

# Rating the Packers: Week 12 vs Vikings

## Defense gets trampled over

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - Judged from one standpoint, the Green Bay Packers' 26-26 tie with the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday at Lambeau Field was an accomplishment.

That's because the Packers looked dead to rights when they trailed, 23-7, early in the fourth quarter.

Rally they did, salvaging their place at the table in the muddled NFC playoff picture. But the lowly Vikings exposed so many weaknesses, particularly along both lines and on the overall defense, that it would take an eternal optimist to be bullish on the Packers' chances down the stretch.

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

### **RECEIVERS (2 ½)**

Week after week, Andrew Quarless just isn't getting it done in the running game. He was involved in four of the nine "bad" runs. In overtime, Eddie Lacy might well have surged across from the 3 on second down, but DE Jared Allen beat Quarless across his face and hammered the running back from the side for a 1-yard gain. On a first-down run from the Viking 10, Quarless came across the formation and dived at Allen's feet. Allen stepped right over the careless block and, when Lacy was stymied on the play side, drilled him for no gain. Lacy failed to gain on another red-zone run when Quarless couldn't get DE Brian Robison cut off on the back side. These are difficult blocks, to be sure, but better blocking tight ends make them. Playing 70 of 94 snaps, Quarless looked sluggish coming off the line and into his routes. Brandon Bostick played extensively until he dropped a TD pass and then sat down for the final 25 plays of regulation. Once again, he showed a developing feel for finding windows in zones on his 24-yard reception across the middle. The WR snap counts were Jordy Nelson 93, James Jones 90, Jarrett Boykin 78 and Myles White two. Jones struggled separating against rookie CB Xavier Rhodes, having a TD pass jarred away, a long bomb deflected and a third-and-7 slant broken up. His knee can't be totally right. Later, Jones helped fuel the comeback by drawing a 35-yard interference call against little Marcus Sherels and making a better adjustment than Sherels on a 28-yard lollipop. Jordy Nelson speared a 34-year seamer behind Sherels and diverted coverage so Boykin could beat Rhodes one-on-one for a 6-yard TD. Boykin's 34-yard sidelineer tight to the boundary against CB Chris Cook showed just how strong and clutch he can be.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (1 ½)**

The unit did good work for a rushing attack that gained 196 yards against fronts loaded up against the run. Neither Marshall Newhouse nor T.J. Lang had a "bad" run, and Evan Dietrich-Smith and Josh Sitton were effective drive blockers, too. Mike McCarthy ran almost all zone plays; the first time a guard pulled, Sitton wiped out MLB Audie Cole and James Starks broke for 34 yards. David Bakhtiari was at least partially involved in three "bad" runs against Allen. Time after time, in run or pass, Allen drove Bakhtiari back. Even on the three pressures that he yielded to Allen, he never flat missed. Bakhtiari battled, but this time the decision clearly went to the veteran. By conservative estimate, 8½ of the 14 knockdowns (not counting the two sacks) were charged to the line. Cole, who replaced starter Erin Henderson, had 4½ pressures mainly because Dietrich-Smith and the guards weren't sharp against his delayed middle blitzes. Robison began to figure out Newhouse in the second half and was responsible for five of the six pressures that Newhouse allowed. At times, Newhouse's elbows were so tight to his body that he couldn't punch Robison at all. Once again, Derek Sherrod didn't play a down. For the second game in a row Lang didn't finish in pass protection, and the result was three pressures. Sitton was letting rushers get to his edge and yielded three pressures. Being tagged with three penalties when the outcome was at hand in the final 2 minutes was an awful way for the line to finish.

## **QUARTERBACKS (2)**

After blitzing Aaron Rodgers just 11.1% a month earlier, coordinator Alan Williams pressured with five or more on 30.6% of passes and with six or more on 12.9%. When the line failed, the burden was too much for Scott Tolzien and Matt Flynn. Tolzien, benched one series into the second half after 35 snaps, missed open receivers four times and underthrew deep twice. He also had two passes (Flynn had three) batted two weeks after having three rejected by the Eagles. His arm trajectory is somewhat flat. The Vikings seemed to confuse Tolzien by dropping D-linemen into coverage. He made a great vertical throw to Nelson despite having DT Kevin Williams right in his face after he was turned loose by Lang. He also faked Robison into the air, faked NT Letroy Guion in the open field and scored on a spinning 6-yard scramble. After a mediocre first series in the huddle and under center, Flynn engineered the helter-skelter comeback from no-huddle and shotgun. The beating that he took was significant but didn't deter him in the least. He found Lacy six times for short completions, threw his always-catchable passes and produced 19 points in seven possessions. His arm certainly wasn't as strong as Tolzien's, and McCarthy must take that into consideration with his play-calling. Flynn, however, did show more moxie, scrambling four times for 24 yards and throwing the ball away when trouble approached. For hardly having practice in his second tour, it was a strong debut.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4½)**

One week after breaking just one tackle in 16 touches, Lacy broke 10 in 31. Four came on one 9-yard rush in the first quarter. Cole missed him three times, and SS Jamarca Sanford and WLB Chad Greenway each missed him twice. The Vikings kept bringing down a safety and Lacy kept gaining yards. On his 3-yard TD, he dragged Allen the final 2 yards. One or two backs? Zone or power scheme? It doesn't seem to matter. When Lang pulled left, Lacy followed his track perfectly and picked up 17 outside. He kind of hops or skips into the line on inside zones. In the clear, he invariably puts the spin move on the unblocked safety. On fourth and 1, Lacy ran into Sitton's back side 2 yards behind the line. It's a wonder how he advanced the ball 6 more yards after that. He also showed better feel as a check-down/flat receiving option. He played 70 snaps compared to merely seven for Starks before heading inside for about 10 minutes because of an asthma problem. Bursting with pent-up energy, Starks smashed through three tacklers on his 34-yard explosion. John Kuhn (32) is really doing the job as a blocker.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)**

The essence of defensive line play in the 3-4 defense is not only occupying blockers in the run game but also getting off those blocks. B.J. Raji (51) and Ryan Pickett (55) simply have to do more than they are. Pickett actually had two or three good rushes; he's moving better on his bruised knee. Raji beat RG Brandon Fusco, an improving player, for a tackle for loss. As a rusher, he hasn't been winning one-on-one or collapsing the pocket against double teams. Minus third wide body Johnny Jolly (groin), Mike Daniels (42) started at five-technique over C.J. Wilson (26). Daniels again led the pass rush with three pressures (two of which set up sacks for Brad Jones and A.J. Hawk), but he's too small for base end in the 3-4. Wilson made more plays than anyone else against the run before leaving with an ankle injury. The Packers gave Jerel Worthy (nine) his 2013 debut, and perhaps as expected the results weren't good. The coaches had to get him out of there when he wasn't strong enough to hold his gap. Datone Jones (20) was thrown into the breach when the coaches were desperate to stop the run, and in his first 3-4 snap in weeks he got shoved inside and Toby Gerhart shouldered past for 15 yards. Mike Neal rushed with his hand down four times, and Daniels rushed as an outside linebacker three times.

## **LINEBACKERS (1½)**

Clay Matthews began looking like himself in his third game back from a broken thumb. The Vikings let LT Ryan Kalil take Matthews one-on-one on 84% of his rushes, and Matthews beat him for a sack and knockdown. Matthews (67) had four pressures, Neal (59) had two, Andy Mulumba (30) had none and Nate Palmer was a surprise inactive. The Vikings were backed up at their 21 facing third and 9 and needing a field goal to prolong overtime. Matthews then elected to run an inside spin move that opened up a gaping hole for Adrian Peterson to charge through on a draw for 15. Eight plays later, the Packers were hanging on by a thread at their 12. That's when Neal blew up the pulling Fusco and Peterson went down for minus-5. Earlier, he stuffed RT Phil Loadholt on another tackle for loss. Neal can be such a physical force, but there also are plays when he's locked up by Loadholt forever and then can't get his outside arm free to prevent Peterson from turning his end for 22. Standing up isn't easy the first year. On the inside, Hawk (78) and Brad Jones (54) weren't good enough. Hawk got away with a face-mask penalty against Peterson to register his first forced fumble since October 2007. He also couldn't even deny No.3 TE Chase Ford on a 20-yard reception, failed to break down and sack Christian Ponder on what became a 15-yard completion, and started playing too high late against the run. Hawk's decision to play lighter this season hurts him in a rugged, cold game like this. Jones doesn't show great instincts, toughness or speed. Both need to be protected to succeed in the run game, and their coverage ability is no better than adequate. The defense missed a stunning 16 tackles, and Hawk led with three. Jamari Lattimore played seven snaps.

## **SECONDARY (1)**

Possibly the best performer was Jarrett Bush (23), who filled in as the dime back for the second straight game. He always provides a physical dimension, and his coverage has been tight, too. Morgan Burnett (80) spent the majority of the game as the eighth defender in the box, and on six occasions (four against Peterson) he came through with strong wrap-up tackles to prevent breakaway runs. Penalized just three times in his career, Burnett picked up a pair in this game, but his roughing call was ludicrous. M.D. Jennings (54) also tackled well, but he's limited so much by size. The Packers tried the heavier Chris Banjo (17), but he got destroyed by pulling TE John Carlson on Gerhart's 26-yard jaunt and was removed in mid-series for Sean Richardson (11). He trashed Greg Jennings on his first snap from scrimmage in a year but didn't do much else. Other than a 31-yard bomb in which Jerome Simpson out-jumped him, Tramon Williams (76) was solid. He was far more physical than Davon House (76), who is hanging back in some contact situations and missed two tackles. He comes across as nonchalant sometimes. House

saved the game with a spectacular end-zone deflection on a dart to Cordarrelle Patterson, but also dropped an easy interception. Micah Hyde (32) fights the good fight nearly every Sunday.

### **KICKERS (4)**

Tim Masthay took the dangerous Sherels out of the game, averaging 40.8 yards (gross and net) and 4.28 seconds (hang time). Sherels had to make three fair catches, and Masthay put three down inside the 20. Mason Crosby made two short field goals (27, 20) but had a rough day kicking off. His three boots for distance had averages of 67.3 and 3.71, he hooked a squibber out of bounds and his pooch attempt was returned to the 30.

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)**

Johnathan Franklin's reinstatement as the kickoff returner didn't last long. He went out with a concussion on his lone return. The only missed tackle was by Mulumba. His botched play against Patterson cost the Packers 43 yards of field position. Led by Bush, the punt coverage was exceptional. The one time Sherels wasn't surrounded was the opening punt. The ball was loose for 1.7 seconds before Sherels recovered his own bobble. Bostick tackled Patterson twice on kickoffs.

### **OVERALL (2)**

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