

# Rating the Packers: Week 4 at Bears

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - If the Green Bay Packers had lost Sunday at Soldier Field, they would have been bringing up the rear in the NFC North Division and staring at a 0-3 record against NFC opposition.

Nothing's ever over 'til it's over in the NFC North. Ask last year's Detroit Lions. And it surely wouldn't have been over for the Packers, most people's pick to win the division for the fourth straight season.

Regardless of their defensive flaws, the Packers need to apologize for nothing Sunday. They were on the road against an archrival with a winning record, and left with a convincing victory.

Here is rating of Green Bay 38, Chicago 17, with the Packers' 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

## RECEIVERS (4)

For the second game in a row Jordy Nelson played every snap (52) on offense. The difference was Mike McCarthy has begun to utilize him in the innermost spot of a three-receiver set, which once was the province of Jermichael Finley and Greg Jennings. From No. 3, Nelson played seven snaps and caught three passes for 28 yards. It helps give the Packers a middle-of-the-field threat since the tight ends have been targeted just 14 times in four games. It was from No. 3 that Nelson ran an inside-breaking route into the teeth of a two-shell for 15 yards on third and 8. He schooled rookie Kyle Fuller on a 3-yard TD fade and beat tight coverage at the ball by Tim Jennings for an 11-yard TD. His working relationship with Aaron Rodgers is marvelous. Meanwhile, Randall Cobb made six of his catches from the slot and one for 46 (33 after the catch) in which he lined up alone to the left and froze Fuller with a killer move. Covered by nickel back Isaiah Frey, who the Bears cut Aug. 26 before re-signing, Cobb beat him in textbook fashion for a 22-yard TD. Chattering his feet at the line, Cobb released cleanly outside against Frey's press coverage and separated by several yards. He had to make a contested end-zone catch because the ball actually was slightly underthrown. Cobb appeared to drop a slant on what would have been an 11-yard TD. Playing 37 snaps as the No. 3 in place of injured Jarrett Boykin (groin), Davante Adams needs to tighten his game. He ran right into LB Jon Bostic on one play-side route and went down, then missed Jennings on an interior screen to Nelson that should have gained more than 4. For the third week in a row the coaches showed they don't trust Brandon Bostick's command of the offense and didn't play him. Andrew Quarless (43) wasn't effective as a blocker, especially on the seven plays he aligned in the backfield. When the Bears ignored Richard Rodgers (22), he found an opening deep and hauled one in for 43. His blocking, particularly on the back side, was too hit or miss.

## OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Obviously, the Bears were hurting without RE Jared Allen (illness) and DT Jeremiah Ratliff (concussion). Everyone else had to play more snaps than usual and the rush was practically nonexistent (one cheap sack, one knockdown, four hurries). The only starter that didn't allow a pressure or "bad" run was rookie Corey Linsley. His pair of holding penalties within the span of three plays was a problem. He was penalized for finishing a run block on NT Stephen Paea. One series earlier, Linsley courted a penalty when he latched on to Paea a bit too long on a 9-yard run. His penalty for holding Bostic on a pass play was legitimate. The Packers love Linsley's competitiveness and strength but NFL officials just don't allow slam-bam run blocks anymore. He must be careful. DE Willie Young, the Bears' No. 1 rusher, was limited to one pressure by David Bakhtiari. However, Bakhtiari was at least partially responsible for three of the six "bad" runs, including two against Young when the end was in a wide alignment and Bakhtiari didn't get much of a jolt using just his arms. Bryan Bulaga wasn't sharp in the run game (1 ½ "bad" runs) but yielded just one pressure to hard-charging DE Lamarr Houston. His knee no longer hindered him on the back side. After averaging 6.6 running plays in Games 1-3 in which linemen pulled, the Packers went to a straight-ahead wall blocking scheme that didn't look real good. When T.J. Lang did pull twice in the fourth quarter, the net gain was 1 yard.

## **QUARTERBACKS (5)**

Once again, Aaron Rodgers proved to be a hard man to keep down. One week after the Lions stifled Rodgers using mostly two-shell, defensive coordinator Mel Tucker went with a variety of coverages and got chewed up. McCarthy helped by moving away from the same old three-WR, one-TE set by starting with double tight ends and getting back to the formation later on. Five of Rodgers' passes came on dropbacks from under center. In the first three games, there were just eight of those. With his four-man rush blocked all day, Tucker felt compelled to rush five or more on 28.1% of passes (six on 12.5%). The only time Rodgers was down came on his ad-libbing 34-yard TD to Adams on a play that didn't count because of Linsley's penalty. Given tremendous protection and windless, gorgeous weather, Rodgers was scanning the entire field and delivering the ball with timing, touch and accuracy. Just about everything worked against a Bears' defense down four starters. When Tucker tried to sub, Rodgers made him the third coordinator he's victimized for a penalty already this season with a quick snap.

## **RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)**

Last year, in his 14 games in which injury wasn't a factor, Eddie Lacy played 70.6% of the snaps. In two injury-free games this season, his playing time was 64.2%. On Sunday, Lacy played 96.2% (50 of 52 snaps). Why was there just one snap for James Starks (it was the last play for Green Bay) and none for DuJuan Harris? No idea. If McCarthy was hoping to get Lacy in gear, it didn't happen. It did get Lacy a series of six withering hits, including two each from DT Will Sutton and LB Lance Briggs. Lacy resembles a proud pugilist who keeps taking shots but won't go down until his cornerman intervenes. He certainly did wham it in there on an early 2-yard TD right up the gut. He's never hesitant, but on most of his runs there just isn't much happening. In the third quarter, Lacy had a chance to punish Bostic but elected to avoid and the gain was merely 2. His long gain in 18 carries was 10 yards, and even on that he ran into the back of a blocker. Every week he breaks some tackles, but probably not as many on average as last year. John Kuhn, whose frequent role as third-down back has been usurped by Lacy, has four snaps in the past two games and 23 in the first month. It's the Lacy show, and the results haven't been good.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE ( ½ )**

In a possible harbinger of things to come, NT Mike Pennel's snap count went from eight in the first half to 14 in the second half and Letroy Guion's went the other way from 19 to 9. Pennel, the 332-pound rookie, stood in there at least and held his turf. Most of the carries were away from him, but he did shed a blocker and make one tackle. He also got blasted by RG Kyle Long on a trap play. After being shoved back five yards by Long on the first play, Guion had a long day. He showed no instincts on two traps and a TE wham block, and his ill-advised spin move prevented him from being in position to recover the fumbled exchange that Jay Cutler picked up and gained 15 yards. Of the 37 rushes for 194 yards by Matt Forte and Ka'Deem Carey, the only one for negative yardage was the result of Guion splitting a backside double-team. Mike Daniels (38) was trapped on a 17-yard run. Datone Jones (32) was flattened by backup LG Michael Ola on a 13-yard trap. It was as if the players had never seen a trap before. The unit's only sack or knockdown was recorded by Jones, who came across two gaps and beat backup C Brian de la Puente for a 2.3-second sack. Josh Boyd (24) hurt his knee early, returned, gave his usual top effort and then exited after Long drove him back 10 yards from the point of attack.

## **LINEBACKERS (1)**

To be effective, A.J. Hawk (all 78 snaps) needs to have blockers kept off him. He can slip blocks, which he did to both RT Jordan Mills and de la Puente before stopping Forte for no gain in short-yardage situations. He just isn't physical or explosive enough to deliver a blow, jack a lineman and plug things up. When Cutler ran a sneak for 2 on third and 1, Hawk hit him but couldn't stop his surge. Jamari Lattimore (64) is a heavier hitter than Hawk and plays faster, too. Walked out opposite TE Martellus Bennett in the slot, he read draw, re-entered the box and tackled Forte for 2. If his reads are timely, he'll attack the line, too. At the same time, Lattimore tends to play and tackle high, and his fits aren't consistent. He was out of position on Carey's 12-yard run. On one of Sam Barrington's two snaps, it was his play to make on a 17-yard run by Forte, but he was wired to the blocker for a long time. The rotating fivesome outside wasn't any better. Julius Peppers (43 at LB, nine at DL) led the team in missed tackles with three, including a bounce-out by Forte for 19. Obviously, Peppers knew everything there is to know about how to rush LT Jermon Bushrod and RT Jordan Mills, his ex-teammates. To his credit, he didn't take a gratuitous shot at Cutler even though nice rushes brought him within a step three times. The only knockdown was by Mike Neal (17, 22), who otherwise had a too quiet afternoon. Ditto for Clay Matthews (47), who was washed inside by Bennett on two rushes for 14 and, despite mere 15.8% double-teaming, settled for one pressure in 26 rushes. Playing on a sore groin, he did field a bouncing ball for an interception. Neither rookie Jayrone Elliott (12, 3), playing from scrimmage for the first time, nor Nick Perry (23, 3) contributed much.

## **SECONDARY (3)**

WR Josh Morgan must get across Tramon Williams' face to prevent the interception that caromed to Matthews. It still was a great break by Williams (78), but it should have been his pick because it did hit him right in the chest. Six players other than Williams had at least one of the unit's seven missed tackles. Williams' worst play came when he took a bad angle as the contain player after Forte eluded Peppers on his aforementioned long run. Cutler went after Sam Shields (78), who hung tough and made two excellent deflections against Alshon Jeffery and was in ideal position for the interception when Brandon Marshall crossed up Cutler by running a double move. When Jeffery went in motion, Shields appeared to take his eyes off him just long enough so he was late reacting on the throwback-reverse TD pass of 8 yards. One of Shields' two misses tackles came on the 26-yard seam route to the physically imposing Bennett. Williams has been the most physical of the four corners. Davon House (33) slipped on a 6-yard TD pass to Marshall when he played too high and lost leverage before changing cleats and rotating with Casey Hayward (26) as the nickel back. For the first time, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (58) played a lot more than Micah Hyde (34). He made the defensive play of the game, driving up from his half of the end zone and wrestling Bennett away from the goal line as the first half ended. He needs to become a more patient and secure tackler, but his aggressiveness is a plus. After reacting slowly against Bennett in the slot and yielding a 23-yard completion, Hyde came back later to break up the same route. Bennett also victimized him on a 27-yard fade. Morgan Burnett (78) isn't an explosive hitter but made some strong tackles. The 25-yard screen to Forte was on Burnett for being out of position.

## **KICKERS (3 ½)**

Mason Crosby delivered from 53 yards before having a 38-yard try blocked by the springy Young. His seven kickoffs (one was miss hit) averaged 70.7 yards and 3.54 seconds of hang time. He had five touchbacks. His leg proved to be much stronger than Robbie Gould's. For the second time in 15 games Tim Masthay wasn't required to punt.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Joe DeCamillis, the Bears' special teams coach, aimed Gould's surprise onside kick away from ever-alert Jarrett Bush and toward Jeff Janis, Starks and Clinton-Dix. The day was saved by Sean Richardson, who hustled from the other side to make the recovery. Harris and Hyde alternated returning kickoffs. Coverage was exceptional.

## **OVERALL (4)**

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