

# Rating the Packers: Week 10 vs Lions

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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**Green Bay** - If this isn't rock bottom for a team quarterbacked by Aaron Rodgers and with so many good players, the Green Bay Packers don't want to experience it.

Something that hasn't happened to the Packers in 24 years happened Sunday. They lost to the Detroit Lions in Wisconsin.

Competitive on defense against the Lions' modest attack, the Packers were abysmal on offense yet again and, for the first time since Seattle, awful on special teams.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 18-16 defeat, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

## RECEIVERS ( ½ )

Darius Slay is far and away the Lions' most established cornerback. When Slay manned up on James Jones (he played 86 of 87 snaps), it made some sense that Jones wouldn't be a larger part of the game plan. Jones dropped both passes thrown to him, including a 4-yard TD. When veteran CB Rashean Mathis (concussion) went on injured reserve Saturday, the coaches built their Sunday around Davante Adams (87) against Nevin Lawson. It's why Adams received an unheard-of total of 21 targets (22 counting the conversion), and in some measure explains having to punt nine times. Randall Cobb (82, including three at RB) is a much better player than Adams, and the player covering him in the slot (Josh Wilson or Quandre Diggs) wasn't any better than Lawson. New England has always gotten the ball to its stellar slots from imaginative route combinations and sets. The Packers remain largely static. Cobb, who had 10 targets, should have had 20 or more given the fact there were 62 in all. He hurt himself by dropping an easy pass on third and 6 that would have gone forever. The Packers are paying Cobb \$10 million a year. He should be fed the ball week after week from all over the formation. The pass game should always feature him. Adams turned those 22 targets into merely 79 yards, including 30 after the catch. He made a one-handed catch. He showed quick feet releasing against Lawson's press-man coverage. He also showed mediocre separation against an undersized opponent making just his second start. When the officiating crew let them play, Adams whined for penalties on Lawson after four incompletions. His 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty was bush. He dropped a 30-yard bomb and failed to make three other contested catches. Jared Abbrederis (19) got the nod over Jeff Janis, whose only snap came in the final minute. Abbrederis isn't a burner but he's resourceful and sure-handed. Alas, on his 32-yard reception that was the Packers' longest gain of the afternoon, he was hit hard and didn't return. Injuries have dogged him for years. Justin Perillo played just four snaps in the first 47 minutes before finishing with a career-high 17. He ran a 4.76-second 40 out of Maine in 2014, which isn't fast but is a step up from Richard Rodgers (4.87). He sparked the comeback with a classic seam route for 24 and an in-breaking route for an 11-yard TD. He has sure hands, a knack for getting open and a confident, sunny attitude. When the Lions paid little attention to Rodgers (54) in the red zone, he secured a 4-yard TD. In the flats, little DBs just kept chopping him down.

## OFFENSIVE LINE ( ½ )

Probably the best of the bunch was David Bakhtiari, who didn't allow a pressure before suffering a knee injury and leaving after 57 plays. Bakhtiari has learned to be more patient against DE Ziggy Ansah, who had his number in 2013. However, he drew another penalty, increasing his total to seven, or four more than any other player on the team. There were 66 dropbacks, enough for two games, and Lions defensive coordinator Teryl Austin blitzed heavily on passes (36.8% five or more, 10.3% six or more). The 6½ pressures charged to the line wasn't bad, although the Lions probably had fewer individual rush threats than any team the Packers have faced. Corey Linsley had an excellent day in protection, and not one of his 71 snaps from shotgun were errant. Two of the six "bad" runs were charged to Linsley. On one, he wasn't able to block back on DT Gabe Wright on the carry by Cobb for minus-3. In Linsley's defense, that is an extremely difficult block to execute out of shotgun. He was late getting off a double-team on a first-down run that went nowhere. After two fine games T.J. Lang had a dip in performance. He was involved in four "bad" runs by missing a cut-off, getting displaced and missing SS Isa Abdul-Quddus on one of his three pulls. Lang and Bryan Bulaga each drew holding penalties. Playing on a bad knee, Bulaga allowed 2½ pressures and one-half "bad" run. His balance and base haven't been as good in recent games, presumably because of the injury. Josh Sitton was reliable other than a missed block on a screen and getting blown up by WLB Tahir Whitehead on his only pull.

## **QUARTERBACKS (1)**

The Lions entered the game having allowed opposing passers a rating of 111.1 and completion percentage of 73.1%. It's hard to post a rating as low as Rodgers' 83.6 without an interception; his percentage was 57.4%. Precious few teams used to blitz Rodgers but they do now. His accuracy, at least until the fourth quarter, was terrible, both by his standards and the NFL standard. He threw long, he threw short, he threw wide of the mark. It's fairly obvious he isn't fully on board with the way the Packers are playing on offense. He changes a lot at the line. In stressful times, his visage probably doesn't provide a lot of comfort for teammates and coaches. His glares and gestures suggest frustration, both with others and probably himself. He had opportunities to run more but strangely decided against it. Two sacks and one knockdown were mostly his responsibility. For just the second of nine games he wasn't able to draw the foe offside by cadence. With the outcome at hand, he needed to throw the conversion pass to Adams higher and deeper. A player with his elite ability and high intelligence simply must find a way to galvanize his teammates on a bad day and secure a victory over an opponent with the worst record in the league. That just goes with the territory.

## **RUNNING BACKS (1)**

James Starks probably set some sort of record for playing time by a Packers' running back with 82 snaps. Also playing were John Kuhn (five), Cobb (three), Alonzo Harris (one) and Aaron Ripkowski (one). There were two empty sets. One week after gaining 76 yards in three screen passes, Starks caught three more for 45. Rather than breaking five tackles as he did against Carolina, there was just one Sunday. His best run came on third and 1. Abdul-Quddus blew up the pulling Lang, leaving Starks stuck behind the line. He altered his course, avoided disaster and picked up 4. Starks was somewhat more on point this week in blitz pickup. Wilson, however, did slip around him on a slot blitz and made Rodgers step up on the second sack. Eddie Lacy (groin) sat out just his second game in 2½ seasons.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

There were alterations in roles and playing time. Datone Jones played 12 snaps as a lineman in the nickel and dime. Also, he was given 18 snaps in what, in effect, was left outside linebacker opposite Nick Perry in the nickel. Jayrone Elliott had worked with the No. 2's on the left outside for the first seven games. Jones had 1½ pressures against Michael Ola, who replaced an ineffective LaAdrian Waddle at right tackle after the first eight snaps. The coaches feel Jones has the athleticism to stand up, and at 290 pounds he provides more anchor against the run than the 255-pound Elliott. Meanwhile, Letroy Guion, who averaged 34.6 snaps in his first five games, was on the field for just 19 of the 65. At times, Guion can be like a bull in a china shop. He barges around, banging into friend and foe alike without always seeing the big picture. But when it comes to brute strength, Guion is unreal. On the Lions' failed third and 1, he blew through RT Riley Reiff (6-5, 308) like he was an air bag. This was the first game that Mike Pennel (21) played more than Guion. He was trapped and on the ground early, but held the fort after that. Mike Daniels (50) gave LG Laken Tomlinson more than he could handle from a physical standpoint. Time after Daniels rocked the Duke rookie back, sometimes shedding him and going on to the ball carrier. He finished with a team-high 3½ pressures. B.J. Raji (33) didn't dominate struggling C Travis Swanson but effectively patrolled the middle of a stout run defense.

## **LINEBACKERS (2)**

After giving SILB Jake Ryan a 38-snap look in Carolina, the coaches had to decide between him and Nate Palmer alongside Clay Matthews. Palmer got the call, and if it might have been his last shot the Illinois State product made the most of it. In 51 snaps (Ryan had zero), Palmer played his best game. There still were change-of-direction issues, an imprecise drop in zone coverage and one missed tackle. However, Palmer seemed to play with more fire and decisiveness. It was as if he said to himself, "Well, if this really is my last chance to start for an NFL team, I'm going to attack and not have any regrets." He was more physical, more active, more inspired. Matthews (65, including 61 inside) rushed from a variety of locations when Dom Capers blitzed on a whopping 59.5% of passes, including 13.5% with six or more. Even though pass protection has been the Lions' prime weakness on offense, Matthews was shut out. If the Packers are to emerge from their pass-rushing rut, their main threat has to start getting off blocks. In a minor departure, about half the time Matthews replaced Joe Thomas as the lone LB in dime. In Capers' seven snaps using the "Bear" defense, six came on second and long. Mike Neal (47) didn't produce rushing the passer but set a mean edge against the run. On the other side, Julius Peppers (44) was accorded heavy double-team attention (46.2%) on his individual rushes. He was better playing the run than rushing or in coverage. Perry (24) was his usual rugged self in run defense.

## **SECONDARY (3½)**

After a poor showing against the Panthers, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (62) turned in one of his best games as a Packer. Frequently playing in the box, he filled holes with strength and chased down plays with energy. He also made the defensive play of the game, making a diving interception of Matthew Stafford's fastball that was fired between the hashes of a two-shell secondary. Had the pass been incomplete, the Lions' probably would have kicked a 41-yard field goal to put the game all but out of reach. Morgan Burnett (65) was better as well another week removed from his calf injury. Burnett had a hand in the defense's worst play, the 43-yard reception to Golden Tate. When the coverage was blown, Tate caught the ball in the clear and gained about 35 yards after the catch. Neither Sam Shields (64) nor Burnett made their best efforts and failed to wrap up, and Micah Hyde (28) overran it. Shields played well in coverage. Damarious Randall (50) was respectable, too. Even in his first outing against Calvin Johnson, the rookie played him tightly and never got beat deep. Casey Hayward blitzed seven times off the edge even though he's too slight to cause much damage. Hayward gave up the winning TD pass to Lance Moore on a play-action fake. From the 4, Hayward can't expect to get help inside from linebackers who must play run first.

## **KICKERS ( ½ )**

Mason Crosby's 52-yard attempt to win the game as time expired was difficult, to say the least. But he has been so automatic for 2½ years that few doubted he would connect. It was a mishit of the highest order. Crosby got lucky from 44 when his ball clanged in off the left upright. His one-hop, 13-yard successful onside kick was masterful, and his three kickoffs averaged 69.3 yards and 3.59 seconds of hang time. Tim Masthay was up and down on nine punts, averaging 41.3 yards (gross), 37.0 (net) and 3.94 hang time.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS ( ½ )**

The game turned on Ameer Abdullah's 104-yard kickoff return to open the second half. Chris Banjo was double-teamed and pushed from his lane. Demetri Goodson and Ryan were in position to make the tackle. Hayward, the safety on the play, got outflanked, and Crosby opted to take a side. With a helping hand from Quinten Rollins, who cut out Johnson's legs, Randall sifted through bodies to recover the onside kick. Rollins neatly downed a punt at the 3. Hyde chased down Abdullah, surprisingly showing more speed than Hayward, but permitted a punt to roll 14 yards by not fielding it. Ripkowski logged three hard hits.

## **OVERALL ( ½ )**

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