

# Grading The Green Bay Packers:

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## Coaching

The 4-3 (or quad) defense was a failure. The Packers didn't run it at all in the preseason and expected it to work against one of the NFL's most dynamic offenses in Seattle during the regular-season opener. The coaches trashed it after a woeful first half against Chicago in Week 4. Part of the problem was the lackluster play of inside linebackers Brad Jones and A.J. Hawk. Clay Matthews' shift to inside linebacker had a domino effect on the defense, which improved dramatically during the second half of the season. The Packers still gave up a lot of production in the fourth quarter of games, which came back to bite them during a colossal collapse in the NFC championship game against the Seahawks. Conservative play-calling late did them no favors, either. The Packers' no-huddle offense stalled early in the season when it tried a run-first approach behind Eddie Lacy. It regained its footing when it put the ball back in the hand of Rodgers, and the offense wound up being the league's top-scoring unit. However, Green Bay never was able to replicate its successes at home (9-0) on the road (4-5) where it averaged nearly half as many points. Special teams were an absolute train wreck. The Packers gave up seven combined blocked field goals, extra points and punts. They also allowed a punt return for a touchdown that was the difference in a Dec. 14 loss to Buffalo. Brandon Bostick's botched onside kick in the NFC championship game brought all of the unit's failures full circle.

**Grade: B-**



Green Bay Packers general manager Ted Thompson (Photo: File/USA TODAY Sports)

## **Personnel Moves**

The Packers added two difference-makers in free agency, Julius Peppers and Letroy Guion, without compromising any potential compensatory draft picks since both players were released for salary-cap reasons. General manager Ted Thompson gambled right on Peppers, who stayed healthy and showed he could still make plays at age 34. The Packers had to pay a little more than they probably wanted to re-sign cornerback Sam Shields, but he remains an up-and-comer despite his injury history. Although losing James Jones to free agency took away another of Aaron Rodgers' weapons, the Packers accurately extended Jordy Nelson prior to him registering the first 1,500-yard receiving year in franchise history. They also allowed center Evan Dietrich-Smith to walk in free agency and drafted an even better replacement in Corey Linsley, who stepped in when JC Tretter was lost for the first half of the season with a knee injury. They didn't gain immediate production from all of their draft picks, but first-round safety Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and second-round receiver Davante Adams flashed serious potential. The only wart on the Packers' offseason was neglecting the inside linebacker position one year after the safety position eroded without any offseason upkeep. Jones was a disaster and Hawk went from serviceable to substandard fast, forcing Matthews to play out of position in the second half of the season.

**Grade: B-plus.**

## Grading Scale

A: Elite NFL player

B: Above average

C: Average

D: Below average

F: Failed to perform at an NFL level

Note: Dropped passes, missed tackles, touchdowns allowed and sacks allowed were according to Pro Football Focus. Penalties according to NFLPenalties.com.

By the numbers

Key 2014 statistics, with NFL ranking out of 32 teams in parentheses.

Total offense: 386.1 yards per game (sixth).

Rushing offense: 119.8 yards per game (11th).

Passing offenses: 266.3 yards per game (eighth).

Total defense: 346.4 yards per game (15th).

Rushing defense: 119.9 yards per game (23rd).

Passing defense: 226.4 yards per game (10th).

Turnover differential: Plus-14 (first).

Takeaways: 27 (18 interceptions, nine fumble recoveries).

Giveaways: 13 (six interceptions, seven lost fumbles).

Net punting: 37.0 yards (31st).

Kickoff return average: 19.1 yards per return (31st).

Punt return average: 11.5 yards per return (fifth).

Sacks: 41 (tied for ninth).

Sacks allowed: 30 (tied for ninth fewest).

Penalties: 104 (tied for 13th fewest).