

Rating the Packers: Week 2 vs Seahawks

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Sept 22, 2015

Green Bay - Seattle coach Pete Carroll sized up the situation Sunday night the moment he walked into Lambeau Field.

"I know it's a big game for these guys after all the story lines," Carroll said after the Green Bay Packers defeated the Seahawks, 27-17. "These guys started out with a great surge...fans and everything...all the energy they could muster. It was really obvious...their hometown, and all that kind of stuff...it was really, really strong."

In some ways it was a game the Packers had to win, and they certainly delivered before a record regular-season crowd.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Seahawks, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

RECEIVERS (4)

Richard Rodgers (44 snaps) failed to beat MLB Bobby Wagner inside on third down from the 1, and the result was four fewer points. The two-point conversion found the pair matched up again. This time, Rodgers wheeled his 270-pound frame into Wagner, created separation and made the catch despite an interference penalty on Wagner. Of all things, Rodgers then hovered over Wagner for a second or two in a form of gloating. LB K.J. Wright immediately objected, and their dispute carried over to the next snap from scrimmage. Rodgers sustained his block on Wright, going for the pancake. Wright pinned Rodgers on the way down before they grabbed face masks and the Seahawk was ejected. The Packers can only hope Rodgers continues playing with aggressiveness, both as a blocker and receiver. A fourth-quarter draw play in which he was late off the ball and tardy picking up Wright was more typical of Rodgers' blocking. Rookie Ty Montgomery ran like the running back many scouts portrayed him as, breaking two tackles and falling forward several times. The Seahawks made a wise choice benching SS Dion Bailey and covering Randall Cobb (61 at WR) in the slot with Marcus Burley, who fared well against him a year ago. Most of Cobb's 116 yards came in the middle of the field against linebacker and zone coverage. Both Cobb (shoulder) and Davante Adams (54, ankle) played hurt. Old pro James Jones (68) was right there in the end zone for a 29-yard "free play" TD after Aaron Rodgers looked off FS Earl Thomas. Jones is like Muhammad Ali against George Foreman in Zaire, winning by "rope a doping." Andrew Quarless (20) delivered a stinging wham block on DE Bruce Irvin, springing James Starks for the Packers' longest gain (35 yards) of the night.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

The core of the entire attack was centered around the trio of Josh Sitton, Corey Linsley and T.J. Lang. The Packers' interior had been the best part of the offense in the previous three games against Seattle, and there was no drop-off this time. Linsley was impressive in his battle with Brandon Mebane, a powerful and seasoned nose tackle. Mebane drew a holding penalty against Linsley on a botched play, and also wheeled by him for one-half of a pressure. Otherwise, Linsley maintained ideal position in pass protection. He is mastering the fine line between being too aggressive and not aggressive enough. Along with Sitton, they almost never get knocked back. Jordan Hill, an explosive young inside rusher, didn't get a sniff against the interior. Other than the first run of the game and an illegal-hands penalty, Sitton was consistent. Lang could have sustained a little better in the run game against 3-technique Ahtyba Rubin. He also delivered some punishing help blocks on DE Cliff Avril. The Packers slid the line toward Don Barclay thinking Linsley could handle himself one-on-one in protection. Barclay's competition with the undersized but still bull-rushing Avril wasn't clean. His no-sack, two-pressure day would have been higher if somebody other than Rodgers had been playing quarterback. Barclay allowed two of the five "bad" runs, too. But considering it was his first start in 20 months and the caliber of opposition, Barclay successfully filled in for injured Bryan Bulaga. He kept at least half of his body in contact with either Avril or Michael Bennett all day long. Barclay and David Bakhtiari were bull-rushed repeatedly. Bakhtiari seemed to be inviting Irvin or Bennett to get to his outside edge, and from there he tried to push them around the horn. At times it worked, and at other times (3½ pressures, including two sacks) it didn't. Bakhtiari was steady and persistent in the run game. On the five carries when linemen pulled, the gain was 19. While his edges often collapsed, Rodgers' security blanket was knowing the middle of the pocket was secure.

QUARTERBACKS (5)

When Rodgers was healthy, the Seahawks blitzed him just 15.4% in September 2012 and 7.9% in September 2014. When he had a bad calf in January, coordinator Dan Quinn blitzed 23.7%. On this night, the blitz rate for first-year coordinator Kris Richard was merely 4.7%. By rushing four, Richard generally prevented the big play but left himself vulnerable to runs by Rodgers. With six gaps available, a four-man rush theoretically leaves two open. Rodgers found them. At times, Rodgers would gambol ahead just to see what he could see. Other times, he evacuated when his tackles were walked back. As always, he threw with unreal accuracy on the move and never came close to an interception. When the Packers took charge in the first series, Rodgers drew Bennett offside twice and converted the first third down on a 12-men penalty. When it was third and 12 at the Seattle 46, Rodgers courageously sold out on a middle scramble to gain 9 yards, just enough for a field-goal attempt. Running Rodgers on a QB draw into the teeth of an aroused defense was risky business. With pass rushers buzzing and bumping him, Rodgers kept two hands securely locked on the ball at the moment of truth before making the play.

RUNNING BACKS (3½)

Eddie Lacy (seven) has been virtually indestructible through his career at Alabama and Green Bay. He just plays through injury. This time, Lacy absorbed a wicked shot from Thomas and then had his ankle damaged on the next play when Wright tackled him. In came James Starks, whose highest snap count in 2014 was 39. He played 49, carried 20 times for 95 yards and illustrated his value once again. He broke only three tackles, made a nice catch of a low screen pass and lost a fumble on the sideline when stripped by Wright. Cobb's insertion at RB for seven plays early in the fourth quarter proved to be a game-changer. He immediately made Thomas miss in the flat, turning a three-yard pass into 19. Montgomery caught a 5-yard pass in his lone snap out of the backfield, giving foes another wrinkle for which to prepare.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4½)

The Packers used their 3-4 base defense on just 12 of 59 snaps but that didn't limit NT B.J. Raji. He started alongside Mike Daniels (38) in the nickel defense, a sign the coaches like him as much for his pass push as his run stuffing. Of course, a seven-year veteran such as Raji had a huge advantage against a converted D-lineman like Drew Nowak, who was making his second start at center. Still, Nowak is a competitive performer and athlete. It isn't easy to dominate anyone in the NFL, but that's what Raji did. Not only was he too strong for Nowak, a native of De Pere, he also was too tenacious and quick. Raji beat Nowak three times for tackles for loss, and set up Daniels' sack by trashing LG Justin Britt and forcing Russell Wilson to run up in the pocket. Nowak wasn't shut out. He helped jolt Raji three to five yards off the ball two or three times when the nose tackle's pads were too high. Raji also showed long pursuit late in the game, which wouldn't have happened in recent seasons. He's in much better shape this year. Daniels' best play was powering through a back-side cut by RT Garry Gilliam to stop Marshawn Lynch for no gain on third and 3. As a rusher, however, Daniels has yet to reach top form. Mike Pennel (19) started again at 5-technique in the 3-4 and really improved from the opener. He smashed a back-side cut by TE Luke Willson to stack up Lynch for no gain, beat a double team to tackle Lynch for loss and split another double to force Lynch into Raji's clutches behind the line. For a big man, Pennel has good snap in his body and doesn't stay blocked for long. He made another bad mistake, lining up in the neutral zone for a penalty that wiped out a takeaway. Datone Jones (15) returned in the role as one of two interior rushers alongside Julius Peppers. When hard-charging Josh Boyd suffered a season-ending ankle injury on his third snap, Jones moved into the early-down rotation.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Clay Matthews (60) played every snap for the second game in a row, but this was the first time in seven seasons he never once lined up at OLB. He rushed just four times, missed three tackles and was up and down in coverage. Nate Palmer (46) made his first start alongside Matthews and was OK. He played it straight, keeping his cutback responsibilities paramount in mind. Jake Ryan didn't play from scrimmage. On the outside, Peppers (28 snaps at OLB, 12 at DT) was a disappointment. Despite facing the green Gilliam and RG J.R. Sweezy, a player he dominated at times in '14, Peppers was largely invisible. Of the five OLBs, all but Jayrone Elliott (nine) were caught out of position at least once by the zone read. Nick Perry (32) was more active than normal, but neither he nor Mike Neal (41) contributed much to a pass rush that was mostly non-existent. Andy Mulumba (10) played ahead of Elliott, but when he lost contain twice Elliott got the call. He was 5 yards behind RB Fred Jackson but chased him down and clubbed the ball out. Elliott always has been an aware player, but never like the screen pass that he diagnosed and intercepted with one hand. Luckily, he recovered his own fumble on the return. Neal's offside penalty probably was the difference in a TD and a FG.

SECONDARY (4)

One week after being successfully targeted by the Bears, Sam Shields (59) didn't have a single ball thrown in his direction. He probably played better than any player on defense in the last three games against Seattle, and offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell obviously took note. Shields set the tone on the first play, slipping through traffic to slam Tyler Lockett for no gain on a bubble screen. Shields played mostly press coverage, and Wilson decided to throw at Casey Hayward (56) and Micah Hyde (47) instead. Hayward looked back too early and was left in the dust on Doug Baldwin's 32-yard corner route from the slot. As the nickel and dime back, Hyde was a step late much of the day, including the 13-yard TD to Baldwin. Damarious Randall (14), who played outside in dime, was solid. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (59) was quick and fearless in run support but also dropped two interceptions. Morgan Burnett (59) missed two tackles in a pedestrian return from a calf injury. Although Sean Richardson was on the field for merely four snaps, the Seahawks tested him in a hurry on a wheel route. His coverage was good, and the pass fell incomplete. The Packers appeared to cover Jimmy Graham as they would any other tight end. He was invisible.

KICKERS (4½)

Mason Crosby's 54-yard field goal was dead center perfect with room to spare. He also connected from 18, 44 and 21. His six kickoffs for distance averaged 73.5 yards and 3.98 seconds of hang time. Despite having to reset in order to field two of Brett Goode's three snaps, Tim Masthay averaged 46.3 (gross), 39.0 (net) and 4.37 (hang time). After struggling for consistency in mid-August punting to his right, he isn't now.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

On the six kickoffs for distance, the Seahawks' average start point was the 17. Coordinator Ron Zook squibbed just one of seven against rookie Lockett, the hottest return man in the league. The coverage was little short of sensational. Jeff Janis, with his size, speed and no-fear approach, led the assault along with Elliott, whose 22 snaps led the club. The Seahawks' return squad was overrun. Hyde was rock-solid moving around to make fair catches on four of Jon Ryan's Aussie-style punts.

OVERALL (4 ½)

Sept. 22, 2014, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel