

Rating the Packers: Week 15 at Bears

Green Bay doesn't have to be at best vs. Chicago

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - These days, the Green Bay Packers don't need to be great to beat the Chicago Bears - even at Soldier Field. Solid was more than enough to do the trick for the Packers, who defeated their archrival for the sixth straight time.

Here is a rating of the Packers in the 21-13 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

Jermichael Finley was outstanding as a receiver, catching five of six balls (he was in the clear 18 yards downfield on the incomplection, but Aaron Rodgers threw behind him) and wasn't spotted by Rodgers several other times. He ran a nice stop-and-go against MLB Nick Roach. He beat WLB Lance Briggs on a 31-yard seam route in which he ran over SS Major Wright to gain 12 after the catch. He beat Chris Conte inside on a WR slant for 8 on third and 2. And he showed fast feet to beat Wright as a WR on an exact up-out-in route for 8 on fourth and 2. For the eighth game in nine starts Finley (57 snaps) didn't have a drop. His run blocking, however, was poor. He tied for the team lead in "bad" runs with two. He showed no sustain or finish at the point of attack against DE Israel Idonije and also was beat inside and displaced into the backfield several times. It was interesting that D.J. Williams wasn't in uniform behind Tom Crabtree (12) and Ryan Taylor (14). On the outside, the Bears couldn't cover the mild-mannered James Jones (66), who beat backup CB Kelvin Hayden for two TDs and elite CB Charles Tillman for another. Jones is never demonstrative, just always professional. He's become a master of the sideline release, the sideline back-shoulder and sideline stop routes. On his second drop of the season, he appeared to peek at the defense when the ball arrived or it probably would have been a 17-yard TD. Randall Cobb (54) terrorized nickel back D.J. Moore. When Cobb's in the slot and he leans out along his route stem and then tears back inside, he's almost impossible to cover. He made a spectacular catch on a high 31-yard sideline bullet, a play that helped get a sluggish offense going. He also had two drops. Greg Jennings (64) is beginning to regain his old form. He made two Bears miss on a 19-yard sideline catch and attracted double coverage on many other occasions.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

Julius Peppers spent the large majority of his 63 snaps over Marshall Newhouse rather than Don Barclay, but in his second start Barclay acquitted himself well. After taking a motion penalty on the first snap, Barclay settled down and gave up just one-half pressure (it was a sack) and just one-half "bad" run. He isn't getting a lot of movement in the run game, but his legs keep moving and his man didn't make many plays. Barclay seems fairly light on his feet and isn't overwhelmed by his circumstances. He isn't Bryan Bulaga by a long shot at this point, but the results have been favorable. Newhouse was OK against Peppers. He allowed one-half sack off the edge and another pressure. On Peppers' full sack, Newhouse tried and failed on a cut block that wasn't appropriate for the play. Something went haywire there. T.J. Lang looked 10 times more confident back at LG than he did at RT. The interior caught a major break when speedy DT Henry Melton (chest) sat out. Josh Sitton muscled around and, other than a holding penalty and one-half "bad" run, played well. At center, Jeff Saturday was reliable once again in pass protection but was responsible at least partially on four "bad" runs. It wasn't that Saturday was getting knocked into the backfield. It was more being late to the LB level and struggling on reach blocks. Why the coaches used Greg Van Roten five times and Evan Dietrich-Smith just twice as the extra O-lineman didn't add up. EDS is a much better player, and in Games 6 and 8 showed he could do it well.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

Defensive coordinator Rod Marinelli never blitzes Rodgers. This time, he sent five or more on 16% of passes and six or more on 7%. However, Marinelli found it necessary to deviate from his preferred two-safety shell to mix in eight-man fronts with a single safety to stop the run. With the safeties fairly wide, Rodgers exploited both looks with daring, pinpoint throws for gains of 31 to Finley, 29 to Cobb and 27 to Cobb. He attacked a conservative style defense for the first time in weeks and broke the game open. His biggest play came in the second quarter with the Bears ahead, 7-0. On third and 6, Marinelli sent six for the first time. When Rodgers sensed that there was nobody to block Roach, he just ran away from him as Cobb adjusted his routes up the sideline. Sprinting fairly hard to the right, Rodgers threw a 30-yard laser that was high, outside and surgically placed. Later, he made a lightning progression jump from Finley on the right to Jones on the left for his second TD, and then threw a back-shoulder ball to Jones for a 6-yard TD that had about a six-inch window to defeat clingy Charles Tillman. Rodgers threw behind open receivers three times. He has been more accurate. But with a division title to clinch, he made huge plays and didn't turn it over.

RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)

The only glaring negative was Ryan Grant's fumble. It was the first lost fumble by a RB since Grant and John Kuhn each had one in the Giants playoff game. Alex Green (35 snaps) started and played most of the early downs. DuJuan Harris, the change-of-pace man, didn't get in until the start of the third quarter. All six of his snaps were confined to a 13-play, 79-yard TD drive. John Kuhn took 14 snaps at FB and 17 as the one back on third downs. And Grant played six of his 13 snaps as an apparent closer in the final five minutes. Even after Grant became Tillman's 10th fumble victim of the season, Mike McCarthy surprisingly stayed with him. If Grant does it again, he might be finished in Green Bay; Green hasn't fumbled once in 135 carries. Green brought it to the Bears. On his first carry, he delivered a stiff forearm to Roach and kept on going. The pass protection by Kuhn and Green was solid, but Kuhn looked just awful on a pair of lead blocks against backup SLB Blake Costanzo. Harris certainly looked exciting on his opening 21-yard burst when he put down a jump cut, made Moore miss, accelerated by Briggs and finished the run.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

Not only are Chicago's O-linemen soft and non-athletic, they have to be among the most fundamentally unsound and poorly coached units in the league. Thus, praise for the D-line should be modest. The Bears dominated the first five minutes. On the second play, B.J. Raji (43) took himself right out of the middle and Ryan Pickett (30) was sealed outside, too, creating a highway for Matt Forte to drive on for 14 yards. But when the Packers' front awakened, it controlled play. Raji stood out. He shattered a double-team by LT J'Marcus Webb and rookie LG James Brown to stop Forte for minus-3. He penetrated frequently, drew a holding call on RG Gabe Carimi and got him benched. And he applied constant pressure. The coaches must have liked what Jerel Worthy was giving them in base because he played more (32-12) this week than Mike Daniels. Neither was as productive as Mike Neal (18), who had a team-high 3½ pressures. His flush on a stunt set up Clay Matthews for one sack, and then a flush by Dezman Moses set up a sack for Neal.

LINEBACKERS (4 ½)

Returning from a four-game absence (hamstring), Matthews played 48 of 54 snaps and was superb. By his standards, his pass rush was average. Against the run, he was dominant. He blew up TE Matt Spaeth on a tackle for loss. He came across so fast that RG Chris Spencer had no chance to trap him. He hunkered down, got underneath pads and wouldn't be budged. It was telling that when Jay Cutler had all day (4.5 seconds) to throw deep on Morgan Burnett's 53-yard interference penalty, Matthews dropped into coverage for one of only two times all day. On the other side, Erik Walden played 24 of 27 first-half snaps but watched the entire second half as Moses played all 27 snaps. Frank Zombo (six) also got in. Walden sliced inside once and made a strong tackle. Otherwise, he either failed to disengage at the point or got washed down inside. Moses set a stronger edge and registered two pressures to Walden's none. On the inside, Brad Jones was terrific and A.J. Hawk played pretty well, too. Jones didn't look good in his zone coverage and then missed the tackle on Brandon Marshall's 15-yard TD pass. Otherwise, he made several sure tackles flowing behind the line and filling holes. On the goal-line stand, Hawk first went flying over the top to knock off C Roberto Garza so Jones could finish off Forte. On third down, he also took on interference so Jones could clean up. Jones also broke up a third-and-10 pass to Forte and had decent coverage on a 30-yard sideline incompleteness to the speedy back.

SECONDARY (4 ½)

Tramon Williams (52) basically went where Marshall went until the Bears started putting him No. 3 (innermost of three). That's how Jones was matched against him on the TD. Usually but not always aided by safety help, Williams pestered Marshall both from press and off locations. He's in shutdown-corner mode right now. On the other side, Sam Shields (50) got the nod over Davon House, who played special-teams only. The Bears attacked Shields with one-on-one routes designed for rookie Alshon Jeffery, and Shields easily won. He forced the Bears to punt at the end of their impressive opening drive, driving on and deflecting a third-and-6 hook to Jeffery. He had one penalty (illegal contact) whereas Jeffery had three for offensive pass interference in the last 16 minutes. Shields stayed disciplined with his eyes, his hands and his feet. The Bears' longest gain (22 yards) came at his expense: a missed tackle at the line against Forte. But Shields could have been a bit disoriented after having his bell rung on the previous play. On his interception, Casey Hayward (28) knew where his help was in Cover-2 zone. When Devin Hester turned his route back inside, Cutler presumably hoped Hester would read Cover-2 and go vertical behind Hayward. When Hayward didn't bite on the double move, he picked it. Burnett (54) was slow to recognize Jeffery's route on his interference penalty. Otherwise, he played tough in the box, eluding the pulling Brown to stop Forte for no gain, beating TE Kyle Adams on a tackle for loss and forcing Marshall to fumble. M.D. Jennings (47) and Jerron McMillian (24) are keeping a spot warm for Charles Woodson.

KICKERS (½)

Mason Crosby is great on onside kicks, good on kickoffs, tackles well, is a class act and makes a ton of money. Otherwise, he's a mess. He hit a terrible screwball way wide right from 43 and missed from 42 off the left upright. McCarthy passed up attempts of 55 and 44 yards to go on fourth down. Crosby's four kickoffs averaged 71 yards and 3.47 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay's five punts averaged 41.6 (gross), 33.2 (net) and 4.22 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (½)

Jeremy Ross cost the units their first turnover of the season by dropping a throwback pass from Cobb on an ill-advised punt return that could have lost the game. Jarrett Bush had two more penalties. A missed block by House almost got Cobb killed on a punt return. Green's lousy block was inches away from causing a blocked punt. House and McMillian were credited with sniffing out the Bears' hidden FG ploy. Neither coverage nor return was acceptable.

OVERALL (3 ½)

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