

Rating the Packers: Week 2 vs Jets

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - It's almost impossible to hide weakness in a 60-minute game of pro football.

The New York Jets are awful at the cornerback position. On Sunday at Lambeau Field, those four Jets were exposed by Jordy Nelson.

Left guard Brian Winters, a second-year man from Kent State, probably is the Jets' worst offensive lineman. He was exposed by Mike Daniels.

Those two mismatches were critically important in why the Green Bay Packers managed to overcome an 18-point deficit and defeat the Jets, 31-24.

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

RECEIVERS (4)

Jets coach Rex Ryan decided that Eddie Lacy would not beat his team. He must have figured his four-man rushes and 44.2% blitzing (a hefty 13.5% of the blitzes included six or more) would protect rotating CBs Antonio Allen (57 snaps), Darrin Walls (44), Dee Milliner (40) and Kyle Wilson (23). He did halt the run and his rush was heavy, but the flawed cover people undermined his grand plan. Playing 69 of a possible 71 snaps, Nelson dominated whoever was in front of him. The Packers trailed, 14-0, when Aaron Rodgers pulled something out of the old Dan Marino-Marks Brothers playbook in Miami. On third and 4, he just flung it up high to Nelson, who vaulted over Walls and made a spectacular 23-yard catch. His nine-reception, 209-yard (86 after the catch) extravaganza includes three for 124 against Milliner, three for 45 against Allen and three for 40 against Walls. He also drew a 27-yard interference penalty on Allen, a safety who had never played cornerback in his life until mid-August. The Jets played some man, some Cover 2 and some blended coverages. They didn't double-team. Nelson's numbers would have been even higher if he could have hung on to three low passes. It also was easy pickings for Randall Cobb (64 snaps at WR) because the Jets usually remained in base personnel to cover the slot. That left SS Dawan Landry or linebackers in coverage of Cobb for which they were ill-equipped. After playing the first 28 snaps, Jarrett Boykin played just seven more. On his 24th and 26th snaps, Boykin was unable to separate from and beat Allen on inside-breaking routes that would have been TDs. Davante Adams replaced Boykin as the other outside receiver and looked good as an athlete and competitor. He's probably faster than Boykin, almost as big and a more fluid route runner. Adams had one more snap than Boykin, 36 to 35. At tight end, the Packers are biding their time until Brandon Bostick can provide a much-needed, stretch-the-field dimension. At least the blocking of Andrew Quarless (36) and Richard Rodgers (34) didn't lead to any of the three "bad" runs.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Filling in for RT Bryan Bulaga, Derek Sherrod played much better in the second half than the first. For someone with such phenomenal size, he really doesn't create movement for the run game. He fell off two or three run blocks but didn't outright miss. After watching Sherrod this season, one scout wondered about his confidence level. Of his four pressures, three came against OLB Quinton Coples. On the other side, David Bakhtiari allowed 3 ½ knockdowns and one hurry in a subpar showing. Backup OLB Jason Babin and Coples each beat him twice. He also left his feet prematurely and failed to cut DE Muhammad Wilkerson, enabling Wilkerson to charge down the line and crush Lacy on a failed third and 2. On the same play, T.J. Lang lost against DT Sheldon Richardson at the point of attack. That's usually a throwing down for Mike McCarthy, and with blocking like that will continue to be. Bakhtiari also got beat inside by Babin on a Lacy carry for no gain. Once again, Josh Sitton and Corey Linsley were the leading performers. Sitton didn't yield a pressure while Linsley allowed two one-half pressures. Matched against NT Damon Harrison, a 350-pounder with youth and attitude, Linsley gave everything he had. He continues to keep his man away from the ball. One of the fumbled shotgun snaps was his fault. Lang gave up 2 ½ pressures, including a stunt-sack to OLB Calvin Pace in which he overextended.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

Aaron Rodgers got the Packers off to a rotten start with his first fumbled center exchange since having one in each of his three games (two were his fault) as a starter six years ago. It's a remarkable achievement, stark evidence of just how much of a technician and perfectionist he is. On this fumble, the Packers' first play from scrimmage, Linsley had to move left and block Harrison for a run by Lacy. It's Rodgers' job to ride the center in that direction. Instead, he pulled straight back and the Jets recovered to set up a touchdown. Rodgers' other fumble came on a low, off-center shotgun snap that he should have fielded. Amazingly enough, it was just the second fumbled snap from shotgun formation in Rodgers' 98 starts (the first was at New Orleans, Game 11, 2008). The comeback, the finest statistically in Rodgers' career, featured an incredible line-drive throw of 30 yards to Nelson on his 80-yard TD that gave no time for Milliner to recover or for FS Calvin Pryor to get over in Cover 2. He also had another long Cover 2-beater that was exquisite, and the two short TDs and conversion to Cobb were surgically placed as well. Now, Rodgers has got to stop holding the ball. He gets an A for courage and durability, surviving four sacks and nine knockdowns. But taking a sack after 7.3 seconds is just plain foolhardy.

RUNNING BACKS (2)

McCarthy refused to run against Ryan's overloaded box. In fact, he never inserted John Kuhn as a lead blocker for Lacy until the second snap of the third quarter. Lacy's long gain in 13 carries was 10 yards. On a 1-yard attempt in the second half, he cut back instead of getting what he could play side and exposed himself allowing Pryor to level him right on the knee. Lacy was occupied for much of his 55 snaps helping in protection. He helped the line with chip blocks and stopped some interior blitzers. He must continue working to make himself available as a check-down receiver. One four-play stretch in the second quarter was it for James Starks. DuJuan Harris played the last eight snaps of the long TD drive at the end of the half. Meanwhile, Cobb carried twice in his three-snap backfield stint. He showed guts pin-balling backward inside on a 4-yard toss but then didn't see a cutback lane on a 2-yard gain.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Poor Winters. Daniels, who played 47 of 72 defensive snaps, had 10 days to ruminate about his tepid showing in Seattle. Daniels has had better pass-rushing games but never one this good against the run. Of his two pressures, the knockdown of Geno Smith against Winters that led to Tramon Williams' interception turned the tide toward Green Bay and his second produced a sack as he split a double-team by C Nick Mangold and Winters. In the run game, the 320-pound Winters had no chance. Daniels penetrated against Winters to tackle speedster Chris Johnson for minus-6. Using his natural leverage, he kept pressing Winters, jerking him and finding the ball. The Jets dearly hoped to follow in the Seahawks' footsteps and win behind their Chris Ivory-Chris Johnson-Bilal Powell ground game. Football is an 11-man game, but thanks largely to Daniels the Packers prevented the Jets from establishing control. Rookie NT Mike Pennel was in uniform for the first time but remained in mothballs. The coaches gave Letroy Guion (38) another shot and had to be relatively satisfied with his improvement. Guion played lower, stayed off the ground and made a few plays in pursuit. You can see some of the power traits that the Packers admired during his long career in Minnesota. Josh Boyd (23) took some of Datone Jones' early-down snaps freeing him to rush on most of his 26. Boyd can stack the point as well as anyone the Packers have but remains too inconsistent. The front seven didn't handle several quick traps.

LINEBACKERS (3 ½)

WILB Jamari Lattimore (59 snaps) replaced injured Brad Jones and probably had a better day overall than A.J. Hawk, who took over for Jones as the dime linebacker and played all 72 snaps. Lattimore made a couple jarring tackles, had one of the five missed tackles by the defense and didn't have a bad play in coverage. He can run and hit. He's also light and still feeling his way on reads. The Jets' last score came after Hawk made a terrible decision on third and 6 late in the third quarter. Matched in coverage against Powell, Hawk left him at the last second to rush even though Smith was surrounded in the pocket. A second later, Smith flipped it over Hawk's head to the wide-open Powell, who rammed 20 yards setting up a field goal. It was a costly mistake, one the cerebral Hawk is paid not to make. Otherwise, Hawk filled and tackled well against the run. But can't something be done about keeping that helmet on his head? Because Dom Capers played more 4-3 than 3-4, Julius Peppers (30-17) and Mike Neal (39-20) had more snaps as linemen than LBs. Peppers had a team-high 3½ pressures, including three at the expense of RT Breno Giacomini. The veteran remains capable of impressive plays but also of letting himself get blocked by pedestrian tight ends. Neal, with 1 ½ pressures, played hard as always. Clay Matthews (64) played to the slot side of the formation in the 4-3 and, on 11 dropbacks, played in coverage. He had two pressures and a batted ball. Nick Perry played 11 of his 20 snaps at LB and buttressed the run defense. At times, he functions almost as a brick wall. It was difficult to find individual fault on the Jets' 39-yard option run because New York having 10 men on the field messed up the defense's alignment.

SECONDARY (3 ½)

Smith and coordinator Marty Mornhinweg directed much of their passing game at Sam Shields. The slant-and-go route by Eric Decker has been seen 100 times before by Shields, but when he stopped his feet Decker got behind him and caught a perfectly thrown ball for a 29-yard TD. Decker ran a clever in-and-out route against Shields for 7 yards on fourth and 2, setting up a TD. Meanwhile, Williams high-pointed an interception on an underthrown wheel route intended for TE Zach Sudfeld and didn't allow a completion in four targets. It's his contract year and he's off to an excellent start. Even though Williams said he heard whistles blowing before and after the 36-yard bomb to Jeremy Kerley, it's never a reason not to battle as hard as normal in the end zone. He shut it down, enabling the undersized Kerley to haul in what would have been the tying TD. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (56 snaps) should have been there to help but was tardy arriving on the scene. The rookie was outrun by Decker 50 yards downfield on a ball that Smith just overthrew. Upcoming opponents will note that and seek a similar matchup. The best player in the secondary was Davon House. Playing 30 snaps in sub packages instead of Casey Hayward, he made two tremendous deflections. Morgan Burnett also made a terrific breakup of a third-and-2 pass. He also didn't fight through a pick on a 14-yard pass to FB Tommy Bohanon, didn't react well in other underneath coverages and missed Kerley on the breakout option run. Clinton-Dix ducked his head and missed Kerley, too.

KICKERS (5)

Mason Crosby smashed a field goal from 55 yards that might have been good from 65. His five kickoffs for distance (four touchbacks) averaged a whopping 75.4 yards and 3.92 seconds of hang time. His onside kick of 27 yards was well-placed but covered beautifully by WR Greg Salas. Tim Masthay's four punts had averages of 49.3 (gross), 46.5 (net) and 4.22.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Sean Richardson and Jarrett Bush led top-shelf coverage, although Bush drew a silly taunting penalty. Micah Hyde made a great play racing up to field a short punt and making an 8-yard return. Harris reacted well to bounce a kickoff return outside for 41 yards. Cobb made two tacklers miss on a punt return for 8.

OVERALL (3 ½)

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