

Rating the Packers: Week 3 at Lions

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Since early last November, the Green Bay Packers have gone 1-3-1 against NFC North Division opponents.

From Game 11 of the 2009 season through 2012, they were 19-3 in the division, counting playoffs.

The Packers should take their 19-7 defeat Sunday at the hands of the Detroit Lions at Ford Field as a major reality check. The Lions had a longer injury list but still controlled the game with their lines and ability to both run the ball and stop the run.

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

RECEIVERS (½)

After being jacked up and shoved several yards back by DE Jason Jones on the Eddie Lacy safety, TE Richard Rodgers was done for the day with 11 snaps. No more action from scrimmage, none on special teams, either. Good for Mike McCarthy and position coach Jerry Fontenot. There's still value in having to fear for one's job. All the 270-pound Rodgers had to do was gain a stalemate against the 275-pound Jones. Then Lacy would have the corner and the run-through by MLB DeAndre Levy in which he made the tackle wouldn't have succeeded. Andrew Quarless (32) took over from there and performed well as a receiver. He beat the speedy, cerebral Levy twice on out cuts for 15 yards, sat down within a zone for 18 and beat SS Isa Abdul-Quddus for a 10-yard TD even though the free agent had blanket coverage. However, Quarless was erratic as a blocker. His cut block of DE George Johnson sprung James Starks on a 15-yard burst and he covered Levy on a 7-yard draw. He also missed Levy twice and failed to get Johnson cut off on another run by Starks. On the outside, the snap counts were 52 (of 52) for Jordy Nelson, 42 for Randall Cobb, 35 for Jarrett Boykin and 34 for Davante Adams. CB Darius Slay has made remarkable strides in his second season. He played like a No. 1 cornerback, brimming with confidence and talent as he contained Nelson. On the other side, Boykin and Adams couldn't get anything going against vulnerable veteran Rashean Mathis. Boykin made Levy miss, turning a 1-yard gain into 11 with the best run-after-catch on what was a lousy day for the entire unit. He also had a routine drop. Not once did Cobb line up outside. All day long he had the slot two-way go against the Lions' fifth and sixth nickel backs, Danny Gorrer and Mohammed Seisay. A hard grader would give Cobb two drops. More alarming was the fact he couldn't beat these newly arrived free agents like a drum. Playing slot in this offense with this quarterback should be a ticket to enormous production and the stardom that goes with that. But Cobb's ho-hum play throughout training camp has carried over into the regular season. Nelson's missed tackle on Don Carey's 40-yard TD return was inexcusable.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1½)

After a poor game against the Jets, David Bakhtiari bowed up against DE Ziggy Ansah with a one-hurry, no-"bad" run showing. Ansah and towering backup Devin Taylor combined for three sacks and four pressures at Bakhtiari's expense on Thanksgiving. Three of the pressures came on bull rushes. This was a litmus test of the strength and weight gains made by Bakhtiari in the last 10 months. Not only did Bakhtiari set his anchor, he finished run blocks better than any of the linemen. Guards T.J. Lang and Josh Sitton have to play a lot better than this if the offense is going to get untracked. For the second straight game Lang got beat for a sack on a stunt. Ndamukong Suh bumped Lang on his rear end before sacking Rodgers in 4.4 seconds. Lang also contributed partially on three "bad" runs. Besides not getting Levy on the safety, he missed LB Tahir Whitehead on a 1-yard rush and was late out on Levy on a toss for minus-2. Sitton was solid in pass protection but failed to sustain when pulling against MLB Stephen Tulloch and DT C.J. Mosley. The three runs that he pulled on gained just 3 yards. Bryan Bulaga allowed one pressure and one "bad" run in an efficient return after being questionable with a Sept. 4 sprained knee. He labored in space and on some backside cuts because his agility was hampered. Corey Linsley got walked back once by Suh and allowed rampaging DT Nick Fairley to shoot into the backfield so fast that he almost pilfered the ball off Aaron Rodgers' hip on a bootleg. But Linsley yielded just one "bad" run, when he overextended on a combo block and was late getting back on the ubiquitous Levy, and didn't have a pressure. As a whole, the unit allowed too much penetration and didn't do enough scraping and hustling downfield.

QUARTERBACKS (1½)

Last year on Thanksgiving, Matt Flynn was down 10 times (seven sacks, three knockdowns) and hurried six times. On Sunday, Rodgers was down four times (two sacks, two knockdowns) and hurried twice. In November, Lions defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham rushed five or more on 28.7% of dropbacks. His successor, Teryl Austin, blitzed just 12.9%. The pass rush was average to slightly above by NFL standards. Considering Tulloch, the defensive leader, went out after merely 11 snaps with a torn ACL, the middle of the field should have been available. There also were backups in the slots and at strong safety. Turned out it was anything but a turkey shoot. Rodgers wasn't extending his progression, often trying to slip through the pocket after the first read instead of reading it out and using the entire field. He never throws interceptions, which is great, but to beat a two-shell secondary riskier passes often are required. With a potential comeback on the line, he had all day to make a play before throwing low to Nelson on third down. Then, on fourth down, he threw behind Nelson against Levy for a 20-yard TD on a ball he completes maybe 75% of the time. He had the best chance to halt Carey but blew the tackle at the 8. It was stunning to see Suh help him up after his sack.

RUNNING BACKS (1)

It's hard to say if Lacy's fumble was caused more by Fairley or running into the back of a blocker. Either way, he didn't have that ball tucked high and tight going through trash. His best runs came on shotgun draw plays. On a 17-yard run, he almost fumbled again on early contact but regained control. You can't fault Lacy on the safety, but there were two other carries in which his reads were improper. The Packers had second and 1 on their last possession when Lacy probably gets close to the marker if he would have lowered the shoulder off tackle. Instead, he bounced wide only to be smothered by Johnson, whom Bakhtiari had under control. Lacy's woeful afternoon in 24 snaps opened the door for James Starks to have 19 and DuJuan Harris nine. Starks was just average other than his carries for 15 and 9 in which he stuck his foot in the FieldTurf and made the perfect cut to maximize situations in which there was penetration. Harris was his usual gutsy self in pass protection but should have stayed play-side on a reverse-field run that was for minus-3.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

Because the Lions played with at least three split receivers, the Packers matched with sub defenses and ended up using their 3-4 base only 11 times. It became a Datone Jones kind of game, and in a career-high 37 snaps he probably had his best outing as a Packer. Operating mostly against RG Larry Warford, the Lions' No. 1 blocker, Jones showed explosiveness off the ball and strength on bull rushes. He drove Warford onto his back and surged ahead to flatten Matthew Stafford, and also had other flushes against RT Cornelius Lucas and Warford. Jones was needed because Mike Daniels (47), Letroy Guion (40) and Josh Boyd (20) combined for two pressures. Daniels and LG Rob Sims probably duked it out to a well-played draw. Sims covered Daniels up at times but then Daniels would slip past him into the backfield. It must have been frustrating for Daniels because the ball always seemed to be going the other way. The more Guion plays, the more you realize this isn't his first rodeo. He's respectable against double-teams. Boyd continues to make youthful mistakes, but at least his bad plays usually stem from aggressiveness.

LINEBACKERS (3½)

Julius Peppers (46 snaps at LB, 11 at DL) had six pressures, three more than any of his teammates. He should have set the pace, too, because his rotating opponents, RTs Garrett Reynolds and Lucas, were by far Detroit's worst linemen. He gave the Packers a chance with a strip-sack-recovery around Reynolds in 2.5 seconds. On the other hand, he is slow to flatten from the back side and allows himself to get pinned inside by smaller blockers. One thing Peppers doesn't tolerate is chippiness. When rookie TE Eric Ebron nudged him in the back, Peppers got in his face. Clay Matthews, limited to 44 snaps before departing with a groin injury, had a knockdown, a batted ball and a tackle for minus-5. It's hard to imagine the defense capitulating as it did at the end if Matthews had been on the field. Mike Neal (24, 19) got his sack on one of his patented stunts with his buddy, Matthews. Their violent, unselfish styles mesh well. On third and 7 near the end, Nick Perry (23) came out of the stack to play a bubble screen and went down like a ton of bricks after being cut in the open field just when it appeared he would tackle Golden Tate. It was so mechanical, as if Perry somehow wasn't expecting a cut on a screen. Jamari Lattimore (46) is an interesting case study. He sticks his nose anywhere, has the speed to overcome his false steps at times and was so much more competitive than A.J. Hawk (74 of 75) during the ugly finish. Yet, he will get out of position, as he was in zone drops on 17-yard completions to Tate and Calvin Johnson. Hawk made excellent stops after upending Warford on a pull and evading a block by TE Brandon Pettigrew. But then he gave Reggie Bush the inside instead of making him win in the flat on a 15-yard option route. In an 18-snap stint for a disabled Lattimore (cramping), Sam Barrington was OK until he played too high and was carried for 2½ yards on the final third down when the Lions closed it out.

SECONDARY (3½)

The Packers mixed several coverages effectively preventing Johnson from dominating. Davon House (39) made a tremendous long-ball interception and covered well, but he also had two of the defense's seven missed tackles. Tramon Williams (75) has been more than willing to enter heavy-contact tackling and blitz situations. His coverage was solid and his two penalties were questionable. On his pass interference, the ball appeared to be thrown behind Johnson and that "Megatron" ran into him. Sam Shields gave up two bombs for 78 yards, mistiming his jump on a 52-yarder to Corey Fuller and getting beat at the ball by Johnson for 26. He played soft, as if he was preoccupied about getting burned deep. Morgan Burnett (75) offered a physical presence against the run from the box, where he is best-suited and most effective. Micah Hyde (58) blew containment on Bush's 26-yard TD run when it looked like he expected him to cut back. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (30) needs work on his run fits. However, he shifted the right way from a center-field location and thus was in position to intercept a tipped 20-yard pass.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby averaged 72 yards and 4.09 seconds of hang time on two kickoffs. Counting a free kick, Tim Masthay had five good punts and one that was so-so. His averages were 43 yards (gross), 39.8 (net) and 4.48 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

Cobb covered 50 yards from sideline to sideline on an exciting 22-yard punt return in which he broke two tackles. Harris' 25.5 average would have been higher if Boykin and Starks would have blocked FB Jed Collins on a second-quarter return. Brandon Bostick played 15 snaps and was penalized twice. Ryan Taylor and Jarrett Bush set the physical tone.

OVERALL (1 ½)

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