

# Rating the Packers: Week 4 at 49ers

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - At some juncture the San Francisco 49ers' season will spin past the point of no return, a sense of hopelessness will invade and energy for the task at hand will wane.

It wasn't like that Sunday at Levi's Stadium when the 49ers played hard if not particularly well even by their modest standards in a 17-3 defeat at the hands of the Green Bay Packers.

The 49ers didn't give the game away by jumping offside on hard counts and turning the ball over. They made the Packers earn everything they got, which made the hard-fought triumph more rewarding for the visitors.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the 49ers, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

## RECEIVERS (3)

The Packers probably set some sort of franchise record by not using a tight end from a three-point stance until their 43rd play (9:48 left in the third quarter). Without Andrew Quarless, Richard Rodgers had to play 66 of the 73 snaps. Forty-six came from detached locations, 14 in the backfield and six attached in a three-point stance. He opened by getting blown up by linebacker Aaron Lynch on a run for minus-1. After that, Rodgers both sustained and finished as he was inserted into run plays from the backfield by taking care of DE Glenn Dorsey on a chip block and breaking two tackles by SILB NaVorro Bowman. He stayed alive for almost 8 seconds before eluding SS Antoine Bethea for a TD and made several sharp blitz adjustments. If rookie Kennard Backman was ready, he would have played more than three snaps. Once again, Randall Cobb (57 WR, four RB) played with a bad shoulder. "Unbelievable what he has been playing through," coach Mike McCarthy said. He dropped his first pass of the season. Nickel back Jimmie Ward had plenty of help on Cobb. An AFC scout was adamant about Ty Montgomery's collegiate deficiencies tracking and catching deep balls. He played 72 snaps (66 WR, six RB), starting with a drop 37 yards downfield on a stop-and-go route against CB Tramaine Brock. Jeff Janis (15) was wide open in the middle right in Aaron Rodgers' view but instead of throwing he held it and took a sack. Janis wasn't targeted. Once again, James Jones (62) was the best receiver on the field. With the Packers clinging to a 7-3, he ran two great routes leading to the clinching TD

## OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

On the first pocket pass the 49ers buried Aaron Rodgers with four rushers power-rushing five blockers. Corey Linsley gave up what would have been one-half sack to DE Quinton Dial, one of the strongest men the Packers have seen in a while. Linsley allowed 1½ pressures, T.J. Lang one-half and Josh Sitton none. The interior anchored a yard or two deeper than in most games, which obscured Rodgers' vision and clogged escape lanes. The Packers gained a lot of yards on the ground but that was due in part to undermanned boxes. Defensive coordinator Eric Mangini sold out in coverage, in effect giving up the run. Sitton and Dial waged a memorable battle of behemoths. Each man took turns pancaking the other in short-yardage situations. That almost never happens to Sitton, but Dial is so massive and muscled-up. Four more penalties on the line, including two holds on Sitton and a false start on T.J. Lang that ruined a possession, increased its four-game total to 10 (six holds). Don Barclay wasn't charged with a "bad" run until near the end when he missed OLB Aaron Lynch on the back side. He was dependable at the point and forever scuffling to finish. Barclay's pass blocking was another matter. He gave up seven pressures, including five to Lynch (two were sacks) and 1½ to OLB Ahmad Brooks (one sack). He would have yielded another sack to Lynch, but Rodgers saved him with a left-handed flip to Eddie Lacy on the way down. Barclay has massive 10 7/8-inch hands but was missing with them and his sets were too inconsistent. Mike McCarthy has a lot of pride. He doesn't believe in max protection, not even when a tackle is having a game like Barclay. If Barclay plays another week for injured Bryan Bulaga, it will be a test of his willpower. A conscientious man, he'll be down in the dumps for a few days. On the other side, David Bakhtiari drew another holding penalty because he's not releasing his man when he spins out to chase Rodgers. He must learn to release on time. The 49ers went after Bakhtiari with bull rushes and his yield was two pressures.

## **QUARTERBACKS (4)**

What turned into a rather dreary day for Rodgers might have been much different if Montgomery makes that catch. His pass was a thing of beauty, arched perfectly and precisely placed. Unlike other defenses, Mangini's outfit wouldn't flinch. At one point, Rodgers even had to shrug his shoulders in mock resignation when the 49ers refused to heed his hard count. The 49ers blitzed just 15%, far below their norm. It was a smart move. The first time Mangini zone-blitzed, Rodgers was all over it for a 12-yard shot to his tight end. Rodgers danced around 7.6 seconds on his TD pass. He eluded FS Eric Reid for a 17-yard scramble to set up the other TD. The best that can be said for much of the game was Rodgers didn't turn it over. He threw a poor low ball on third and 1 to bring on the punt team. He overthrew his tight end deep. He turned down a pair of screen passes for other things that failed to materialize.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3½)**

The best play was an off-tackle toss to Lacy that probably should have been repeated more often. The 49ers struggled getting enough people to slow down Lacy's power surges. He played only 41 snaps (56%), not even entering the lineup in the second half until the sixth play. The ankle injury has lessened Lacy's impact. In 19 touches, the only tackle he broke was by Dial. There was nothing special about James Starks (24). He didn't appear to miss any cuts, failed to break a single tackle and got what was there. John Kuhn (15) steamed into WILB Michael Wilhoite, who was unblocked, at the 1, churned off DE Tank Carradine and scored a TD. It was enormous.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Are the Packers better than the Vikings up front? Three weeks after the 49ers battered Minnesota for 230 yards rushing, they mustered only 77 vs. the Packers. B.J. Raji played just 24 of the 50 snaps but continued making his presence felt. He set the tone on the first run, playing through C Marcus Martin for what would have been a 6-yard loss if he had finished. RG Jordan Devey is the weak link for the 49ers, and Raji was too physical for him. The sack by Julius Peppers was clean-up variety after Datone Jones (15 snaps) beat Devey with a spin move. One of Nick Perry's two sacks was clean-up variety after Mike Daniels (27) beat Devey to flush Colin Kaepernick. Daniels was hopping over back-side cut blocks and frequently playing across the line. Raji made a pursuit tackle on a screen. The debut of Letroy Guion (22) was mediocre. He ended up on the ground on his first two plays. From the eyeball test, Guion packed on a lot of muscle during his suspension. The Packers must decide if potential benefits at the point outweigh potential shortcomings in balance and change of direction. Guion also risked a penalty by bumping RB Carlos Hyde after a tackle for loss that he didn't participate in. Mike Pennel (eight) has become the No. 5 player in the unit.

## **LINEBACKERS (4½)**

Clay Matthews needs no excuse to play inspired football, but even by his standards this performance was outstanding. He blitzed six times from inside linebacker, seeking and finding open lanes between Martin and Devey. After blowing an unblocked sack early, he shot a gap to sack Kaepernick in 2.9 seconds and flushed him on an unblocked middle rush from the dime package. Matthews played 33 snaps at inside linebacker, 13 at outside linebacker and four in the "Bear" defense. He helped stifle Kaepernick on zone-read runs (five for 23). He was faked out badly by Reggie Bush on an option route that might have been a 15-yard TD, but Kaepernick threw the ball in the dirt. It's like the QB had the yips. The measured, consistent game of Nate Palmer (37) is an effective counter-point to Matthews' reckless abandon. Joe Thomas (11) replaced Palmer as the dime LB and rushed four times off the edge without any production. Thomas' best moment was going for the ball under TE Vance McDonald's arm like a lamprey attacks a lake trout. If fortune hadn't smiled on McDonald for the recovery, the 49ers might have been shut out. Julius Peppers played one-third of his 30 snaps at tackle alongside Jones in the dime. In that role, the Packers basically are asking Peppers to give himself up on stunts so others can come free. Mike Neal (35) started opposite Peppers; Nick Perry (20) and Jayrone Elliott (14) filled in. Neal had some problems with the zone read early. Perry knocked the hands of Pro Bowl LT Joe Staley off his chest, used superb footwork to angle his charge and zipped on by to sack Kaepernick in 3.0 seconds. It was a remarkable effort. Elliott made another of his "feel" plays, waiting until the right moment to accelerate past RT Erik Pears for a sack.

## **SECONDARY (4½)**

When Dom Capers crowded the line with his safeties forcing Kaepernick to beat him, it put the onus on Sam Shields (48) to have a terrific game in man coverage. He did, not giving up a completion to Anquan Boldin or Torrey Smith, and didn't miss a tackle. When Kaepernick ran around and fired a 56-yard pass to Boldin, Shields followed across the field in a three-deep look and high-pointed the ball perfectly for a marvelous interception. Casey Hayward (45) needs to get off Boldin's block and get Quinton Patton contained on that 40-yard tear pass. His intelligence was evident in how he reacted to the 49ers' quick game. Damarious Randall (39) challenged receivers in the bump zone. He did fail at the ball on the 47-yard bomb to the speedy Smith. Three plays later, he put that aside to leap high and break up an end-zone fade to Smith. He gets his head around consistently on the boundary. That's a play many players simply don't have the talent to make. When Shields left the field briefly, Quinten Rollins made the most of his three snaps. He made an extremely aggressive long run force, extricating himself from Boldin and then upending Hyde for no gain. Then he tackled Kaepernick on the next play. With Morgan Burnett (calf) out, the Micah Hyde-Ha Ha Clinton-Dix pairing was just fine. Clinton-Dix (50) blasted Kaepernick with a hard tackle on the 49ers' first play, letting him know there would be a physical price to be paid if he didn't slide. He slid after that. However, Clinton-Dix remained a little conservative in his reactions. Hyde (50) always gives up his share of completions but made all the tackles. Sean Richardson (16) took Chris Banjo's time in some sub defenses but never made a play.

## **KICKERS (1½)**

Mason Crosby has been so good for so long, his miss wide left by a few feet from 44 yards was borderline shocking. Discounting blocked attempts that weren't his fault, he had missed just one of 44 or shorter since Game 9 of 2013. He came back to connect from 31. His four-kickoff averages were 72.8 yards and 4.02 seconds of hang time; three were touchbacks. Tim Masthay had a terrific opening punt wiped out by an illegal-formation penalty. His six-punt averages were 39.2 (gross), 37.2 (net) and 4.15 (hang time). His second-longest punt, 48, included 13 yards of roll after a mishit.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (3½)**

It's hard telling why three of 49ers rookie Bradley Pinion's six punts were poor. It's possible coach Ron Zook unnerved him by mixing his rushes. Banjo's speed keeps showing up. He had two of the four individual hard hits in coverage. Also, S L.J. McCray, probably the 49ers' best core player, appeared to misjudge Banjo's speed on Masthay's highest punt. When McCray adjusted too late, he crashed into returner Jarryd Hayne and the 49ers were fortunate to recover the fumble. Janis was first man down on the play, but he lost sight of the ball and was in no position to recover it. Hyde accounts for hidden yardage almost every week with sure hands and heady decisions on punt returns.

## **OVERALL (3½)**

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