

# Rating the Packers: Divisional Playoff at 49ers

## Defense not only culprit in defeat

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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**Green Bay** - Mike McCarthy spent the better part of 12 months hoping the Green Bay Packers would play better than they did against the New York Giants last January in the divisional playoffs. He appeared to be most disturbed by the Packers' season-high total of three lost fumbles in the 37-20 home loss to the Giants.

On Saturday night at Candlestick Park, the Packers were just as bad handling the ball. They had a season-high three fumbles, and only good fortune allowed them to lose one rather than all three. Plus, Randall Cobb misplayed a pair of kickoff returns.

As horrible as the defense was allowing a shocking 323 yards on the ground (and 579 overall), the Packers would have been in it at the end had they just taken care of the ball.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 45-31 loss to San Francisco, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

### RECEIVERS (3)

Playing all 68 snaps, James Jones put an exclamation point on his tremendous season. The offense wasn't doing much of anything until Jones went over nickel back Chris Culliver and made the 44-yard catch falling on his back as FS Dashon Goldson raked at the ball. While the 49ers used more read-option than ever before, McCarthy's wrinkle was splitting RBs as receivers. In a strange empty set with RBs and TEs wide and Jones as No. 3 on the right, he tucked in behind ILB NaVorro Bowman and then beat SS Donte Whitner with a juggling 20-yard TD catch of a low hummer from Aaron Rodgers. In garbage time, Jones still showed he had fight by breaking two tackles for 16 yards. Of the two blatant drops, Jones had one and Tom Crabtree (seven) had the other. Elsewhere, the playing time and mediocre results were comparable for Greg Jennings (44), Jordy Nelson (44) and Randall Cobb (34). Jennings' fine 30-yard reception was the longest play by the three out of 20 targeted throws. Jennings was inches away from making a twisting, turning 51-yard TD catch. Of the trio's 16 receptions, the longest gain after the catch was 6 yards. The 49ers' hard-hitting secondary tried to intimidate and tackled well. Jermichael Finley (46) made a fine 19-yard reception on a seamer behind ILB Patrick Willis and played hard. Why Donald Driver, who didn't play from scrimmage as the sixth WR, was in uniform and TE D.J. Williams was not is inexplicable.

### OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

The Packers accomplished a rare feat in not having a single "bad" run, which is defined as a rush for 1 yard or less in non-goal line or short-yardage situations. The 49ers are excellent at blowing up plays, but there was almost no penetration, displacement or blown assignments. After a rough outing against the Vikings, Evan Dietrich-Smith finished strong. Time after time he delivered a heavy punch against the DT tandem of Justin Smith and Ray McDonald. Linemen that just try to get in the way are referred to by some scouts as "oozers." EDS is the antithesis of that. He hits hard, works extremely hard and goes after people. He also was the only lineman who didn't yield a pressure. Although EDS was almost always uncovered, Josh Sitton played virtually the entire game with McDonald on his nose. It was a great battle, but Sitton didn't make a mistake in the run game and yielded just one-half pressure. When Sitton lost his cleat in the middle of a series, Jeff Saturday had to run in. On Saturday's first play, he got shoved deep into the backfield by McDonald. It was the final reminder that the veteran's benching had a lot to do with the rise of the run game. T.J. Lang was matched against muscular Justin Smith and held up just fine. Smith beat Lang across his face on the first running play, but DuJuan Harris made a sharp cut and the gain was 2. Later, Lang got solid surge against Smith on Harris' 4-yard carry on third and 1 and then pancaked Bowman on Harris' 18-yard TD run. The Smiths, Justin and Aldon, tried 20 of their feared twists against Lang and Marshall Newhouse Sept. 9. This time, they attempted only three. Newhouse allowed 3½ pressures, including 2½ to ROLB Aldon Smith. Newhouse's maddening inconsistencies were evident on a long third-quarter drive that led to a first down at the 49ers 22 with the Packers trailing, 24-21. On first down, Cobb had a huge hole, but it closed after 4 yards when Newhouse didn't sustain his block against Aldon Smith. On second down, he got beat inside by Aldon Smith and a hurried pass fell incomplete. On third down, he jumped offside. The Packers had to settle for a field goal when they needed a TD. Don Barclay allowed a manageable two pressures to LOLB Ahmad Brooks, another top-notch player. Barclay was much better with his hand placement this week.

## **QUARTERBACKS (3)**

On 44 pass attempts, D-coordinator Vic Fangio rushed five only twice (4.6%). He kept his safeties deep, once again putting the onus on Rodgers to beat the 49ers on long marches. But Rodgers didn't have the patience to pull it off despite excellent protection and a competitive ground game. He had all day on CB Tarell Brown's interception but still threw it even though Nelson was never open. Rodgers isn't often guilty of poor judgment, but he was there. On a third and 3 to start the game, maybe Kuhn in the flat from a slot position was the proper read. But that's such a ridiculous play. Kuhn can't run that route and get proper depth. Just change the call. Rodgers also missed Harris on a check-down. If Rodgers was confident in the game plan, it didn't seem that way by his mannerisms. After watching Colin Kaepernick run all over the place, Rodgers was carrying the ball too loosely and fumbled on a side-swiping hit by Aldon Smith. Luck was with him on the recovery.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

Obviously, Harris captivated McCarthy with his hard-to-locate height, fearless running style and quick change of direction. He started and played 25 snaps. Meanwhile, Ryan Grant's lone play came as a decoy at WR, James Starks was a healthy DNP (did not play) and Alex Green was a healthy inactive. John Kuhn's 19 snaps all came in one-back sets; he didn't line up as a two-back FB all night. On his brilliant 18-yard TD run, Harris made a hard cut left at the 16 and a hard cut right at the 10 to make Whitner grab air. Other times, he kept his legs churning. Cobb probably should have played even more than his eight snaps in the backfield.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (1)**

B.J. Raji closed with a dud. He was single-blocked by C Jonathan Goodwin on a 6-yard carry and pushed back too far on a 9-yard gain. LG Mike Lupati trapped the unsuspecting Raji on third and 1 to spring LaMichael James for 14. Raji sustained the final TD drive with the unpardonable sin of jumping offside on fourth and 1. Other than an early flush against RG Alex Boone, his pass rush was negligible. Who cares if this might be the best O-line in the NFL? His team was counting on Raji to provide much more than he did in a 68-play stint. In and out of the lineup due to an unspecified injury, Ryan Pickett (42) had the team's only tackle for loss and fared OK at the point. C.J. Wilson (43) is a disciplined gap player with the ability to extend his arms into a blocker's chest and disengage when the ball carrier draws near. He remains stuck in neutral as a pass rusher. Mike Neal also was a major disappointment. On Kaepernick's 20-yard TD scramble, Neal blew containment with a spin move and then reacted the wrong way coming out of it. That was terrible football. Not only didn't Neal have a pressure, he was so soft at the point that the Packers decided they could hardly play him in the second half. After 22 first-half snaps, Neal's count dipped to three in the second. The coaches instead went with Mike Daniels (27), the rookie scrapper who doesn't take anything from anybody. Besides standing toe to toe against RT Anthony Davis, he registered two of the unit's three pressures.

## **LINEBACKERS ( ½ )**

Clay Matthews got the W over LT Joe Staley in Game 1, and Staley got the W in the rematch. Matthews was double-teamed on 33% of passes. His only pressure was the first-quarter sack against Staley, who did a great job staying on balance and not lunging. Matthews (78 of 78 snaps) was too quick for Staley to handle on the back side of the run game. The 49ers aimed almost all their read-option attack at Erik Walden (51) and Dezman Moses (27). Had Walden been a step deeper into the backfield, Kaepernick probably would have handed off on his 56-yard TD instead of circling Walden. Other times, Walden shot inside when the defensive package didn't appear defined. It was grab-bagging defense at its worst. When Walden moved inside as a spy on third and 9, he let Kaepernick blow right by him for 15. You love Walden for his toughness and heart, but he is shy some football instinct. Moses was a much quicker study against the read-option. A.J. Hawk (56) was a lot better than Brad Jones (78). Hawk didn't get to Vernon Davis' body on the 44-yard seam route over the top of him. However, he did a decent job slipping blocks and plugging the run. Jones just wasn't good enough for a game of this magnitude. He was late seeing James on his 14-yard burst on third and 1. He was abused by FB Bruce Miller on Frank Gore's 16-yard run. He was run over by pulling LG Mike Lupati on an 11-yard gain by Gore. He lost lane integrity on Dom Capers' lone six-man blitz and let Kaepernick run for a first down.

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS (1)**

A few years ago, Tramon Williams (74) was attacking receivers and routes. He's just so soft now. Michael Crabtree caught five of seven passes against him for 75 yards, and Williams' penalties gave the 49ers two more first downs. On Kaepernick's 56-yard run, Williams just stayed blocked forever by WR Ted Ginn. Shed him. Try to get a holding penalty. Do anything except dying out there. In the slot, Casey Hayward (31) had Kaepernick dead on a blitz but didn't sell out physically against the bigger man and let him out for a 19-yard run to set up a FG. On the other side, Sam Shields' pick and 52-yard TD return was sensational. But Shields (72) showed no violence on crossing routes and, like Williams, was saved giving long TD bombs to Randy Moss by overthrown passes. At his age and having missed so much time, Charles Woodson (78) doesn't have legs. He stumbled after Frank Gore got away from him in man coverage for 45. Although unblocked, he stumbled again and so Kaepernick could blaze past him for 56. A few years ago, his breakup of the hook pass to Davis probably would have been a pick and 36-yard TD return. Morgan Burnett (78) played pretty well.

## **KICKERS (4)**

Tim Masthay forced two fair catches and had two punts downed at the 7. His four-punt averages were 47 yards (net, gross) and 4.47 seconds of hang time. Mason Crosby was good just inside the right upright from 31 yards and averaged 70.6 and 3.73 on five kickoffs.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (1)**

Jeremy Ross made a youthful mistake, aggressively trying to return a punt when his first job was just catch the ball. Did McCarthy place undue trust in him? Perhaps. Cobb botched a pair of kickoff returns. When David Akers' line-driven a boot with just 3.2 hang time that offered opportunity for a long return, Cobb muffed the catch and took a knee. Then he picked up another of his bobbles and got out only to the 11. Kuhn's holding penalty on a KO forced a start from the 7. In a remarkable effort, Jarrett Bush beat a double-team block in the fourth quarter to down a punt.

## **OVERALL (2)**

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