

Rating the Packers: Week 15 at Bills

Packers drop the ball against Bills

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Dec 17, 2014

Green Bay - The passer rating for Aaron Rodgers is above 100 in the Green Bay Packers' 10 victories and below 100 in their four defeats.

Buffalo knew full well that the Packers will live and die with their quarterback. Coach Doug Marrone's decision to sell out against Rodgers meant the Bills couldn't afford to bring an extra run defender in the box.

Privately, Marrone probably was thanking Mike McCarthy for not forcing the issue with Eddie Lacy and James Starks. If McCarthy had, the Bills would have been forced to bring up a safety, which in turn would have opened up the secondary for Rodgers perhaps to exploit.

Thus, the Bills gained their biggest victory in years while the Packers fell behind Seattle in the chase for NFC home-field advantage.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 21-13 defeat, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (½)

CBs Stephon Gilmore and Corey Graham together with electric little slot Nickell Robey took away those takeoff-stop routes that Jordy Nelson (69 of 71 snaps) and Davante Adams (63) make a living on. When Graham squatted once too often, Nelson torched him on a slant-and-go but took his eyes off the ball and dropped what likely would have been a 94-yard TD. A power-speed receiver, Nelson was wide open deep on the first pick but didn't get the ball. On a "free" play, he was in position for a 26-yard TD but couldn't handle a pass that was ticked by Graham. Nelson did break three tackles on a 20-yard slant from the No. 3 position, astonishingly the team's longest reception. Randall Cobb (55 at WR) dropped two more passes after having dropped three against New England. Quietly, his drop count is growing. Robey might be short (5-7 ½) but he matched up well. Cobb did play hard, several times accepting major punishment to gain the extra yard. One play after the catastrophic drop by Nelson, Cobb got right back to business with a terrific open-field block on Robey so Andrew Quarless (43) could gain 7 on a third-and-6 flat pass. Adams, who had one drop, hasn't had a catch for more than 10 yards in five of the last six games. The Packers can't afford for him to level off because Jarrett Boykin (13) isn't a threat. On the second pick, dime back Ron Brooks had Boykin around the waist but Boykin had his arms extended and should catch that slant. He did it last year all the time. Inactive for eight straight games, Jeff Janis probably should get another look as No. 4. Quarless did some good things as a lead blocker but set an ominous tone with his first-series third-and-7 drop. For the first time in the open field, JC Tretter was inserted at TE, his first position at Cornell, in a run-heavy set. Richard Rodgers (20) and Adams cost the Packers three points with feeble tackling attempts on the second pick.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz blitzed merely 14.9%, just less than his average according to STATS, in hopes that his elite front four could unhinge Rodgers. The Bills ran stunt after stunt, but the Packers turned them almost all away and handled the one on ones, too. Rather than ask Corey Linsley to reach NT Marcell Dareus, Josh Sitton angle-blocked Dareus and Linsley showed remarkable awareness and ability to hit on the move as the short puller. His three pulls gained 29 yards. Two scouts said beforehand that Dareus rated the edge as the Bills' best D-lineman. Linsley was the only blocker without a pressure or "bad" run. Sitton mashed and mauled well early; his seal blocks are like hitting a stone wall. Later, Sitton was pushed back by DT Kyle Williams for a knockdown on a twist and got pancaked twice on individual rushes by backup Stefan Charles. His torn toe still must be a very real issue. Kyle Williams got T.J. Lang once on a stunt and DT Corbin Bryant got him for a "bad" run and pressure. Lang was very consistent run-blocking at the LB level. David Bakhtiari elevated his intensity to meet relentless RE Jerry Hughes, got almost no help and allowed just one pressure. Hughes got Bakhtiari on two Lacy runs for no gain. Bryan Bulaga exited after 60 snaps with a concussion. Bulaga frustrated LE Mario Williams with a deep-set approach and shut him down. Tretter replaced Bulaga for the last 12 snaps and gave up the strip-sack-safety off the edge to Mario Williams at the end. There was no penalty when Tretter tackled Kyle Williams after getting beat badly inside.

QUARTERBACKS (1)

Rodgers' default throws are the takeoff-stops and shorter stops. He can complete those in his sleep. On a temperate day with modest winds, his rhythm and accuracy deserted him. It was bizarre, to say the least. After Quarless dropped his first pass, Rodgers had Nelson wide open for a 6-yard stop from shotgun. The ball was shin-height and would have fallen incomplete if not for Nelson's fine grab. Rodgers wanted penalties on the bumping Bills early. In the second quarter, he was so oblivious that McCarthy had to scream for a timeout at :01; he squandered another in the same series trying to orchestrate late in the play clock. He threw behind Nelson enabling Graham to break up a dig. He passed off-line to Starks in the flat. He threw behind Cobb inside giving Robey a good chance for a pick. He didn't see Nelson breaking free with his arm raised, then tried to throw to Cobb open across the middle. The ball wobbled, had nothing on it and was picked. Everyone almost had a heart attack when Gilmore played the hitch and almost intercepted for a 64-yard TD. Bacarri Rambo, the No. 4 safety, had the two picks. CB Jason David (New Orleans, 2008) is the only other player to intercept Rodgers twice in the same game. The game-clinching fumble, his fifth in five games and ninth of the season, happened in 2.2 seconds and wasn't his fault. His hard counts drew penalties on Dareus and Hughes.

RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)

After breaking just a pair of tackles in the last two games Lacy (41) broke five here. Nursing a bad hip that prevented him from practicing, he played through it as is his wont and was outstanding. On the 12-yard swing pass, he managed to elude Graham even though it was tight to the sideline and then crunched over the top of Robey. His 1-yard TD was poorly blocked but he got it anyway. Lacy's overweight and hurting and everything else, but week in and week out he has been a force. Starks (15) looked explosive, breaking two tackles in his five touches, but then never saw the field in the second half. He hurt the cause by misjudging the sideline and catching an 8-yard pass out of bounds. The best drive (80 yards) saw John Kuhn (15) in the backfield for every play. On two runs by Lacy for 32, he delivered excellent blocks on LB Nigel Bradham. Kuhn's false-start penalty was his first since the Oakland rout in December 2007. Thirteen of Cobb's 14 snaps in the backfield came in the fourth quarter. He beat Bradham for 14, Rambo for 16 and FS Aaron Williams for 17 with quick cuts. It's about all the Packers had in the passing game all day.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

Mike Daniels (51 of 68 snaps) put himself in position for a big game but missed three tackles, an exorbitant number for a D-lineman (he had six misses in 2012-'13). Down after down, Daniels compensates for lack of height by staying low and generally holding his gap. He also has the body snap and desire not to stay blocked for long. His pass rush, though, was disappointing. Letroy Guion (45) had to take on a slew of double-teams and couldn't prevent the Bills from controlling the clock. He just isn't the jumbo anchor the Packers used to have. Guion, however, is quick off the ball. It showed on his walk-back sack against C Eric Wood, the Bills' best O-lineman, and the third-and-1 stop that he shared credit with Josh Boyd and Daniels. Boyd (33) wrecked a drive by drawing a hold on LT Cordy Glenn and shoving back LG Kraig Urbik to tackle Jackson for minus-5 on successive plays. On the other hand, Boyd was shoved from his gap a few times by Glenn; there appeared to be bad blood between the old SEC rivals. Datone Jones (21) played mostly on passing downs and was just OK.

LINEBACKERS (3 ½)

Playing as the dime LB for the third time in four games, Brad Jones made the most of his 11 snaps. Jones played to the leverage of his coverage and twice tackled receivers short on third-down completions, and broke up a third-and-8 pass to Fred Jackson with a quick close to the ball. He also occupied two blockers on a middle blitz freeing Clay Matthews to roll through for a sack. It was his best game in a while. The Packers might consider expanding Jones' role so he joins Sam Barrington (57) in the base. A.J. Hawk (32) played another game in the 3-4 only and offered no bulk or strike against the Bills' guard-to-guard run game. On third and 2, Hawk had a clean shot but Boobie Dixon just kept on going through his minimal impact. Barrington is a head-hunter. He will play too high, seems to guess sometimes in coverage and is heavily penalized. But at least he delivers a blow. Matthews (43 OLB, 25 ILB) played every snap and had four of the team's 10 pressures. On the other side, Julius Peppers didn't even have one pressure playing against long-armed rookie Seantrel Henderson, a seventh-round pick. Everyone knew right where stationary Kyle Orton would be, but Peppers still couldn't get there. He also had one of the 12 missed tackles by the defense. Mike Neal (eight DL, 12 OLB) registered two pressures early. The other backup outside, Nick Perry (18), reinjured his shoulder but came back and finished. The assumption is the shoulder has taken the punch from Perry's power rushes.

SECONDARY (3)

Tramon Williams (64) bounced back from a rough outing and was the best player in the back end. Orton tested Williams three times on double-moves but didn't get anywhere. On the interception, he blanketed Sammy Watkins in man coverage, maintained excellent position and used his superior vertical jump to win the ball from the rookie. On the other side, Sam Shields (63) keeps getting his body in awkward positions, even on special teams. It's unorthodox, to say the least. Nickel back Micah Hyde (33) hasn't been as strong tackling in recent games, and Casey Hayward (13) played in the dime. Dom Capers blitzed 45.5%, putting the normal onus on the defensive backs to cover one-on-one and doing what he could to stop the run. For a change, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (68) was the eighth man up almost as much as Morgan Burnett (68). Clinton-Dix did make a raft of tackles but also missed four. It might not happen if he'd take one step closer to his target while keeping his head up. It looked like the two safeties were mostly to blame on the 40-yard pass to RB Bryce Brown.

KICKERS (2 ½)

Tim Masthay's poor punt (31 yards, 4.03 seconds hang time) led to Marcus Thigpen's 75-yard TD. His best punt, 63 yards, rolled for 23. His six-punt averages were 42.8 yards (gross), 30.3 (net) and 4.10. The protection snafus could be weighing on Masthay. Mason Crosby hit FGs from 45 and 34; the block from 53 wasn't on him. His four-kickoff averages were 61.8 and 4.00.

SPECIAL TEAMS (½)

The Packers' punt team didn't look good athletically. Thigpen was surrounded but no one was able to break down and tackle him. Sean Richardson had the early miss, and Boykin's lack of speed proved costly late. The Bills made sure Jarrett Bush was double-teamed. When Linsley got too high, Mario Williams gained 3 yards of penetration and blocked the FG. Quarless was late getting on the field, which tends to unsettle everyone. Jayrone Elliott — big, fast, tough and learning how to play — made the tackle on all four returns. Chris Banjo debuted in a prominent role. He'll help. WR Marcus Easley split the double-team block of rookie Demetri Goodson (replacing injured Davon House) and Shields to dump Hyde for no gain, forcing the Packers to start their last-ditch drive at the 10. Brandon Bostick and Richardson had penalties.

OVERALL (1 ½)

Dec 17, 2014, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel