

Rating the Packers: Week 6 at Dolphins

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - When the Green Bay Packers fell behind for the first time Sunday, Mike McCarthy's very next call when the offense took the field was an end-around with Randall Cobb.

The crowd at Sun Life Stadium got about as loud as it was when cagey defensive end Cameron Wake wasn't fooled and Cobb was buried after gaining 1 yard. Only 9 minutes remained and Miami led, 24-17.

McCarthy brings out a trick play about once every other year. No doubt the fans and perhaps the Dolphins were thinking, "The Packers are desperate. We've got them on the run. What will they try next?"

From that point forward, it became the Aaron Rodgers show, and when the curtain fell the Packers owned one of their more rewarding victories under McCarthy.

Here's a rating of the Packers in their 27-24 triumph, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4½)

One play after the reverse, the Packers faced third and 9. The Dolphins rushed only three and on the right outside competitive little CB Brent Grimes had Jordy Nelson blanketed. Not liking what he was seeing, Rodgers took three or four steps to his right. Immediately, Nelson burst away from the unsuspecting Grimes and Rodgers almost casually flipped it to him for 22 yards. On the final drive, DE Olivier Vernon beat David Bakhtiari inside even though it was another three-man rush. With Vernon bearing down preparing to smack him down frontally in what would be 2.9 seconds, all Rodgers had going was the complete confidence Nelson would be open. Grimes is a big-time player. Once again, Nelson was able to separate at the moment of truth and the gain on his out cut was 18. He played 79 of the 80 snaps, caught nine of 16 for 107 yards and lit up the place with his understated excellence if not elegance. Cobb's best was his 5-yard TD when the Dolphins had him double-covered with FS Louis Delmas and nickel back Jimmy Wilson. But when Rodgers extended the play Cobb (73 snaps) kept juking long enough to lose Delmas. Instead of waiting near the end line, he rushed forward between the frustrated defenders and made the catch about 4 yards deep. Davante Adams (62) is starting to give the Packers what they expected drafting him in the second round. Let's be honest. He embarrassed Cortland Finnegan, who for five or six years epitomized the best in ball-hawking, rugged cornerbacks. It would appear that Finnegan is a shell of the player that he was for the Titans, but that shouldn't detract from Adams' best game to date. Not only couldn't Finnegan cover the rookie, he couldn't tackle him at all. Andrew Quarless (53) caught the game-winner with his body, not his hands. OK, that's nitpicking. Given a relative mismatch against OLB Philip Wheeler, Quarless delivered on a nice, solid back-shoulder fade.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1)

On Thursday, T.J. Lang said, "I'm not going to ever give up on a play." He wasn't kidding. As Rodgers was being sacked, Lang was at least five yards away. It was his 73rd play under a merciless sun. Think Lang's coaches would have made an issue of it if he had just stood watching Rodgers go down? Of course not. But because Lang was finishing the play like always he was heading toward Rodgers when the ball came out. Otherwise, both DE Chris McCain and Grimes easily would have beat him to it. As it was, he had to wedge himself between the two Dolphins and assume the textbook fetal position to win the ball if not the game. Probably the best player in the run game was Bryan Bulaga. None of the 11 "bad" runs were charged to him. On the other hand, he allowed 5½ pressures (1½ were sacks) to Wake. When Bulaga kick steps, he wasn't covering enough ground to handle Wake's patented dip-and-rip move. The exaggerated stagger of his stance might be hurting his balance, too. Both Wake and RE Olivier Vernon frequently took off like jackrabbits correctly anticipating the Packers' silent count. Bakhtiari, who allowed all 3½ of his pressures to Vernon, thought Vernon was offside on his full sack. Corey Linsley wasn't able to follow up on his dominant performance against Viking NT Linval Joseph. NT Earl Mitchell, one of the AFC's better interior rushers, didn't have a pressure in 35 snaps due largely to Linsley's strength. One time, when Mitchell raised his arms attempting to bat a pass, Linsley latched on and had the raw power to tip the 310-pounder over on his head. However, the rookie was late getting MLB Koa Misi on a cross-blitz pressure and WLB Jelani Jenkins on a run for minus-3. Neither Josh Sitton nor Lang allowed a pressure, which was a feat considering how good DTs Randy Starks, Jared Odrick and Mitchell are. At the same time, Sitton didn't get a lick of movement all day and was charged with at least partial responsibility on five "bad" runs. Derek Sherrod made a six-snap debut as a sixth offensive lineman/extra TE.

QUARTERBACKS (4½)

Rodgers seemed extra pumped. He recognized that the fierceness of the Dolphins' front, the defense's overall speed and an unpredictable scheme would put the onus squarely on him. He closed an opening 80-yard drive with three outstanding plays. First, he checked to a QB draw on third and 8, then bolted by tacklers to sneak beyond the marker. Next he dropped a beautiful pass over Wilson to Cobb for 28 on a corner route. Finally, he carried out a sharp run fake, thereby drawing SS Reshad Jones up the step or two necessary so Nelson would have room behind him to the post for a 9-yard TD. Little was so precise after that. Coordinator Kevin Coyle rushed five or more on 31.4% of passes (7.8% six or more), registering three sacks, nine knockdowns and two batted balls (by Odrick). Rodgers wasn't perfect. There was an intentional-grounding penalty, a late sideline pass that should have been intercepted by Jones and a couple more off-target tosses. He also fumbled on the sack midway through the decisive drive only to be saved from utter disappointment by Lang's hustle. Rodgers carried the day by implementing McCarthy's aggressive game plan, maneuvering at the line to find the matchups that he wanted and being an anchor for his teammates when all seemed lost on a tough day in south Florida.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

It's hard to say if conditioning was a factor why Eddie Lacy wasn't on the field until the 11th play of the final 11-play drive. Maybe it should have been expected that Lacy would wear down in the heat and humidity. He probably could lose some weight. Anyway, it was a proud moment for Starks, who started the push with a slashing 12-yard run and then actually raised his arm for Rodgers to see him on a check-down and making 10 yards with it on third and 10. Two plays earlier, Starks wound up 20 yards deep stretching out on the sideline for a bullet thrown by the scrambling Rodgers. The ball ticked off his fingertips, but just the fact he was in position and came close might be encouraging to the coaches. Lacy (38) was better than Starks (39) protecting against Coyle's late-developing rush game. Of Lacy's 14 carries (for just 40 yards), 13 came with Rodgers under center and just one from shotgun. Lacy broke some tackles and ran into Sitton and others when the middle was jammed by the Dolphins' A-gap machinations. John Kuhn's four carries were his most in a game since Game 10 of 2012. He found some creases and moved the pile, but obviously what ails the ground game can't be cured with more rushes from the fullback.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

Minus Datone Jones, the playing time was divvied up so Mike Daniels had 40 snaps, Letroy Guion had 36, Josh Boyd had 22, Mike Pennel had nine and Luther Robinson had two at the bitter end. Until Dom Capers went to his base 3-4 desperately needing to get the ball back, he had played one snap of 3-4 all day. On the goal-line stand from the 4, Guion either tackled or made Knowshon Moreno change his path on all three of his failed carries. He beat RG Mike Pouncey once and powered right through rookie RT Ja'Wuan James on the other two. Guion collected one of the defense's five knockdowns of Ryan Tannehill by beating C Samson Satele on a twist. Daniels' production against LG Daryn Colledge was disappointing. Colledge tied him up on rushes (his one hurry came against Satele) and maintained position on most runs. Daniels came to the fore at the end, powering through LT Branden Albert for a tackle for loss and a 1-yard carry. Boyd lacks great this and great that but no one would ever question his effort. Pennel's world of potential was evident when he gained an edge against Pouncey only to blow the sack. He manhandled Albert once and motored over trash. Then there was the 5-yard rush in which he got his pads up and was taken for a ride. Robinson must prove to the coaches that he can be a lot stronger at the point than he was against Minnesota.

LINEBACKERS (1½)

Capers blitzed five or more a whopping 60% (14.3% six or more) and, as usual, his best extra rusher was Brad Jones. Subbing for injured Jamari Lattimore (neck) after 11 plays, Jones had two pressures in just four rushes over his 34 snaps. Over the years, blitzing probably is the best part of his game. He has a knack for timing and punishes RBs. Jones saved a huge gain by tripping up Lamar Miller on a dump-off. But just as Lattimore missed a tackle in the flat on the first play of the game, Jones' miss of Miller in the flat cost the defense 21 yards. Jones will be kidded for having the long pass to speedy TE Charles Clay bounce off the back of his helmet at the goal line. Because it was a fire zone, Jones was in man coverage. Based on how awful A.J. Hawk (58 of 58 snaps) was in coverage, that probably would have been a 25-yard TD. Hawk didn't stick with WR Jarvis Landry on a 21-yard reception, didn't plaster Mike Wallace on the 25-yard gain resulting from Pennel's gaffe and appeared to be marooned in quicksand when Landry caught a post right next to him for 19. If Hawk had any change of direction or quick twitch, he'd have intercepted that ball. However, he is skillful getting Lattimore and others aligned properly. It was a long day for Clay Matthews (49) as well. Despite being double-teamed on just two of his 16 individual rushes, his only pressure came after a flush by Jones. He also played the zone read worse than the other OLBs. Tannehill's 40-yard sprint should have been Matthews' play. Look for Nick Perry to play more after an impressive 12-snap cameo. The only sack was by Mike Neal (17 at LB, 10 at DL). He always brings it. Julius Peppers (39, 2) continues to feel his way through all of Capers' defenses.

SECONDARY (4)

Rotating nickel backs Casey Hayward (34) and Davon House (49) started outside and Jarrett Bush (15) became the nickel after Sam Shields (33) and Tramon Williams (35) went down. House matched against Mike Wallace down the stretch. Other than a 21-yard interference penalty in coverage of Wallace, he sparkled. Well, he should have intercepted the end-zone slant, but lesser CBs are beat for a TD there. Hayward's interception was a thing of beauty. Playing a flat-curl concept from deep-to-short in his preferred zone coverage, Hayward appeared to bait Tannehill into the curl throw and then made a magnificent leaping pick. On the down side, he was too willing to leave his feet and missed the tackle on a short pass to Wallace that ruptured into 25. Williams missed the tackle 12 yards downfield on Tannehill's jaunt and didn't use his remarkable vertical jump and wiry strength to get the ball away from Landry on his 14-yard TD. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (37) made a great breakup of an over route to Wallace and several jarring, saving tackles. Micah Hyde (34) was active against the run, too.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby hit FGs from 43 and 30 yards, averaged 73.7 yards and 3.49 seconds on his three KOs for distance and precisely placed two 70-yard directional boots for touchbacks. It was a nerve-racking day for Tim Masthay. After the block, he did well to angle left away from two near-blocks by Wilson. His four-punt averages were 43.0 (gross), 30.4 (net) and 3.91 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1½)

When Miami rushed eight into gaps against eight blockers, Lattimore played too soft and allowed the block by LB Jonathan Freeny. Peppers was called for being offside on a FG block, but it was Daniels who jumped first. Hyde broke four tackles on a 24-yard punt return, then went a long way horizontally to field a 40-yard punt with just 3.55 hang time and charge up the field for 17. WR Kevin Dorsey wasn't in proper position on Landry's 54-yard return. DuJuan Harris' hesitation-and-go kickoff return for 33 yards won't engender trust among his coaches.

OVERALL (4)

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