

Rating the Packers: Playoffs vs 49ers

Green Bay not good enough to win

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Jan. 7, 2014

Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers posted one of the six worst records (8-7-1) of any division-winning team in the 36-year history of the 16-game schedule.

Three of those other five teams — Denver (8-8) in 2011, Seattle (7-9) in 2010 and San Diego (8-8) in 2008 — all played their first-round playoff games at home. All three won.

The other two — Cleveland (8-8) in 1985, Minnesota (8-7-1) in 1978 — played their first playoff game on the road and lost.

Green Bay was in ideal position to become the latest underdog team with a mediocre record in the regular season to post a wild-card surprise. The Packers just didn't play well enough.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 23-20 loss to the San Francisco 49ers, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3)

Defensive coordinator Vic Fangio was without starting CB Carlos Rogers (hamstring) and had so little trust in veteran Eric Wright that he never played him a down from scrimmage. Fangio got away with playing just three cornerbacks because ILBs NaVorro Bowman and Patrick Willis are speedy and savvy, and Mike McCarthy lined up with four wide receivers on just five of 63 snaps. When the Packers split four wide, TE Andrew Quarless usually was the fourth. Fangio played two safeties deep at least 90% of the time, protecting vulnerable nickel back Perrish Cox and forcing the Packers to throw into much tighter windows downfield. Jordy Nelson (61 snaps) was covered most of the time by Tramaine Brock, a first-year starter with outstanding ability. He caught seven of the eight passes thrown to him for 62 yards, including a pivot route in the corner that evaded Brock's fingers by a matter of inches. James Jones (62) again struggled to separate in the short-to-intermediate range and had chances to make three big plays. He was the first to jump against SS Donte Whitner and Cox on an underthrown bomb at the 7 but couldn't make the play. It also would have taken excellent work for Jones to catch a 9-yard pass in the right corner of the end zone and another deep pass at the 9 against Brock. Jones looked stunned after the third that he didn't catch any of them. Randall Cobb basically was invisible in 43 snaps. The only balls thrown to Cobb came off adjusted routes on extended plays that he turned into gains of 26 and 25 yards. Jarrett Boykin (27) got shut out. Early on, Quarless (47) made a solid lead block on Bowman and a good cut block against LOLB Aldon Smith. Then he was clubbed off his feet by Smith on a 1-yard run and failed at the point of attack against LOLB Ahmad Brooks. It typified his up-and-down season.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

Josh Sitton atoned for one of the worst games of his career Sept. 8 in San Francisco with an excellent effort against DE Justin Smith. It was strength against strength, and Sitton gave up just one-half pressure and no "bad" runs. Sitton certainly gave ground on Smith's legendary power rushes, but each time he was able to sit down before getting into Aaron Rodgers' lap. On John Kuhn's 1-yard TD run, he ran directly behind Sitton's drive block against DE Tony Jerod-Eddie. The four power plays on which Sitton pulled gained 20 yards. It's unclear why the Smiths didn't run more than a couple of stunts against Sitton and David Bakhtiari. Undoubtedly some of the reason was Aldon Smith's immediate success against Bakhtiari. He played right through Bakhtiari on the first snap from scrimmage, and that's generally the way it went until the rookie exited early in the fourth quarter with a concussion. Bakhtiari was partially responsible for two sacks by Aldon Smith, gave up another hurry and drew two of the team's three penalties. Bakhtiari finished the season being manhandled by a player with better quickness, leverage and strength. Replacement Marshall Newhouse (11 snaps) finished with another forgettable showing. On the other side, Don Barclay was beat inside by Brooks for 1½ "bad" runs, including a failed third-and-2 run by Kuhn on the first series. He also allowed 5½ pressures, including 1½ sacks. Fangio had no reason to blitz more than he did (11.8%) on passes because Aldon Smith and Brooks were constantly threatening outside while Justin Smith and Ray McDonald were getting push inside. Opposite McDonald, T.J. Lang gave up 1½ pressures and two partial "bad" runs. Evan Dietrich-Smith was inconsistent as well. He got to the second level and sustained nicely against Bowman and Willis. Late in the game, Dietrich-Smith pulled, passed up the unblocked Bowman to track outside and Cobb was swallowed up for a gain of 1.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

Mike McCarthy's game plan lacked punch. He decided to run against Fangio's two-shell secondary from spread formations, throw short with check-downs and screens and try to get Rodgers out on extended plays. Another part of the problem was the quickness and speed of the inside linebackers in their matchup coverage underneath. In the first half, Rodgers was indecisive. He held the ball 4.3 seconds on the first sack, then fumbled in 3.8 seconds after being scrunched by Brooks and Aldon Smith. For Rodgers, who fumbled just 17 times in 53 games from 2010-'12, it was his fifth fumble in 10 games this season. Rodgers was at least partially responsible for three of the four sacks. At times, he had receivers open but thought better of it and decided not to take the chance downfield. Fangio forced Rodgers to be patient, and it's not a game that he prefers to play. In the second half, he ignited the team with two impromptu plays. Trapped by McDonald after his bull rush through Dietrich-Smith, Rodgers managed to get out and with eyes up spotted Cobb behind Cox for 26. On the next series, James Starks and Newhouse didn't react well to a rare slot blitz. Rodgers ducked inside of the onrushing Cox and hit Cobb again for 25. Other than that, his longest completion was 19 yards.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

Serenaded several times by chants of "Ed-die, Ed-die," Eddie Lacy completed his first season by grinding out 81 yards against one of the league's finest fronts. He broke three tackles, attacked throughout and gained at least a yard in 20 of his 21 carries. On a promising check-down, he dropped his third pass of the season. Lacy played 37 snaps, including 24 in the first half and then just 13 in the second. He might have had some breathing problems in the frigid evening air. He looked tired. Enter Starks, who in 15 snaps ran very well five times for 29. Starks broke a tackle by Willis and made a fine route adjustment against Brooks for a 13-yard reception. Starks and Rodgers were next to each other and in some form of communication when Rodgers deemed it necessary to burn a pair of timeouts. Kuhn (13) might have made the first down on third and 2, but he fumbled.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

It was another base defense game against the 49ers with 3-4 personnel on the field for 44 of 64 snaps (68.8%). The best of the wide bodies was Ryan Pickett (47). He beat a reach block by C Jonathan Goodwin that turned into a run for minus 5. He pursued near the 49ers' bench to trip up Colin Kaepernick after a gain of 1. He came off a block and stopped Frank Gore for a 1-yard gain. Pickett also backed up into zone coverage three times. D-line coach Mike Trgovac changed things up, giving B.J. Raji more snaps (26) at the nose than Pickett's 17. The other went to Josh Boyd (14). Every now and again Raji would strong-arm LG Mike Iupati or Goodwin, jolting them back. Raji wasn't making many plays from his gap but wasn't knocked out of it, either. Mike Daniels (35) played with passion and easily was the team's best pass rusher. On his sack, he bull-rushed Goodwin and grabbed Kaepernick just as he was breaking out for what would have been a sizable gain. Daniels had 1½ pressures against Iupati, the Pro Bowl player who continued to struggle against movement. However, he deserved his share of the blame for creating some running lanes for Kaepernick. C.J. Wilson (18) took some of the base snaps that would have gone to injured Johnny Jolly and held his ground. Jerel Worthy played three snaps, including one at OLB after injuries struck, and actually showed a little explosiveness.

LINEBACKERS (3)

LOLB Mike Neal was cut-blocked on the right knee by RB Kendall Hunter on the fourth play, limped through another snap and then was done for the day. It forced Nick Perry to play 59 snaps, six more than he has in a game all season. In the early going, Perry set a stiff edge. One time, he thrust his arms into TE Vernon Davis' chest and jolted him back. He sacked Kaepernick on a stunt set up by Jarrett Bush's flush against Gore and played two bootlegs well. As expected, the more Perry played on his bad foot, the worse he performed. On the first play of the 49ers' final drive, he was unable to break down in space against Michael Crabtree. When the 49ers were committed to the run trying to reduce the field-goal distance, first Perry and then A.J. Hawk (64) found themselves dominated by lead-blocking FB Will Tukuafu. Meanwhile, Andy Mulumba (57) played as long as he could on a bad knee and had 1½ pressures. Datone Jones played seven snaps down and six at OLB when Mulumba had to depart. It was obvious Jones knows what he's doing standing up. Neither Hawk nor Brad Jones (55) did anything beyond the pedestrian. Hawk needs to be closer and almost rolling into Davis on his 28-yard TD so when the ball comes he's in position to defend it. It's a difficult coverage, but no one ever said the game was easy. When Gore saw Kaepernick take off on what would rupture into a 42-yard run, he went after Jones and cut him off his feet. On the final drive, Gore routinely beat Jones on an 11-yard check-down.

SECONDARY (3)

Tramon Williams' aggressive, veteran leadership was precisely what this makeshift defense needed to at least be competitive in a playoff game. On Kaepernick's second pass, he jumped a stop route to Crabtree and broke it up. When Kaepernick threw a lazy corner route to Davis, Williams made a wonderful read and swooped in front for an interception. Give Kaepernick credit for chasing Williams and making the tackle on a 17-yard return. Give Williams credit for hitting Kaepernick harder than anyone did all game. However, in the first quarter, Williams failed to put away what should have been an end-zone interception that would have taken three points from the 49ers. When Mulumba rolled into Sam Shields on the second play, Shields suffered a knee injury and was replaced by Davon House. After having played five snaps in the last four games, House played 61. Dom Capers didn't alter his stop-Gore plan. There must have been 20 snaps in which House and Williams were in man coverage without any safety help. Given minimal practice time and inactivity, House played surprisingly well. He broke up two third-down passes in the end zone to Crabtree and a 38-yard home run to Davis. Brad Jones picked up his garbage sack because House instantly read a tear screen. House did leave his feet too soon and missed an open-field tackle of Kaepernick. Crabtree caught some passes on him. But, all things considered, House left a positive final impression. Nickel back Micah Hyde (20) forced Crabtree to fumble, but M.D. Jennings (46) fanned on the recovery at the boundary. The sure-handed Hyde also dropped what might have been a game-winning pick-six of 34 yards and gave up a 31-yard corner route to Crabtree. When Capers rushed seven for the first time since Game 7, the blitzing Bush (10) committed the cardinal sin of giving up the outside on Kaepernick's 11-yard burst on third and 8. It was a horrible mental error. Safeties Morgan Burnett (64), Sean Richardson (18) and Jennings contributed little.

KICKERS (3½)

Mason Crosby hit from 34 and 24 yards, ending the season with 16 made in a row. His three kickoffs for distance averaged 62 yards and 3.79 seconds (hang time). On five punts, Tim Masthay averaged 39.4 (gross), 35.4 (net) and 4.14 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

The game's longest return, 37 yards by LaMichael James, came on a kickoff by Crosby that he positioned perfectly in the left corner at the goal-line. How James was able to take it that far straight up the sideline against converging coverage was remarkable. That return was followed in four plays by the 49ers' go-ahead TD. McCarthy rolled the dice with Cobb on four kickoff returns, but Cobb probably was less effective than Hyde. Brett Goode had two semi-high snaps. RB Kahlil Bell's lazy block against S Craig Dahl almost led to a blocked punt.

OVERALL (3)

From the Jan. 7, 2014, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel