

Rating the Packers: Week 6 at Ravens

Packers play old-fashioned to beat Ravens

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel
Posted: Oct. 15, 2013

Green Bay - If the Green Bay Packers looked back and said the key to beating the Baltimore Ravens was stopping four runs inside the 4, it would have been achievement enough.

But when you couple a goal-line stand with a pair of clock-eating drives by the offense in the fourth quarter, you can understand the jubilation among coaches and players alike after their 19-17 victory Sunday at M&T Bank Stadium.

Coach Mike McCarthy's Packers have won a ton of games because of their passing attack and turnover differential. This game was won on toughness.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Ravens, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (2 ½)

James Jones (knee) exited after eight snaps, Randall Cobb (leg) after 36. In the 30 non-kneel down plays of the second half, the snap counts were 30 for Jordy Nelson, 29 for Jarrett Boykin, 28 for Andrew Quarless, 27 for Jermichael Finley and four for Ryan Taylor. By McCarthy's standards it was Neanderthal ball, but it also was fascinating to watch. Finley's day was topsy-turvy. With the game on the line, he separated just enough from Matt Elam's man coverage in the slot on third down to turn a 10-yard in pattern into 52. As magnificent as the play was, Finley stained it by going out of bounds. In the first half, he motioned down and laid a decleating lick on Terrell Suggs that needs to be seen. At another key juncture, he escaped Suggs in coverage for a 19-yard catch. On the other hand, when all of his teammates were blocking with every ounce of energy they could muster, Finley was responsible for the two "bad" runs in the final two minutes. First, he couldn't cut off Suggs. Second, he allowed OLB Pernell McPhee to blow him back into Eddie Lacy's face. Finley's holding penalty was ticky-tack, but he couldn't separate from ILB Josh Byner on a third-and-4 incomplection and got way too high and was destroyed by DE Arthur Jones for a sack on an ill-advised adjusted call that did indeed have him one-on-one with a 315-pounder. Finley also had a drop, and you probably could put down Nelson and Boykin for two apiece. Every Ravens foe searches for ways to match speed against the safeties. When McCarthy finally did, he got SS James Ihedigbo to bite on play-action and Nelson was by him in a flash for a 64-yard TD. Boykin played 58 snaps in all, 35 more than his previous high. He's not a great talent by any means, but by making three tacklers miss on a 43-yard hitch he underscored his much improved run-after-catch from August.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

A week ago, Suggs terrorized Miami tackles Jonathan Martin and Tyson Clabo for three sacks with his power, speed and savvy. Operating mostly against David Bakhtiari, Suggs had no sacks and two hurries. You can tell something about a rookie's mind-set on the first play of a game. On Sunday, it was an inside zone run by Lacy, and Bakhtiari's job was to make sure Suggs didn't get inside. It was impressive to see Bakhtiari go after the distinguished 11-year veteran. Now he lunged and missed, and fortunately for him Suggs wasn't able to track Lacy down. That aggressiveness stayed with Bakhtiari to Lacy's last two runs. First, he cut DE Chris Canty so Lacy had time to barge inside for 9. Second, he stayed in front of Suggs for several seconds so Lacy could sweep outside him for 4 and the decisive first down. You can see the improvement. He's dropping his anchor now, getting his hands inside more consistently and not falling off as much in the run game. On the other side, Don Barclay allowed two sacks, two knockdowns and 2½ hurries, and squatty Elvis Dumervil had four of the 6½ pressures. Still, Barclay had just one-half "bad" run and never quit competing. All-pro NT Haloti Ngata (45 snaps) had no pressures and two tackles, including a Lacy carry for minus-1 in which Evan Dietrich-Smith was unable to reach-block him. Josh Sitton didn't have a terrible play, T.J. Lang had just one or two (including a loss-of-poise penalty) and EDS played well, too. The only pull by a guard or center was by Sitton, and he was penalized for holding Bynes wheeling to the right.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

This was the first time in Aaron Rodgers' 91-game career as a starter that he fumbled more than once in a game on sacks (it was just his fifth game with more than one fumble of any kind). Some people might excuse it, but not Rodgers. He maintains strip-sacks aren't inevitable. Thus, it was strange to see him fumble after the sacks by Dumervil. Fortunately for the Packers, the balls bounced fortuitously and were recovered by Barclay and Boykin. To his credit, Rodgers trusts this line and hangs a long time, which can lead to big plays downfield. He also isn't running as much as he used to, and that was once an enormously effective part of his game. On the interception, there was pressure and he underthrew Nelson in the end-zone corner just enough so Jimmy Smith could claim it. Much worse was a forced, perhaps premeditated toss to Finley that LB Daryl Smith had in his hands before dropping. Rodgers also wasn't nearly as accurate as he has been. Supporting cast or no supporting cast, he is paid to move the football. With the game on the line, he did exactly that.

RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)

With 1:38 left, Lacy had 21 carries. On his 9-yard burst straight up the middle, you could see the toll his big body takes on tacklers. The play appeared to be designed to go wide, but Lacy saw penetration, cut it off and bee-lined straight up the gut. Bakhtiari's ability to get Canty on the ground enabled Lacy to reach the second level. From the left, the hard-hitting Ihedigbo had a choice. He could stick his face into Lacy from the side and attempt a punishing wrap-up tackle. Instead, Ihedigbo attempted a form of cross-body block in which he hurled his 215 pounds at the runaway rookie. Absorbing the body blow, Lacy kept on truckin' before the secondary dragged him down after a gain of 9. Obviously, Lacy is far more than a bull-like closer. He exploded through the line so fast on a 37-yard run that he beat Elam to the spot and went for another 20. It took Jimmy Smith a span of 13 yards to drag him down. Lacy dipped in and dipped out and exercised patience, helping the blockers make him look good and vice versa. His blitz pickup was so-so. Seeing yeoman's duty, he played 59 of 68 snaps compared to four for Johnathan Franklin. Three of John Kuhn's snaps were as at fullback in a traditional two-back set, which is passé in Green Bay. He never played a snap in the four-minute offense.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

A lousy rushing team all season, the Ravens were overwhelmed up front. In the first half, Ray Rice tried to run right behind RT Michael Oher. He failed to gain each time because Johnny Jolly (23 snaps) jacked him up, shed him and pitched in on the stop. Other than LG Kelechi Osemele, a massive, excellent player, the Ravens' starters are undersized. As a result, C Gino Gradkowski and RG Marshal Yanda, a two-time Pro Bowl pick, got almost no movement against wide bodies B.J. Raji (39) and Ryan Pickett (22). Inactive two of the last three games, C.J. Wilson (11) wasn't sharp. After being pancaked by Osemele early, Raji came back to beat the second-year man back-door and smear Bernard Pierce for minus-3. On fourth down at the goal line, Raji knocked off a pulling guard to wreck a last desperate carry by Pierce. The big boys hunkered down both in base and sub, kept blockers occupied and watched the linebackers have all the fun. On passing downs, it generally was Mike Daniels (36), Raji and Datone Jones (18). Daniels had the only pressure by a D-lineman. Even in the 11 three-man rushes by Dom Capers, Daniels required constant attention. If left alone, Gradkowski would have been overrun. Daniels' best moment came when he engaged Yanda, trashed Yanda and stopped Rice for minus-1.

LINEBACKERS (4 ½)

When Clay Matthews wasn't really missed, you know a unit performed at a high level. A.J. Hawk raised his game a notch or three, playing all but two snaps in relief of Brad Jones on passing downs as well. On the first snap, Hawk eluded Osemele and tackled Rice for 2. When Oher pulled, Hawk reacted instantly and smashed Rice for minus-3. When Gradkowski, Yanda and Rice were confused by Capers' modest blitzing (27.3%) on passes, Hawk slashed right through them for two sacks in 2.6 seconds each time. Dropping 20 yards deep in coverage, he made WR Tandon Doss pay after he stretched for an incomplete pass. When Joe Flacco tried a boot pass to TE Billy Bajema, Hawk was all over it. Meanwhile, Jamari Lattimore (45) looked like a player in his first start just as Rob Francois did in his late 2011 debut. He showed surprising nose for the ball, flashed a heavy punch for his size and knocked people backward. He made a hard fill on the goal line, made FB Vonta Leach look really bad on an iso block and broke down nicely in the flat against Rice. On the outside, the snap counts were Mike Neal (52), Andy Mulumba (38), Nick Perry (35) and Nate Palmer (seven). Not unlike Daniels, Neal keeps going after people. He had two pressures, one fewer than Perry before the former first-round pick left with a foot injury. Perry jerked his way around LT Eugene Monroe for a strip-sack; his pass-rush repertoire is expanding. Mulumba, the raw-boned rookie, was adequate. The Ravens were able to expose Neal, Perry and Mulumba in space with short passes. Little is said about Matthews' fluidity in coverage, but watching the others freeze against movement was a reminder of the completeness of his game.

SECONDARY (3)

Through a mix of coverages, Capers was able to minimize WR Torrey Smith (one catch, 12 yards). Tramon Williams (63 snaps) and Sam Shields (63) did the lion's share of the work. Davon House (15) closed the window beautifully on a sideline dart to Marlon Brown but dropped the interception. He also broke up two other passes to Brown before being replaced by Micah Hyde (39), who played the slot in sub while Williams went outside. When Jerron McMillian (24) didn't attack a crossing route to ancient TE Dallas Clark and got knocked off by Brown, Clark turned the corner around House and went 45 yards. House's chase was awful on the play, but the Packers just figured he was gassed from his heavy work (26 snaps) on special teams and made the switch. Morgan Burnett (66) repulsed two of the goal-line runs while M.D. Jennings (54) made a hard-nosed stick of Rice on his first-down carry to the 2, preventing a TD. Chris Banjo (11) got a shot late. In the second half, the defensive vibe fell apart. Williams tried to tackle Brown high, took a stiff-arm to the chops and watched a short pass rupture into 59. Shields squatted, peeked at Flacco and allowed an easy 11-yard TD pass to Jacoby Jones. On fourth and 21, McMillian inexplicably stopped his feet, came up from the deep middle, fell and allowed Doss, who runs just 4.55, to blow past for 63. Then amid a general defensive fire drill McMillian reacted poorly and showed terrible footwork again as Clark got by for an 18-yard TD.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby hit three from the left hash (31, 50, 31) and went one for two (45 good, 44 wide right) from the right hash. Tim Masthay easily out-punted Sam Koch, averaging 54.8 (gross), 41.8 (net) and 4.31 (hang time) in six attempts. Masthay's five kickoffs averaged 68.2 and 3.88.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

Former Packers S Anthony Levine took the blame for allowing Taylor to block a punt. Some teams might have released a veteran such as Kuhn after his stunt of trying to return the ball when it was continuing to spin crazily. When Koch had poor hang times of 3.4, 3.2 and 4.1, Hyde ran them back 59 yards while making four tacklers miss. Doss made Brett Goode, Mulumba and Palmer miss on a 38-yard punt return. TE Brandon Bostick is starting to contribute, and hard-charging Banjo is becoming the man to double-team in Jarrett Bush's absence.

OVERALL (4 ½)

From the Oct 15, 2013, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel