

Rating the Packers: Week 6 vs Chargers

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Of all the situations that can occur in a football game, goal-line stands rank at or near the top for sheer excitement.

They energize one team while demoralizing the other. They inspire players and fans alike. And they have considerable staying power in the old memory bank. In the case of the Green Bay-San Diego game Sunday at Lambeau Field, the Packers' goal-line stand proved decisive in their 27-20 victory.

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

RECEIVERS (3)

Randall Cobb (48 snaps, including three at RB) is the team's No. 1 threat, but the coaches are struggling getting him the ball. He has 18 targets in the last three games compared to 28 in the first three. They positioned him in the backfield three times Sunday after not doing it in two of the last three games. They also split him alone to a side on six plays and outside of a slot receiver on six other plays. Still, the double-teaming continues. Cobb must be careful not to let his frustrations affect his performance. He can't start walking back to the huddle or show slouchy body language. One of his catches was a hitch route, the other a hinge route against a mismatched linebacker. Cobb didn't help himself by dropping an easy pass 20 yards downfield. He also drew a false-start penalty from the backfield and didn't make much headway when CB Jason Verrett was pressing him. After playing 47 snaps in his first 1½ seasons, Jeff Janis replaced injured Ty Montgomery (ankle) and logged 40. He broke off a deep route adeptly for 46 yards, and turned a shallow crosser against a botched coverage into 33 by turning on the jets. His small-school background wasn't the only reason a player of his size and speed fell far in the draft. His routes aren't refined, he lacks body control and his hands are average. Yet, the stunning advances Janis has made as a cover man on special teams leads one to believe he might develop as a receiver. James Jones (45) made two big plays against veteran CB Brandon Flowers. When Flowers missed the tackle, Jones broke a 5-yard stop route into 22. With the score tied, 17-17, late in the third quarter, he knew just when to turn for a back-shoulder toss that became an 8-yard TD. Richard Rodgers (45) delivered two tremendous blocks for James Starks on runs totaling 30 yards. He made a jarring lead against ILB Denzel Perryman, a rookie who was a thorn in the Packers' side. He also came across the formation to put DE Corey Liuget on his back with a wham block. Justin Perillo (seven) played ahead of Kennard Backman (zero) even though he wasn't on the 53 until last week. Perillo beat SS Jahleel Addae on a corner route for 21.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3½)

T.J. Lang made it back from a knee injury in one week and didn't allow a pressure against DE Kendall Reyes, a solid player. When OLB Jerry Attaochu fanned on the recovery of a fumble, Lang waded in and won the ball in a tussle with assorted Chargers. Perhaps his only negative play was missing Perryman running through the A gap from a "Bear" front on a tackle for loss. There was a time when David Bakhtiari had major problems handling inside rushes. He had been much improved this season until Attaochu beat him inside for a sack. Later, OLB Melvin Ingram caught him with a spin move inside for a knockdown. Bakhtiari is a tough guy. His run blocking was more than adequate. Bryan Bulaga played efficiently as well other than the sack by Attaochu in which he got caught flat-footed against a secondary inside move. Corey Linsley executed some textbook reach blocks in the run game but also yielded two pressures by not being aware late in the down. When Josh Sitton missed with his hands and gave Liuget his outside edge, the Chargers' best D-lineman leveraged the mistake into a sack. It was the first sack allowed by Sitton since he and C Evan Dietrich-Smith each were charged with one-half on a stunt by Minnesota's Letroy Guion in Game 7 of 2013.

QUARTERBACKS (3½)

Aaron Rodgers made precious few big plays but didn't make any big mistakes, either. Forced to start the first two drives from the 13 and 15 after special-teams penalties, he was money on the opening TD drive. On the second, he coaxed Liuget to jump on third and long. That's when his hard count has been most lethal. The penalty led to a first down, and shortly thereafter it was, 14-0. Defensive coordinator John Pagano played it safe in the first quarter, but from then on he rushed a fifth man about 50% of the time. The Chargers' three sacks all came on five-man blitzes. At the same time, the fifth rusher eliminated another gap through which Rodgers could utilize to extend plays. Instead of just standing tall on the spot and delivering the ball, he kept trying to wiggle out of the pocket. There really was nowhere to go. His one scramble was for 15 yards on third and 7 and led to the opening TD. Three or four times he had receivers available in tight windows but was off the mark. The Packers continue to squander timeouts early in halves.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

James Starks took the first snap, officially giving him the start, but Eddie Lacy replaced him for the next six plays. Rather than a slight, it appeared to be more of an acknowledgment that the coaches felt Starks was the better choice to run the opening toss off tackle. It gained 25 yards in part because it was beautifully blocked but also because Starks beat FS Eric Weddle to the break point. He gained 19 yards after that. Would Lacy have got there fast enough to deny Weddle a clean shot? At his weight, probably not. Some personnel people guess he's in the 260-pound range. Starks also skipped over Weddle's attempted tackle at the 4, put his head down and powered over two defenders for a 5-yard TD on a shovel pass. In the past, Starks (28) has gotten in trouble by not pressing the hole, reversing course and suffering big losses. This time, when Ingram and Addae blew contain, he had half the field open on a dramatic cutback and made San Diego pay with his speed on a 65-yard TD jaunt. Starks' deep route against ILB Kavell Conner needs work but he did well in blitz pickup. Lacy (20) shifted back and forth to split receiver a few times. On his six touches, he didn't break a tackle. Missed block or not, Lacy can't allow himself to get blown up in the hole by a smaller backer like Perryman. Not only did the ball go flying, Lacy got knocked back. Three of Montgomery's 17 snaps came from the backfield. He wasn't clean receiving a handoff on an inside run. Late, he swiveled his hips and made two DBs miss on a 6-yard shovel pass.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3½)

The Packers used their 3-4 base alignment on just two of the 92 gradable snaps. Therefore, the absence of B.J. Raji (groin) was somewhat marginalized. Mike Daniels (70) and Letroy Guion (54) dominated the playing time, but Mike Pennel (24) and Datone Jones (23) were effective and probably deserved to play more. There were seven or eight snaps in which Daniels exhibited his brute strength by driving a blocker (usually RG D.J. Fluker) several yards into the backfield. His partial sack came on a straight walk-back of C Trevor Robinson, one of three backups pressed into starting duty because of injury. Daniels had 2½ pressures, one tackle for loss and a horrendous offside penalty on fourth and 1. With the Packers preoccupied by Philip Rivers and his aerial onslaught, they relied on big bodies to stack and shed when run showed. Guion stacked, but seldom shed. He didn't have a pressure, either, and twice seemed oblivious to where the football was. Pennel was disengaging from blocks and finding the ball. He also trashed LG Kenny Wiggins for one knockdown of Rivers and power-rushed the underpowered Robinson for another. Jones' role is designated interior rusher, usually in dime. He's improving at it, too. He batted down a pass on third and 11, beat Fluker inside to register a tackle for loss in the goal-line stand and swept around RT Joe Barksdale for a sack in 3.8 seconds on one of his two snaps lined up as a wide-technique DE.

LINEBACKERS (2)

Dom Capers blitzed on 37.5% of passes, doing what he could to penetrate the tight pocket that the backup Chargers fought to maintain around the immobile Rivers. Given the fact that Rivers had an astounding 72 gradable dropbacks, the pressure total of 10% from this unit was insufficient. Julius Peppers (71) was double-teamed on only 14.7% of his individual rushes but finished with only two pressures against Barksdale, a finesse player that he could not solve. He also lost contain on Melvin Gordon's 25-yard run. Still, his two plays were vital. He bulled Barksdale for a sack, then bulled him again to knock down Rivers on his fourth-and-goal pass that fell incomplete. Clay Matthews played 56 snaps inside, 26 outside and nine in the "Bear" defense. He had 3½ pressures and a tackle for loss, but frequently got too high on his A-gap assaults and didn't dent Fortress Rivers. On the goal line, he made subtle but enormous plays on first and fourth downs. Early in the third quarter, Capers switched up and put Matthews at outside linebacker for 16 straight snaps. The Packers were short-handed without Nick Perry (shoulder), and not only did Capers want more rush but also to relieve Peppers and Mike Neal (64). Matthews can cover many tight ends, but when he failed to lay a glove on Ladarius Green in unlikely press-man coverage the speedy TE burned him for a 19-yard TD. Matthews' fumble recovery was his first since 2009. Neal had three pressures, giving his customary extreme effort. He got burned having to peel back and cover RBs, too. Neither Andy Mulumba (18) nor Jayrone Elliott (17) were factors. Rivers ran Nate Palmer (80) ragged by constantly shifting his running back. He offered little on seven rushes but was a steadying influence against run and pass.

SECONDARY (1)

Rivers threw 65 times for 503 yards. This unit failed to intercept a pass and broke up just six. It's why the game-clinching deflection by Damarious Randall (82) was so jarring. For 59½ minutes, these players just sat there and took it. CB coach Joe Whitt warned his players that Keenan Allen was an elite route runner. The Packers were overwhelmed by his releases and quick cuts. The Packers elected not to match Sam Shields (92) on Allen, a challenge Shields might have relished. Five of Allen's 14 receptions in 2½ quarters came against Shields (for 76 yards). He played 64 of 92 snaps before leaving with a hip injury; otherwise, he might have broken records. In all, Shields allowed seven completions in 12 attempts for 96 yards. Also, he dropped what should have been a routine interception. Casey Hayward (90) lost a knifing interception to penalty, was active near the line and covered OK. Randall allowed four completions in four targets for 40 to Allen but stopped four targets to others. Quinten Rollins played 12 snaps in the slot and appeared a step slow on several completions. Rivers' longest gain (50) came on a bomb to Malcom Floyd when Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (92) guessed wrong and was out of position. His aggressive tackling included a forced fumble. Replacing Morgan Burnett (calf), Micah Hyde (87) had a rough outing. Not only did Antonio Gates catch three balls against Hyde for 40, but there were two other plays in which Gates should have scored TDs against mediocre coverage by Hyde. Chris Banjo (18) was solid.

KICKERS (3½)

Mason Crosby kicked two field goals (23, 28). His six kickoffs (three touchbacks) averaged 69.8 yards and 3.73 seconds of hang time. One of Tim Masthay's four punts had 4.90 hang time, easily his best of the season. He averaged 40.5 (gross), 42.3 (net) and 4.25.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3½)

Penalties on Banjo (illegal block) and Joe Thomas (holding) ruined the first two returns. It was the first game in which the kicking game drew two penalties. Not even blinding sun could prevent Hyde from running up and saving yards as a punt returner. Janis and Banjo led impressive coverage. Janis came close to blocking a punt. Replacing the injured Montgomery, Jared Abbrederis didn't mess around on a 30-yard kickoff return between the hashes. C JC Tretter, a TE early on at Cornell, ran up 14 yards to field a pooch kickoff.

OVERALL (3½)

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