

Rating the Packers: Week 5 vs Vikings

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Seven weeks from now, the Green Bay Packers' hardest-hitting game of the season might await them against the Minnesota Vikings at TCF Bank Stadium.

After the Packers' 42-10 romp Thursday night at Lambeau Field, new Vikings coach Mike Zimmer didn't linger in the traditional handshake with coach Mike McCarthy.

In his post-game presser, Zimmer spoke of the Packers as being "much more physical than we were," how frustrating it is "when people run the ball down your throats" and that "a lot of it was the back was running over us."

On Friday, Zimmer said, "There's nothing more disheartening as a coach than for you to get manhandled up front." He also said the Vikings' defense maybe "lost the fire."

The rematch Nov. 23 should be cold and a lot of fun.

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

RECEIVERS (4)

Even though Andrew Quarless played 157 snaps to Richard Rodgers' 87 in the first four games, Rodgers started and played the first series of each game. This time, Quarless (31 snaps) started and Rodgers (18) didn't enter until the third series. Quarless isn't Jermichael Finley on quickies in the flat but has more acceleration than Rodgers and is starting to get north-south in a hurry. Quarless' athleticism helps him adjust as a blocker but he tends to play high and doesn't pack much punch. On the Packers' first "bad" run, Rodgers couldn't handle DE Corey Wootton. Brandon Bostick debuted from scrimmage in the final seven plays but wasn't a factor. On the outside, Jordy Nelson was charged with 1 ½ "bad" runs and Randall Cobb one because of negligent blocking. Targeted just three times (four counting a 24-yard interference penalty on CB Josh Robinson), Nelson burned FS Harrison Smith for a 66-yard TD. He's shifty, never seems to tire, runs every route hard and shows the same weight distribution no matter the pattern. Nelson was able to play 69% of the snaps (37 of 54) instead of his usual 95-100% because the second half was academic and Jeff Janis (11) got a chance. Even though veteran nickel back Captain Munnerlyn had outside leverage, Cobb (44) still found a way to beat him outside for an 8-yard TD. Cobb has separated well two weeks in a row. Davante Adams (43) didn't engender trust from Aaron Rodgers by falling down on a deep ball and getting knocked off-balance on a scramble route. Adams did on his slant for an 11-yard score when Rodgers fired it to him in the second window and the rookie didn't even take a peek at Robert Blanton even though he knew the safety had to be lurking.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

T.J. Lang got his mojo back after a few rather ordinary games. Early, he was excellent getting out and sustaining blocks at the LB level. He kept winning one-on-ones against Linval Joseph and Sharrif Floyd, a solid pair of DTs. There was neither a pressure nor a "bad" run in Lang's column. Another reason why the Packers were able to run stretch plays time after time was the ability of Josh Sitton not only to control his man but also get movement. Sitton also was getting off the ball and delivering back-side cut blocks effectively. The left-side combination of David Bakhtiari and Sitton has been handling stunts well, too. Bakhtiari had the toughest matchup in RE Everson Griffen, a tremendous athlete with top burst. Griffen took Bakhtiari up the field three or four steps and then slipped inside toward the passer three or four times, and on one play he was credited with a partial sack. What impressed most about Bakhtiari's day was his improvement against a wide DE at the point in the run game and his nonstop hustle on LBs when runs were away from him. He must be careful, however, about grabbing LBs after tracking them into the scrum. Athletic LE Brian Robison couldn't get anything going against Bryan Bulaga. When LT Derek Sherrod (as well as LG Lane Taylor) entered for the final 10 snaps, Robison moved opposite Sherrod and immediately beat him twice inside. C Corey Linsley isn't playing like a rookie. Each week you see quickness, balance and an understated tenacity. His game is never flawless. He makes mistakes. He's also someone McCarthy and Rodgers should have complete confidence in by now.

QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)

The game was scoreless when Rodgers saw that Munneryn would have no help in the slot against Cobb on second and 4. He checked from a run by Eddie Lacy to a China route in which Adams came underneath leaving Cobb half the field to beat Munneryn. Even against a master tactician like Zimmer, Rodgers manages to find the soft spots in coverage. Some QBs either throw that bomb to Nelson too vertical or too high, which enables the beaten defender to recover. Because Rodgers has a cannon, he was able to throw that pass without a lot of arc and let Nelson adjust. Smith never had a chance because it arrived so quickly through the raindrops. Having big hands is an advantage for Rodgers in wet conditions. Lacking confidence in the run-stopping capability of his front seven, Zimmer kept sending Smith late into the box even though Detroit stifled the Packers by playing mostly two-shell. Using a hard count in which the ball usually is snapped on the third HUT-HUT, Rodgers slowed down the Vikings' pass rush and drew two offsides penalties on Griffen. In fourth-quarter mop-up duty, Matt Flynn (14 snaps) converted two third-and-mediums with completions as the rush bore down. He also made a terrible decision throwing back inside on third and 4 when James Starks didn't even have his back turned to him.

RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)

In the Detroit and Chicago games, 10 of the first 20 runs came from shotgun formation. On Thursday, McCarthy listened to Lacy and others in the building and put Rodgers underneath center on 26 of the 27 carries by the backs. The only run from shotgun was a draw for 6 by Starks. It's almost as if Lacy was a different player. Far better blocking was huge. So was Lacy being able to have the ball for several steps on traditional outside zone plays before using his great vision to pick the hole and make the critical cut. Once the big back (he's got to be pushing 250) found daylight, it became bad news for tacklers. He punished Blanton twice and CB Xavier Rhodes once while breaking seven tackles (no one more than once). Lacy also listened to position coach Sam Gash and stopped his dancing. Part of that, of course, had been taking the handoff flat-footed in spread. Lacy didn't want to go down. On his 11-yard TD, he reversed field and froze Robison before circling him. He did much the same to athletic WLB Gerald Hodges on a check-down for 21. Starks, whose 27 snaps matched Lacy's total, hit the crease so quick on a 17-yard burst that Joseph could only flail at air. He's not skilled in the pass game but, with the ball under his wing, he is a weapon.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Datone Jones played just 17 snaps before departing with an ankle injury. RT Phil Loadholt probably played as poorly as he ever has against Green Bay, and one of his 6 ½ pressures came on Jones' first-series inside charge and warranted a holding penalty. Jones also registered a knockdown against C John Sullivan with the same move that he beat Bears C Brian de la Puente for a sack four days earlier. The Packers used the 3-4 17 times and the 4-3 none for a base run defense. Jones is just average at the point, but even on his poorest snaps he almost always bows up instead of being obliterated. His improvement has been evident weekly. NT Letroy Guion (31) was adequate playing the run and outstanding rushing. He had 1 ½ sacks and one knockdown against his old team; the longer the game went, the more he dominated backup RG Vladimir Ducasse. Mike Daniels (37) was in fine form, beginning on the first play when he slammed LT Ryan Kalil several yards deep into the backfield. He split Kalil and Sullivan for one-half sack and trashed Sullivan, probably the Vikings' best O-lineman, for a full sack. Daniels was just OK against the run, but at least he wasn't getting blown away. Minus Josh Boyd (knee), Mike Pannel (25) played three snaps at NT, three at RE and three at LE in the 3-4. The rest came in sub. Pannel battled, but at this point he's playing too high and getting shoved back or at times out of his gap. Luther Robinson (34) debuted with eight snaps at DE in the 3-4 and the rest in sub. He made two huge plays, clipping Christian Ponder's arm on Julius Peppers' interception and flailing his arms to force Ponder to double-pump on Jamari Lattimore's pick. After getting pushed around taking Jones' snaps in the second quarter, Robinson held his ground better in the second half.

LINEBACKERS (5)

Peppers (43 snaps at LB, two at DL) had the RB in the flat but recognized the sideline route behind him and worked deep to short on his zone drop. Correctly, he was just trying to do his job. Then when the tipped ball came Peppers' way he set sail on a 49-yard TD jaunt that revealed shocking speed for a big man age 34. He also had 2 ½ of the position group's whopping total of 13 pressures. Both Clay Matthews (55) and Lattimore (52) delivered key blocks to speed Peppers on his merry way. Rushing five or more a season-high 40%, Dom Capers saw three of the six sacks come on blitzes. Matthews set up Daniels' sack with a spin move against Kalil, a former high first-round pick who isn't fulfilling his promise. Twelve times Matthews ran stunts, usually with Mike Neal (34, 13). Some stars wouldn't be so unselfish, but the Matthews gang always has been about team. Neal got beat on a play-action pass for 12 but also tied A.J. Hawk for the LB lead in pressures with three. Nick Perry (31, 1) had one sharp sack (bull vs. Loadholt in 2.8 seconds) and one cheapie (Hawk caused Ponder to flee Perry's way with a flush against Kalil on a stunt). Rookie Jayrone Elliott surprisingly didn't get in. Hawk (79 of 79), with 13 of the 41 individual blitzes, and Lattimore combined on a blown sack. Both players, however, had strong performances overall. Hawk's effort was ceaseless, he tackled Cordarrelle Patterson in the open field and he blew up FB Jerome Felton once on a lead. Lattimore made a great catch on his pick and started ahead of Brad Jones, who was healthy enough to play seven late snaps. Lattimore did cost the Packers a timeout by not being on the field.

SECONDARY (4 ½)

Morgan Burnett (79) played as well as he ever has by denying the Vikings twice on third down and forcing Matt Asiata to fumble with a textbook-style punchout. He was a central figure in the more stubborn run defense as the extra man in the box used by Capers most of the game. Micah Hyde keeps starting, but Ha Ha Clinton-Dix was the preferred player again (68 to 42 in snaps). The rookie is eager to make plays and isn't afraid to try. With Capers blitzing more, the Packers were in mostly man coverage with a single-high safety. Casey Hayward played more than Davon House (37 to 25) and was the most effective cornerback with two pass breakups, two pressures in six rushes and a fumble recovery. On third and 3, Hayward patiently held his zone and then broke to jar the check-down from Asiata's grasp. The Bears targeted Sam Shields (79) heavily. The Vikings went after Tramon Williams (79) instead and came close to beating him deep twice. They were key figures to why Ponder's long completion was 18 yards.

KICKERS (4 ½)

Tim Masthay tied the club record with five punts inside the 20. Four of his six boots came when the rain was heaviest, and it didn't bother him one bit. Minnesota's Jeff Locke was affected and couldn't keep pace. Masthay's averages were 50.7 yards (gross), 45.8 (net) and a booming 4.64 (seconds) of hang time. It was one of the best performances of his 77-game career. Mason Crosby was unable to prevent Patterson from returning the first two kickoffs but at least hemmed him in directionally on his third runback. Crosby's averages on six kickoffs for distance were 73.5 yards and 4.04 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3)

PR Marcus Sherels and Patterson make a premier pair. The Packers gave up a 56-yard return to Patterson (shortened to 24 by penalty). After Patterson departed with a hip injury returning the second half KO, Sherels ran one back 46. There were too many missed tackles (five). Hayward had a solo tackle of Patterson. Cobb fielded four punts without incident on a rainy night. Janis came fairly close to blocking two punts.

OVERALL (4 ½)

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