

# Rating the Packers: Week 10 vs Bears

## Packers give Bears no quarter

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - Thirty years ago, when the Chicago Bears were a championship team under coach Mike Ditka, they dominated the Green Bay Packers under coach Forrest Gregg.

Gregg's Packers from 1984-'87 might not have been as talented as the present-day Bears of coach Marc Trestman, but they respected the NFL's longest rivalry and played with a fury that always kept the games close.

Despite their 1-7 record against Ditka's finest teams, the average margin of defeat for Gregg's Packers was just 7.7 points.

Contrast that with Sunday night at Lambeau Field when Trestman's aimless squad blew blitz pickups, coverages and punt protections, committed 11 penalties for 163 yards and failed even to compete on offense, defense or special teams.

The result was Chicago's second-most lopsided defeat against Green Bay in the 94-year series.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 55-14 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

### **RECEIVERS (4 ½)**

After opening the Sept. 28 game against the Bears with two tight ends for the first nine plays, Mike McCarthy went double-tight on the first 10 plays. A season-high 11 of the Packers' 67 snaps came in the inverted wishbone formation, including seven with tight ends in front of the back and four with FB John Kuhn and a tight end. Neither Andrew Quarless (42 snaps) nor Richard Rodgers (52) is a blood-and-guts blocker, but Quarless wasn't responsible for a "bad" run and Rodgers, except for 1 ½ "bad" runs when he got too high or was late arriving, was OK. Whether the formation helps the ground game get started is almost moot. More importantly, the set forces the defense to think run, which in turn makes the play-action passing game take flight. The Bears played a lot of two-safety shell early before defensive coordinator Mel Tucker began grab-bagging. Once again, the Bears couldn't cope with Jordy Nelson, who played 36 of the 38 first-half snaps before retiring after a six-snap second half. Last December, a blown coverage and blown containment cost the Bears a playoff berth on Randall Cobb's 48-yard TD catch in the final minute. This time, a blown coverage involving Aaron Rodgers' late check enabled Nelson to run free on a 73-yard TD, and blown containment enabled Rodgers to flee right and find the wide-open Nelson for a 40-yard TD. Nelson's falling-into-the-end zone catch was difficult but there were several others as well: Quarless' 4-yard TD with S Chris Conte all over him, Brandon Bostick's 1-yard TD with CB Kyle Fuller in tight coverage and Cobb's 18-yard TD behind nickel back Demontre Hurst. Tucker blitzed on Cobb's one-handed score just as he did when Cobb ran by Isaiah Frey, Hurst's predecessor, for a 22-yard TD six weeks earlier. In matchup after matchup in the secondary, it was like man against boy. How rare was Cobb's lost fumble? The last lost fumble by a WR was Game 2 of 2013 (James Jones).

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)**

The Bears' only chance to slow the Packers was for RE Jared Allen, LE Willie Young or DT Jeremiah Ratliff to get after Rodgers. As it turned out, they barely got a sniff. Last November on the same field, Allen had too much leverage and strength for David Bakhtiari. He was in Rodgers' lap all game. Bakhtiari gained a measure of redemption by anchoring against Allen's bull rush while maintaining balance to deny the edges. Allen beat Bakhtiari only once, inside on a draw play for minus-1. Meanwhile, Bryan Bulaga pitched a shutout against Young both run and pass (he did have a holding penalty). Bulaga would short-set Young on one play, then change up and deep-set him. He used his hands very well. Corey Linsley earned a decision in a rugged battle with NT Stephen Paea. The rookie matches muscle with anyone, gains control and drives his feet looking to finish. Because Linsley has been so consistent, it was almost shocking to see DT Will Sutton beat him off the ball on a "bad" run for minus-2. Guards Josh Sitton (toe) and T.J. Lang (ankle) obviously couldn't push off like normal. That was one reason there wasn't much room to run early. Still, they each played 44 snaps, made great blocks on Eddie Lacy's 56-yard screen pass for a TD and didn't have any run-game misses. Lane Taylor played the last 23 snaps for Lang. Under pressure to perform much better than he did in New Orleans, Taylor did. Taylor and Garth Gerhart (14 snaps at LG) moved people when the Packers humiliated the Bears by running out the last 5:36. JC Tretter played nine snaps at LG and 14 at LT in his regular-season debut and it wasn't pretty. He allowed a team-high 2 ½ pressures. Before the Packers can be confident in Tretter's ability to play tackle and guard, he needs all kinds of technique work with his hands and set.

## **QUARTERBACKS (5)**

Tucker felt he had no alternative other than to blitz when his four-man rush went nowhere. He sent five or more on 32.4% of passes (six or more 8.8%), but Rodgers seemed to know exactly what was coming and had a field day. He made Tucker pay for his system of checks by getting the ball to Nelson quickly before FS Brock Vereen had a chance to get over. How many QBs can throw a hard, low trajectory pass 48 yards in the air to the end-zone corner before the safety (Ryan Mundy) had any chance to make a play? Precious few. The Bears' defense was so hopeless that Rodgers never even had to run. Later, he flipped a pass to Nelson that carried 61 yards and, when it came up short, led to Tim Jennings' 53-yard interference penalty. It's possible Rodgers underthrew it intentionally. After freezing Young on a no-surprise bootleg, Rodgers took a big gamble throwing back inside. Naturally, his ball shot right to Quarless for the TD. With his rapid release, velocity and timing, Rodgers protects his WRs and limits the number of contested catches. Matt Flynn (23) slipped on his first dropback before throwing up a flutterball, and then threw to the wrong receiver (Bostick) on a third-and-6 incomplection.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)**

Granted, DuJuan Harris' 14 snaps came in fourth-quarter garbage time, but he was the most impressive back. Carrying eight times for 52 yards, the little big man strung together a series of decisive one-cuts after which he sprung forward into the hole. He ran over Mundy. He cut back to find daylight. He surged ahead on contact. For perhaps the first game all season Lacy (43) didn't break a tackle. He just wasn't pressing the line and attacking the hole. James Starks (10) played just five snaps after making a poor decision on a run for minus-3 late in the first half. He has had some success bouncing plays outside, but in this case it was a mistake. Kuhn (season-high 20) did some good things on four cross traps and powers for 20 yards before inexplicably veering away from the hole and getting hauled down for no gain on a late third and 1.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)**

Dom Capers probably was guilty of playing a too vanilla defense in the first Bears game. The Bears killed his unit with a plethora of traps, powers, whams and reverses. In the first game, Capers rushed six or more only twice in Jay Cutler's 36 dropbacks (5.6%). This time, he all-out blitzed on seven of the Bears' 48 dropbacks (14.6%), his highest ratio since 25% against Washington in Game 2 last season. The other part of the plan was equally as daring and just as effective. Instead of asking the D-linemen to stay square and eat up blocks, Capers put them on the move in a variety of stunts and slants. Caught by surprise, the Bears struggled putting a hat on a hat against the NFL's 32nd-ranked run defense. The scheme was made to order for Josh Boyd (32 of 71 snaps), who used his quickness to register his first two tackles for loss of the season. On the Bears' fifth play, Boyd beat LT Jermon Bushrod inside. Returning after a three-game absence (foot), Datone Jones (14) didn't play much or all that well but did beat LG Michael Ola for a tackle for loss. Mike Daniels (40) helped muck up the Bears' scheme. When Capers played just one snap of 3-4, Letroy Guion (22) played less than usual. Mike Pennel made the most of his season-high 25 snaps. As the Bears' resolve evaporated, he belabored C Roberto Garza and backup LG Brian de la Puente. Pennel posted the unit's two pressures, shoved some blockers around and showed range in lateral pursuit.

## **LINEBACKERS (4 ½)**

There's no need for the Packers to minimize it. Their decision to shift Clay Matthews to weak inside linebacker in the nickel was a rousing success. He's bigger, stronger, quicker, meaner and tougher than Sam Barrington, Brad Jones and Jamari Lattimore. Matthews can do anything because he's a special player and athlete. In 42 snaps inside, Matthews played around some blocks, made some hits, chased hard, didn't get fooled, blitzed adequately and dropped with ease. In 11 snaps at right outside, he whipped around Bushrod for a sack in 2.9 seconds and had another lightning-like sack lost due to his penalty for roughing Cutler. A.J. Hawk (70) got a new lease on life because his new partner makes up for some of his shortcomings. He aided Matthews when he needed schematic help but again was a step slow in coverage and to the sideline. Barrington was given 18 snaps whereas Jones was consigned to special teams and Lattimore was a healthy inactive. Barrington blew through the Bears' unprotected middle for a sack on one of Capers' four zone blitzes and did some sticking, too. Julius Peppers (50) sold out leaping over TE Martellus Bennett's block and onto ball carrier Matt Forte on the Bears' first play. He meant business against his former team. Peppers circled Ola for a strip-sack-recovery, registered a knockdown on a flush by Mike Neal (48), beat RT Jordan Mills and Ola for tackles for loss and grazed Cutler's pass that was intercepted by Micah Hyde. Nick Perry started at Matthews' ROLB position, playing 35 of his 38 snaps there. He had one hurry, one-half tackle for loss and peeled off his third-quarter rush expertly to limit Forte on a flat pass.

## **SECONDARY (4)**

The Packers inserted a safety up to stop the run, played mostly man coverage behind it and controlled one of the NFL's more explosive passing games. Casey Hayward (32) rotated with Hyde (55) at nickel back, and Davon House (21) held up well on a pair of take-off routes by Alshon Jeffery. House also dropped an interception and lost his footing on a 22-yard completion to Jeffery. Hayward's 82-yard TD return didn't take great skill, but players drop those type of interceptions all the time. Bennett made Hyde look bad in Game 4 turning an intermediate corner route into a gain of 23. This time, Hyde was in much better position, stayed between the ball and Bennett and made a tremendous interception. Sam Shields had four of the seven missed tackles by cornerbacks. It just can't happen. He was paid \$9.75 million per year to get dirty and be a complete player. He also dropped a pick that probably would have been a 98-yard TD and misjudged the ball before missing the tackle on Brandon Marshall's 45-yard TD. The return of Morgan Burnett (48) strengthened the communication and run defense. He worked his hands beautifully to beat Forte for a sack in 2.6 seconds. Burnett lost track of Bennett on his 37-yard reception.

## **KICKERS (4)**

On a day when the ball wasn't flying far, Mason Crosby's 52-yard FG was extraordinary. His 10 kickoffs averaged 65.7 yards and 3.79 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay's three-punt averages were 40.3 yards (gross), 36 (net) and a subpar 3.72 (hang time)

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (4)**

Coaching peers of Bears coordinator Joe DeCamillis have been ridiculing his unconventional punt-protection scheme. It broke down again when WR Jarrett Boykin, the only man rushing, beat SS Danny McCray so cleanly that the dropped ball by P Patrick O'Donnell never even got to his foot before Boykin kicked it away. Boykin told the coaches before the game he'd get a block. Later, Boykin moved inside and got out of his lane, giving room for Chris Williams to return a kickoff 101 yards for a TD. Crosby usually makes that tackle; this time he never got a glove on the ex-CFL speedster. On nine other KOs, the Packers covered extremely well, especially Jarrett Bush, Sean Richardson and Jayrone Elliott.

## **OVERALL (5)**

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