

Rating the Packers: Week 12 vs Vikings

Against the Vikings, Green Bay players did what they had to do

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Nov 25, 2014

Green Bay - The Green Bay Packers have much higher hurdles to surmount than the Minnesota Vikings.

You might say the Packers played like that Sunday in their 24-21 victory at TCF Bank Stadium.

Teddy Bridgewater, one of the Vikings' many interesting young players, had more than enough open receivers but was too inaccurate to take advantage. He'll grow, and so might the Vikings under their interesting new coach, Mike Zimmer.

For now, the Packers did what had to be done, which was prevail on the road against an old rival.

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

RECEIVERS (2 ½)

The best performer was Andrew Quarless, who played 41 of the 65 snaps. On the first TD drive, he shook off OLB Anthony Barr in the open field on a bootleg and then gained the final 9 yards of a 16-yard reception. On the second TD drive, he ran through the attempted tackle by FS Harrison Smith, another of the Vikings' prized young defensive players. That enabled him to get the final 11 of a 34-yard reception. Mike McCarthy continues to start Quarless, play him for a series or two and then basically alternate the rest of the way with Richard Rodgers (30). Quarless is the more fluid route runner, blocks as adequately if not more so than Rodgers and is becoming increasingly confident. McCarthy must not think Quarless is talented or fast enough to get down the seam and threaten a two-deep secondary. At least he never gives him a shot to do it in a game. Rodgers might have been left more wide open than any tight end in the league this year. The Vikings became the latest team to ignore him, and the result was a rainbow 1-yard TD pass. On the outside, LC Josh Robinson, RC Xavier Rhodes and slot Captain Munnerlyn covered Jordy Nelson (62), Randall Cobb (57) and Davante Adams (46) about as well as they've been covered all year. Nelson settled for a long of 14 yards in 12 targeted passes. Rhodes is one of the few corners with the size and nerve to challenge him. Bravo to the officials for letting them battle. Munnerlyn was all over Cobb on third-down incompletions preceding the first two punts as well as Cobb's 29-yard reception down the middle. Cobb did have a good game as a blocker, especially two-line plays when he helped get DE Brian Robison and DE Corey Wootton on the ground. He isn't big but he is willing. Adams' major penalty for an illegal block was worse than the holding call on Nelson.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Despite not being able to practice the last three weeks because of a torn toe ligament, Josh Sitton probably played one of his two best games of the season. The Packers ran a lot of outside zone plays to the right in which Sitton was asked to ramble and cut off the nose tackle, a difficult assignment that he executed several times. On the two power plays on which he was asked to pull, the net was 18 yards. He buried his man 8 yards downfield on the 10-yard shovel pass for a TD. Sitton did catch a break when DT Sharrif Floyd, the Vikings' best inside rusher, was inactive (knee). Operating against NT Linnell Joseph and DT Shamar Stephen, an impressive rookie, he didn't yield a pressure or "bad" run. By far the toughest matchup fell to David Bakhtiari. A few times, McCarthy gave him help against RE Everson Griffen with chip blocks by TEs. Otherwise, Bakhtiari fought hard and never gave the impression that blocking Griffen one-on-one was too much for him. Griffen beat him for three pressures, one "bad" run and two holding penalties (one was declined). None of the pressures, however, resulted in the QB getting hit. As well as Griffen has been playing, the Packers would take Bakhtiari's performance every time. Corey Linsley almost never has a problem in protection, and this was no exception. He didn't dominate Joseph, the capable former Giant, as he did Oct. 2. Linsley's so-so blocks against Joseph were partially responsible for a pair of "bad" runs. Bryan Bulaga and T.J. Lang had winning efforts as well. Give Bulaga one-half "bad" run and no pressures, and Lang one pressure and no "bad" runs. Lang limped off on the sixth play, sat out six plays (Lane Taylor took over) to get his bad left ankle retaped and then returned for the final 53. The unit's work in the 4-minute closer was a thing of beauty.

QUARTERBACKS (3 ½)

Zimmer's base scheme in the first meeting Oct. 2 was sending Smith down into the box late in the play clock. Rodgers then found holes against the single-high look. This time, Zimmer generally kept Smith and SS Robert Blanton on the hash marks, often clouding one toward Nelson's side. Helped by strong individual work by the cornerbacks, Zimmer maintained equilibrium even though neither his four-man rushes nor his 28.6% blitz mix was effective. Rodgers had more off-target throws than he usually has in three games. Once again, he didn't have a turnover. That was significant in the outcome. One of his inaccurate passes was wide of Quarless and inches away from becoming the first interception that would have been his fault all season (Smith couldn't hang on). Rodgers hurt the Vikings more with his legs (scrambles for 4, 15, 18) and generalship than with his arm. Rodgers obviously was charged with the only sack because he held the ball for 6.4 seconds. But many associate sacks with the offensive line, and he should know that offensive linemen hate seeing sacks like that. It was third and 27. Just throw the ball anywhere but don't take a sack.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

In the first Viking game, 26 of the carries by this unit came with Rodgers under center. Eddie Lacy (61) had another enormous game but this time his mix was 18 carries from under center (78 yards, 4.3) and seven from shotgun (47 yards, 6.7). In the last 3 ½ minutes, Lacy ran five times in a row. Eighteen of his 25 yards came after contact against boxes stacked with nine, nine, seven, nine and eight defenders, respectively. It was almost as if he was telling McCarthy, "Climb on my back. I got this." The only way to turn back Lacy in those situations is penetration. Get to him early, because once he gets north-south he is going to bleed an extra yard or 2 almost every time. Lacy also knows exactly what to do in protection. He stays out of Rodgers' way, patiently slides to the blitz and strikes a blow without lunging when he gets there. He sold the shovel pass like a veteran. He's also gaining confidence, timing and awareness as a receiver. James Starks fumbled on his first play (Nelson made a strong recovery), was banished for about two quarters before taking three second-half snaps. Discretion can be the better part of valor for a RB. When surrounded, just give up. It was first down. Let Rodgers take it from there. John Kuhn (18) gained 9 on a creative newcheck-down to start the game. In the 4-minute, he delivered three solid blocks on LB Chad Greenway.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

Mike Daniels (54 of 68 snaps) played more than usual because the Packers were in their 3-4 for 11 snaps (all in the first half) and he's probably their top DE against the run. Daniels was at least adequate in the run game. As a rusher, he used his explosive, violent charges for a sack against RG Joe Berger, a full knockdown against C John Sullivan and one-half knockdown against LG Charlie Johnson. As the game wore on, Daniels was starting to abuse Johnson, who is on his last legs as a starter. The Vikings weren't about to be embarrassed by NT Letroy Guion (36) in the rematch after he mauled them for 2½ pressures earlier. Guion didn't get a sniff in the pass rush but came off blocks a time or two to make tackles and really hustled in pursuit. LE Josh Boyd (25) made a tackle scrambling off the ground, tackled Jerick McKinnon for minus-2 on a screen that was diagnosed by Daniels and beat RT Phil Loadholt badly inside on a fourth-and-1. He still plays young at times, and was displaced on a 10-yard carry. Still, his enthusiasm and active hands are important to the front. Datone Jones (13) was a non-factor playing on a bum ankle. Mike Pennel had his best game rushing with 1½ pressures in merely seven snaps.

LINEBACKERS (3)

Clay Matthews had less impact Sunday than in his first two games inside. His playing time included 42 snaps at WILB, 10 when he walked up outside one of the DEs as a fifth defensive linemen, only five as a classic ROLB and three as standup interior rusher in the 3-2. Dom Capers rushed him 14 times alone from WILB. It was there that he registered his only pressure; he also batted a pass. On one play, Berger pulled and Matthews took him on and tackled McKinnon for 3. None of the other four ILBs could stuff, shed and hit like that. The first play explained why A.J. Hawk was replaced by Brad Jones as the dime LB. Capers zone-blitzed, Hawk wound up on TE Kyle Rudolph man-to-man and the gain was 23. His range seems to decrease by the game, he gets tossed from his gap more readily all the time and at his weight (about 230) opponents just bury him in the box. Relegated to special teams for a month, Jones (13) was invisible. After dominating the Vikings for 13 pressures Oct. 2, this unit posted an ordinary 5½. Julius Peppers (58) couldn't unhinge vulnerable RT Phil Loadholt rushing but played off him and the TEs to buttress the interior run defense. Minus Nick Perry (shoulder), Mike Neal (59) started and Jayrone Elliott (19) subbed extensively. It was a forgettable day for Neal. He lost contain on both a long run and an 11-yard scramble, jumped offsides on a late third and 4, missed a tackle on the scrambling Bridgewater and took a terrible roughing the passer penalty. Like Neal, Elliott registered two pressures.

SECONDARY (3)

Playing much of the game at the line, Morgan Burnett (68) was a major factor why the determined Vikings didn't have a run longer than 11 yards. He's comfortable in the box. He remains true to his gap. He flattened off the edge to the ball. He didn't miss a tackle. Without an interception since Game 12 of 2012, Burnett ranged far to make a diving pick but lost it when Micah Hyde drew a fourth-and-5 holding penalty on Cordarrelle Patterson in a coverage that was Tramon Williams', not his. Hyde played his curl-flat assignment perfectly and made a great catch of a sideline floater by Bridgewater. Hyde can't let RB Joe Banyard drag him 4 extra yards on a third-and-6 check-down for 6. On Hyde's sack, he beat McKinnon inside by charging right through him. Backs will let down their guard when a DB blitzes instead of a big LB, and Hyde had the strength and technique to capitalize. Hyde started again at nickel back and played 60 snaps, whereas Casey Hayward had 22 and Davon House just one. Once again, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (68) had some shaky plays in coverage but continued to be the most explosive hitter in the secondary. Play-calling coordinator Norv Turner went after Williams (64) again and had more success this time. The veteran allowed himself to get in a pushing match with strapping young WR Charles Johnson and the result was a 22-yard TD pass. Williams was in perfect position twice for pick-sixes but luck wasn't with him. Probably the most effective corner was Sam Shields (67), but he was saved long gains once or twice by Bridgewater's errant throws.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby hit his only FG attempt (48). His three kickoffs for distance averaged 68 yards and 3.73 seconds of hang time. His 44-yard pop-up and squib were OK. Tim Masthay didn't average much hang time (4.1) in his four punts (42.3 gross, 41 net) but did have two Aussie-style boots to the 10 and 12.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)

Burnett knocked the ever-dangerous Patterson from the game (leg) with a hard sideline tackle. Green Bay knocked him from Game 5 with a hip injury. Other punishing hits were delivered by Jamari Lattimore and Elliott. Filling in for Jarrett Bush (groin), rookie Demetri Goodson played hard but drew a bad penalty for fair-catch interference. Based on DuJuan Harris' body language, it appears he has been instructed just to take a knee and let the offense start from the 20 if the kickoff has good hang time and is at least a few yards in the end zone.

OVERALL (3 ½)

Nov 25, 2014, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel