's 21 individual blitzes, Jones used his team-high 10 to post two pressures.

SECONDARY (4)

Tramon Williams (84 snaps) shadowed Calvin Johnson when he was outside. When Capers brought a safety into the box late leaving Williams one-on-one, he probably fared better than Capers had hoped. Johnson caught five of the nine balls thrown his way with Williams in coverage for 63 yards. His long of the five was merely 19. Williams maintained position, reacted well to Johnson's routes and two or three times used his exceptional vertical jump to break up jump balls/take-off routes. On the other side, Davon House (27) had four terrible plays in the first two series and was replaced by Sam Shields (58). House didn't finish his press coverage on WR Kris Durham (27-yard catch), didn't even try to fight through a pick (Tony Scheffler's 3-yard TD) and missed the tackle at the line on the Lions' longest rush by a RB (13 yards by Joiique Bell). The difference between House and Shields was dramatic on two reverses. On a 22-yard gain by Mike Thomas, his man, House was guilty of false steps, dawdled behind the line and never got near the tackle. When the Lions tried it again, Shields saw it immediately, sprinted behind the line and squared up to tackle Thomas for a gain of 3. Shields cut off Durham on a skinny post for an interception and blew chances for two more. Fresh legs or not, he made his case to get his job back. Casey Hayward played all 84 snaps, moved his feet well and was highly in tune with zone coverage. He was passive on five blitzes but at least got people down as a tackler. Safeties Morgan Burnett (84) and M.D. Jennings (73) spent the entire game trying to deceive Stafford on whether one of them was joining the box. Burnett was more physical than Jennings, but neither one short-circuited mentally and they avoided bad plays. Erring on the side of caution, Burnett was a step late attacking a few throws to Johnson.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby overcame snow, slush and wind, hitting from 49 when his team faced a two-TD deficit. He hit a solid ball from 51 but it hooked slightly left, and then he drilled one from 41. With Stefan Logan taking a conservative approach on KO returns, Crosby changed up his six boots and was effective. Tim Masthay (three punts) averaged 44.3 (gross), 37.7 (net) and 4.06 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

obb made good decisions and ran hard. Jamari Lattimore knocked a bunch of Lions down. Rob Francois and Ryan Taylor were physical, too. There were no penalties or missed tackles.

OVERALL (4)

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