

Rating the Packers: Week 7 vs Browns

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Oct. 22, 2013

Green Bay - How in the world Mike Holmgren, a coach who tutored Joe Montana, Steve Young, Brett Favre, Mark Brunell and Matt Hasselbeck, could use the 22nd selection of the 2012 draft on Brandon Weeden remains a mystery for the ages.

Before that draft, I had trouble finding anyone in the scouting fraternity who really liked Weeden. He appeared to be a second- or third-round draft choice, the antithesis of just about everything that Holmgren would want in a quarterback.

Desperation is no excuse, either. Colt McCoy was as good as Weeden.

Here is a rating of the Green Bay Packers in their 31-13 victory Sunday over Weeden and the Cleveland Browns, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

RECEIVERS (4)

Of Jordy Nelson's 66 snaps, only seven came with him lined up inside. That means he was covered man-to-man, often in bump and run, for 59 snaps by elite CB Joe Haden. The fact that Nelson was the target of just six passes, catching five for 42 yards, would give the decision to Haden. Certainly Browns defensive coordinator Ray Horton would take that every time against a receiver of Nelson's caliber. The Browns also felt good about CB Buster Skrine, a speedster who played outside on early downs and the slot in sub, and his ability to contain free agents Jarrett Boykin (69) and Myles White (48). At 6 feet 2, Boykin enjoyed a 4½-inch height advantage on Skrine. The Packers exploited it with hitches and other routes in which Boykin could use his size. Operating against 5-10 nickel back Chris Owens, Boykin leaped high on a stop route for 15 yards on an early third and 8. Later, he ran exquisite post-corner routes for 39 yards and a 20-yard TD against Skrine, and picked up a 22-yard interference penalty on Skrine that was questionable, to say the least. Boykin also lost a 22-yard completion on David Bakhtiari's holding penalty. He was more physical than White, who was targeted just twice. On the only sack, White appeared to be in line to get the ball but was jarred off his in route by rookie Barkevious Mingo. Jermichael Finley (44) played one of his finest games before departing with a neck injury at the 10-minute mark of the fourth quarter. Afterward, SS T.J. Ward remarked twice about Finley's imposing physical presence. Catching a routine pass in the flat he warded off low-tackle attempts by ILB D'Qwell Jackson, FS Tashaun Gipson and Skrine to score a 10-yard TD. He knocked down OLB Paul Kruger with a hard chip in pass protection, ran over Gipson on a 26-yard reception and lost a 22-yarder when Don Barclay was detected holding. It was an awesome show. Andrew Quarless (33), Brandon Bostick (eight), Jake Stoneburner (two) and Marshall Newhouse (one) also played tight end. None was targeted, but Quarless was responsible for a holding penalty and a team-high 1½ "bad" runs. Quarless will get first shot at replacing Finley, but the coaches won't hesitate calling on the athletic Bostick or the feisty, fast Stoneburner if he doesn't elevate his game several notches

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

Horton's pressure numbers (30.2% five or more, 11.6% six or more) mirrored the game that he coordinated for Arizona a year ago at Lambeau Field. The Browns put the onus on the center, often bluffing with two linebackers in the A gaps right before the snap and threatening blitzes from all over the formation. Not only that, but Phil Taylor is one of the better nose tackles in the business. Against all of that Evan Dietrich-Smith wasn't responsible for a pressure or "bad" run. He is becoming a steady, understated type of player. Never real high or low, he has been calling a good game at the line and keeping his man away from the ball carrier and Rodgers. Dietrich-Smith plays extremely hard, but because he isn't the least bit demonstrative his opponents never seem perturbed at him. He just makes his block, sustains his block and walks away. He'd fit well in the emotionless world of major-league baseball. The Packers almost never use a trap block, but Josh Sitton executed one beautifully against Taylor on a 9-yard rush. Both Sitton and T.J. Lang more than held their own against top-notch DEs Ahtyba Rubin and Desmond Bryant. Backup DE-NT John Hughes made more plays against the interior than the starters. RT Don Barclay allowed five pressures: three to OLB Jabaal Sheard, two to Kruger. They're solid veterans, and they used power to push Barclay back on a consistent basis. Bakhtiari pass-protected much better against Mingo, who kept flying around but couldn't get the rookie tackle off his game. Bakhtiari wasn't as effective cutting off on the back side.

QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)

On Monday, offensive coordinator Tom Clements estimated that 90% of the checks Rodgers has made at the line in recent weeks have been successful. Several Browns defenders marveled at how Rodgers would stand patiently in shotgun (35 snaps) waiting for them to commit to their defensive call so he could make the final adjustment or at least know what was up. That's the game within the game, one Rodgers refuses to dumb down even though there are newcomers at the skilled positions. The pressure was fairly constant, but other than the one sack that probably was his responsibility he frustrated the Browns no end by escaping their clutches. He ended up throwing away four passes, tying his career high and the most for him since Game 6 of 2010. Because of injuries, the Packers ran less no-huddle than normal. They relied on Rodgers to match wits with Horton, recognize what the ever-active Ward was up to and check to good runs.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

The big body of Eddie Lacy (59 snaps) enabled the Packers to control the flow of the game for 60 minutes. You could ding him for a read or two. Ward is such a thorn against the run, and sometimes the Packers guessed wrong on his whereabouts. More times than not, Lacy read the defense correctly and found soft spots. One time Finley missed Sheard on the play side. Lacy recognized it, geared down, sidled left and found 7 yards of daylight. Late in the first quarter, a run was poorly blocked, but Lacy pressed the line and squeezed out 4 yards after contact. He made a hard cut on the goal line and out of a mass of bodies found a crack and emerged from the pack in the end zone. He trusts his instincts; he'll bend a run way back if a hole's closed. Yet, he also knows when to get down, take no gain and line up again. Lacy is just OK in blitz pickup. Sometimes it appears as if he stands more erect in his stance when he's preparing to pick up the rush. Johnathan Franklin (six) surprised Sheard on a wheel route but was overthrown on what might have been a 23-yard TD. John Kuhn played a season-high 14 snaps, driving WILB Craig Robertson 10 yards back behind which Lacy surged for 11.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Even without Mike Neal, who's a linebacker now, position coach Mike Trgovac was able to use a seven-man rotation. Rookie Josh Boyd, in uniform for the first time, was OK in seven late snaps. A key to the defensive efficiency is the fact that no D-lineman has had to play more than 39 snaps since the opener. Everyone's fresh, and with fairly defined roles. B.J. Raji (33 snaps), who probably was the most effective player Sunday, and Ryan Pickett (26) are the stalwarts in run situations, followed by Johnny Jolly (20). Mike Daniels (31) and Datone Jones (23) start on passing downs; Daniels plays some base, but Jones never does. C.J. Wilson (nine) is the fourth wide body against the run. Daniels beat RG Shawn Lauvao for a sack in 3.9 seconds and wore down RG John Greco, an underrated tough guy, for 2½ pressures. Jones rushed better than he has been with three pressures, and Raji's bull rush against Greco helped hurry Weeden into his lone interception.

LINEBACKERS (3 ½)

Minus Clay Matthews and Nick Perry, and with Neal limited to nine first-half snaps and 35 in all because of a sore shoulder, rookies Andy Mulumba (59) and Nate Palmer (46) were the constants. Rushing most of the time against weak-link tackle Mitchell Schwartz, Mulumba had just one pressure in a somewhat disappointing performance. As expected, Palmer didn't get anywhere trying to rush against LT Joe Thomas, but he kept hustling and managed two pressures elsewhere. Palmer played off tight-end blocks in the run game better than Neal, who got moved a few times by Jordan Cameron. Twice Thomas shoved Palmer up the field, creating wide running lanes underneath him. Neal sucked it up, battled double-teams and posted two pressures. WILB Jamari Lattimore (53) played well for a second week in place of Brad Jones (hamstring). He showed speed and cunning breaking up a third-and-1 pass in the flat to RB Fozzy Whittaker and successfully ran through the line behind a pair of pulling linemen to tackle Willis McGahee for no gain. When Lattimore smacks someone, he acts like he has done it hundreds of times before. A.J. Hawk (all 70 snaps) produced 2½ pressures in 13 blitzes and didn't miss a tackle. On a third and 12 pass, Hawk didn't let up in pursuit even though Micah Hyde was in perfect position to tackle WR Greg Little well short on third and 12. So when Hyde lost his balance and missed, Hawk was there to save the day by upending Little a yard short. His effort level always has been high.

SECONDARY (4)

Davon House (57) played one of his finest games. Knowing ample help was in the vicinity, he undercut Davone Bess' sideline route on fourth and 1 and intercepted Weeden's wayward aerial. Later, he used his long arms to tip a long pass from lackadaisical Josh Gordon at the last instant, and then broke up a pair of end-zone fades with excellent timing and patience. He got a break at the end when Weeden-Little misfired on a 7-yard TD pass. Tramon Williams (70) blitzed 10 times from the slot, beating McGahee for a sack, and Sam Shields (70) was solid, too. Hyde (22) served as the dime back for the first time over Jerron McMillian (one), who was benched after a terrible game. Weeden probably should have thrown 20 times to Cameron, easily his best receiver. Maybe one reason that he didn't was Hyde's tight coverage. The return of Morgan Burnett (70) in Game 4 has reduced the number of blown assignments. M.D. Jennings (47) had a clean shot and hit McGahee with everything that he had on third and 1, but McGahee kept churning and converted. Chris Banjo (25), a bigger and more explosive hitter, received some of Jennings' time in the second half.

KICKERS (2 ½)

Tim Masthay's four kickoffs averaged 72.5 yards and 3.91 seconds of hang time. He put one punt down at the 12, hit a bad 32-yard ball and then was told by coach Shawn Slocum to hit his third punt out of bounds so Travis Benjamin couldn't get a return. It went 23 yards. His three-punt averages were 30 yards (gross, net) and 3.89. Slocum called on Mason Crosby to kick off for the first time in nine months because he wanted a well-placed high, short boot and then a directional kick. The results were so-so. Crosby hit from 26 before coming up short and slightly left from 52 into the wind.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1)

The coverage was so disoriented that there weren't any missed tackles on Benjamin's 86-yard KO return and runbacks of 56 and 31 by Whittaker. It was shocking to see Hyde chase down a 4.3 burner like Benjamin. Hyde also ran up 10 yards to field a low punt and return it 18 yards. He took a big hit, but when LB Quentin Groves began woofing, Hyde jumped to his feet and got right in his face. Hyde also faked the gunner into playing him rather than the ball on a punt that hit at the 4 and went for a touchback, and made three tackles. Stoneburner, Quarless and Jolly had major penalties. White fanned on an onside kick recovery but was saved when Browns LB Tank Carder was offside. Kuhn broke through with a chance to foil a surprise running play on fourth and 1 but missed the tackle. Brett Goode made Masthay reset with two snaps below knee level.

OVERALL (4)

From the Oct 22, 2013, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel