

Rating the Packers: Week 5 vs Lions

Lions were doomed against Packers without Calvin Johnson

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - The Green Bay-Detroit game basically was over before it began Sunday at Lambeau Field.

Even with Calvin Johnson, the Lions were a touchdown underdog to snap their 22-game losing streak in the state. When Johnson was declared out 90 minutes before kickoff with a bum knee, the Lions simply didn't have the firepower to beat a divisional foe fresh off a bye.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 22-9 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

Veteran Rashean Mathis, the former Jaguar standout who suffered a devastating knee injury in 2011, covered Jordy Nelson most of the way and did an admirable job. It wasn't his fault that Nelson keeps making a remarkable catch or two every game. He made another one of those toe-tapping sideline grabs for 31 and took a 25-yard jump ball away from SS Glover Quin, another competitive vet. In a 67-play game, Nelson (63), James Jones (61) and Randall Cobb (59) were ironmen again. Matched against No. 1 CB Chris Houston, who played on a tight hamstring, Jones couldn't make a difficult catch deep against Houston early. But with the Detroit safeties focused on Cobb in the slot, coach Mike McCarthy kept dialing up sideline shot plays to Jones. Late in the third quarter, when FS Louis Delmas jumped Cobb, Jones was open to haul in a takeoff 31 yards downfield. It's not easy to traverse those final 52 yards with Houston and others chasing, but Jones high-tailed it all the way. Later, when defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham abandoned his two-safety shell to stop the run, Jones made a tough catch with Houston all over him in man coverage for 39. Three plays later, Jones slipped by Houston on another takeoff but cost his team a 27-yard TD by not getting both feet down. Cobb didn't come close to dominating nickel back Bill Bentley. After blocking pretty well in the first half, Jermichael Finley reverted to form and either fell off or missed several blocks. There were drops by Finley and Ryan Taylor, and the one by Taylor might have been a 34-yard TD. On second and 9, McCarthy inserted Taylor in a three-back set that has been heavily run in the past. When the Lions reacted to play-action, Taylor scooted down the middle only to drop it at the 19. It looked like he saw the ball too late.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

The plan sounded great. With the Lions playing their D-ends wide and shooting DTs Ndamukong Suh and Nick Fairley hard up the field, the Packers decided to run at a six-man box aligned against their three-wide formation. It takes blocking, of course, to make it work, and 180 yards rushing and a 5.5 average attest to success. Generally speaking, Evan Dietrich-Smith turned to help T.J. Lang with Suh leaving Josh Sitton one-on-one against Fairley. The only play Fairley made against Sitton came in the fourth quarter. Sitton couldn't jam his left hand into Fairley's outside number to halt his charge, and the penetration messed up the handoff on a run. Sitton used his mass to stop Fairley's bull rushes and was quick enough to cut off most of his penetration. Of the 12 pass plays that Lang was blocking Suh, he had double-team help from EDS nine times and a chip from Eddie Lacy once. Suh didn't have a pressure but did blow up Lang on a late run for minus-3. McCarthy used a more diverse ground game, giving the Detroit line pause by pulling on six runs (Sitton three, EDS two, Lang one). Lang was sufficiently strong, athletic and competitive to hang with Suh, who had been on a rampage. Lang did miss OLB DeAndre Levy on a promising screen. On Cobb's tide-shifting 67-yard burst, EDS made a blocking change at the line that sent him pulling wide left. Of the four excellent one-on-one blocks on the play side, Dietrich-Smith's block was most difficult because he was in space and trying to eliminate a much smaller man (Levy). Don Barclay played well, too, shutting out slippery DE Willie Young and allowing one pressure and one-half "bad" run when Suh shifted outside. Of the six pressures allowed by the line, five were charged to David Bakhtiari. He also missed DE Ziggy Ansah, who then blindsided Johnathan Franklin to force a fumble. Bakhtiari is active with his feet and hands and seems well-prepared. Improvement in his game has been evident, and more is expected by the staff.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

The Packers' evolution on offense continues. On the first 20 snaps, Aaron Rodgers wasn't under center even one time. It's a spread-shotgun attack these days, where Rodgers can survey the defense, make his checks and dummy calls and orchestrate the proceedings. Cunningham's only hope was to force several turnovers, but fat chance of that because Rodgers just won't make careless, risky throws. His finest pass was the corner route to Nelson in a tight Cover-2 window. His deep rainbows to Jones tight along the boundary were exquisite. Rodgers contributed to the so-so start. He overthrew Nelson 30 yards away on a free play. He was late on a third-and-9 skinny post to Cobb, which led to a field goal. Trusting his protection against a normally fierce rush, he kept eyes downfield. Rodgers' progressions were a bit off, due in large part to Cunningham's two-shell, no-blitz (one out of 33 dropbacks) tactics.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

McCarthy made a shrewd substitution, inserting Cobb in the backfield midway through the third quarter of a 6-3 game. The offense needed a lift, and Cobb with the ball is the best way to do it. Great blocking got Cobb one-on-one with the safety, Delmas, who had been tattooing Lacy all day with hard, driving tackles. But Delmas misjudged Cobb's speed, and when he missed 9 yards downfield the Lions didn't corral Cobb until he had sprinted for 58 more. Playing 54 snaps, Lacy didn't commit a glaring miscue and routinely banged out the tough yards. When Ansah came off a block by Bakhtiari and grabbed Lacy around the waist, he was dragged for 5 yards. Lacy showed good vision on a toss, cutting inside for 8. He showed patience on draws, letting Lang take Suh up the field and out of the play. On the Lions' lone blitz, he stoned MLB Stephen Tulloch. On the other hand, Lacy went down like a ton of bricks three times on frontal shots by the safeties. Franklin's second fumble in two games earned him pine time after seven second-quarter snaps. For the first time in his seven-year career, John Kuhn didn't play a snap from scrimmage. Fullback looks to be on the endangered species list in Green Bay.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

B.J. Raji (35 snaps), Ryan Pickett (21) and Johnny Jolly (17) went belly to belly against undersized center Dominic Raiola, rookie RG Larry Warford and LG Rob Sims. Other than a 9-yard run to start the game when Raji gave ground on a double team, Reggie Bush and Joiqee Bell found little daylight. The Packers' demonstrated ability to hold the middle with two wide bodies in sub packages might be the best part of their defense. The Lions' only chance was to break Bush free, and no matter how long he hunted and pecked, the defensive infrastructure remained intact. Raji had several big bull rushes against Sims, but in this day and age the ball's either out or a D-lineman is reluctant to finish in fear of incurring a roughing-the-passer penalty. It's a ludicrous scenario. The lone pressure was by Mike Daniels (30), who rooted around hard all day. Datone Jones played 19 snaps from a down position.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Playing 41 snaps standing up and six down, Mike Neal played with tremendous strength and energy. He beat RT Jason Fox for a sack, slamming into his chest and pushing him back. He executed a serious hump move on backup Corey Hilliard. He beat LT Riley Reiff for a tackle for loss and two of his six pressures, and trashed TE Brandon Pettigrew before smearing Bush for minus-3. Standing up over center in one package, he hustled to the sideline, broke down and wrestled down Bush in the open field. If Clay Matthews (thumb) is out, it will be interesting to see how Neal copes with increased attention. Relegated to backup status, Nick Perry was too much for Reiff (Perry was the 28th pick in the 2012 draft, Reiff was 23rd). He dipped a shoulder and came around the horn twice against Reiff for sacks and had two other hurries. Matthews (42), Neal and Perry all set a rugged edge, and Reiff struggled keeping up. When Bush ran a reverse for 20, Perry was guilty of not looking beyond the first ball carrier to where Bush was starting to come his way. Matthews didn't get much done rushing against Reiff before departing on a gimme sack. At the end, Datone Jones took his 295 pounds, rushed from a two-point stance and didn't look bad doing it. Brad Jones pulled his right hamstring on his 23rd snap as he chased Bush. Used to pressure three times, Jones produced a sack by charging through Pettigrew's backfield cut block. Forced to play 62 snaps as the every-down linebacker, A.J. Hawk didn't have a pressure in 11 rushes. Losing his helmet four or five times, Hawk showed great discipline containing a well-executed double screen and came off Raiola for a big hit. However, his athletic shortcomings were magnified in the dime. He looked awful in space against Bush and Bell and was a step or two late on two vertical completions. Rob Francois lasted 12 snaps as Jones' replacement before suffering a torn Achilles' tendon that ended his season. Jamari Lattimore (16) disengaged from Hilliard and tackled Bell after a 3-yard gain.

SECONDARY (3 ½)

M.D. Jennings seemed to be a much more confident player with Morgan Burnett back on the field. Both played all 67 snaps. Down after down, they bounced back and forth hiding the safety look from Matthew Stafford and never had a blown coverage. Jennings is a quicker study than Jerron McMillian, whose 21 snaps all came in dime. He missed his first tackle of the year when his head wasn't in proper tackling position against Pettigrew. Burnett's height and presence were noticeable. His first-game aggressiveness got him beat on a bomb to one of the Lions' faceless wide receivers, but with acceleration and timing he managed to tip a 34-yard TD pass away from Patrick Edwards. Chris Banjo didn't play. The degree of difficulty for Tramon Williams (67), Sam Shields (67) and nickel back Davon House (62) was minimal because Johnson and fellow starter Nate Burleson (arm) were standing on the sidelines. House got beat on a few slants and dropped an interception, but he's much bigger and more talented than Micah Hyde (four).

KICKERS (4 ½)

Given the rhythm that Mason Crosby's in right now, it seemed as if he was kicking in a dome. However, Lions K David Akers said the wind was tricky. Crosby just kept drilling straight balls between the pipes, hitting twice from the left hash mark (52, 45), twice from the right (31, 42) and once from the middle (26). Tim Masthay really improved on kickoffs, averaging 72.1 yards and 3.95 seconds of hang time on seven attempts. His three-punt averages were 47 (gross), 33.7 (net) and 4.56.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)

There were three penalties, most for the Packers since Game 4 last season. The holding penalties on Andy Mulumba and House were poor. Francois, a veteran enforcer, will be missed here. LB Sam Barrington, a tough-guy rookie, now must fill his shoes. Just as Donald Driver once did, Nelson came through with a clutch onside-kick recovery. Hyde went inside when he should have cut outside on a promising punt return that went nowhere. Cobb was exonerated by coaches after fielding two punts inside the 10.

OVERALL (4)

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