Rating the Packers: Week 12 vs Bears

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel
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Green Bay - With Aaron Rodgers on the field for the entire game, the Green Bay Packers had never lost to an NFC North Division opponent when favored by a touchdown or more.

In fact, the only time a Mike McCarthy-coached team had lost to a division rival with a healthy quarterback as a touchdown favorite was 35-7 at windy, cold and snowy Soldier Field behind Brett Favre in December 2007.

It's hard to believe, but the span of 12 days the Packers have dropped games to the Detroit Lions as a 10½-point favorite and to the Chicago Bears as a nine-point pick. Both games were at Lambeau Field, too.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 17-13 loss to the Bears on Thanksgiving night, with their football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (½)

You wonder what was going through Ed Donatell's mind as his motley collection of defensive backs controlled play. The Packers' defensive coordinator from 2000-'03 is in his first season coaching the Bears' secondary. As was the case against Detroit, Davante Adams (played 69 of the 78 offensive snaps) was the focal point with 11 targets. His output was 14 yards in two catches. He broke Tracy Porter's tackle in the flat early and made a fine catch with Porter on his back late. In between, he couldn't have played worse. Adams appeared to be jogging on the lazy slant route in which he never even came close to crossing Porter's face. It was intercepted. He was in the clear heading for a possible 47-yard TD with Porter in his wake but showed poor hand placement and dropped the routine catch. Generally covered by Porter, who is with his fifth team, he was smothered much of the time. There were two other contested balls that he failed to seize. All that talk emanating from teammates and coaches after the off-season about how special Adams would be seems out of place. Operating against Kyle Fuller on the other side, James Jones played all 78 snaps and was shut out just as he was by the Lions. With victory hanging in the balance, he labeled his third-down target in the end zone against Porter as a drop. In the slot, rookie free agent Bryce Callahan was impressive carrying the fight to Randall Cobb (76 at WR, two at RB). Again underutilized, Cobb caught six of seven targets for 74. He gave his team a chance at the end by beating Callahan inside for the longest gain for either team (32). He also had another drop and had a weak crackback block on SS Adrian Amos on what was a promising running play. Jeff Janis (12) wasn't targeted but blocked Porter forever on Eddie Lacy's 25-yard screen pass for a TD. After a solid blocking day in Minnesota, Richard Rodgers (46) failed to sustain blocks at least five times against OLB Lamarr Houston. Two of the team's three "bad" runs were at least partially his fault. Justin Perillo (24) wasn't a factor.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Making his first start, JC Tretter went the distance for Corey Linsley (ankle) and held up well. His footwork and aiming points in several outside zone runs were excellent. He'd secure the line before sticking his foot in the ground and taking sharp angles to get on linebackers. He shows body control and balance, and hits well on the move. On Lacy's TD, Tretter showed great reaction to make the key block on ILB Jonathan Anderson, a speedy thorn in the Packers' side all night. He didn't allow a pressure and had just one-half of a "bad" run. Wet field/ball or not, Tretter's butchered shotgun snap cannot happen. In 27 games, Linsley has been charged with one fumble. David Bakhtiari and Bryan Bulaga were solid in the run game but combined to allow 3½ pressures. When Bulaga left with an ankle injury after 61 plays, Don Barclay yielded 1½ pressures against OLB Pernell McPhee in 17 plays. Guards T.J. Lang and Josh Sitton were up and down. Sitton was very good in pass protection, but it was his inability to prevent penetration by Anderson that ruined McCarthy's decision to go on fourth-and-2. One play before Tretter's gaffe, Sitton was penalized for holding DE Ziggy Hood to wipe out a first down at the Bears 10. He didn't need to hold him. Like Sitton, Lang was on point most of the game in the predominantly zone run game (the only pull was by Tretter). Both were covering up their man. Three plays detracted from Lang's showing. He contributed to another failed third-and-1 by missing DE Jarvis Jenkins. He missed FS Chris Prosinski at the 5 on a screen pass to James Starks that Rodgers said "looked like it was going to be a walk-in touchdown." And Lang was responsible for the sack by OLB Willie Young because he was penalized for holding NT Eddie Goldman; on the play, Goldman crashed into a well-positioned Bulaga and injured his ankle.

QUARTERBACKS (1 ½)

The network TV people regularly tell viewers that Rodgers undisputedly is the best quarterback in football. In actuality, there hasn't been anything special about his game in almost two months. For the third time in four games, he has had the ball in his hands last with the chance to deliver a victory. This is what two-time MVPs do. Each time, he didn't do enough to get the job done. Vic Fangio, the Bears' first-year defensive coordinator, handled the final 3 minutes exactly the opposite how Dom Capers, his close friend and former colleague, usually does. Capers refuses to sit on his hands in crunchtime. He'd rather go down fighting by bringing the house. On the 12 drop-backs in the 13-play drive, Fangio rushed four every single time. His blitz rate for the game was just 24.1%. Fangio bet that Rodgers couldn't beat coverage, and he was right. Fangio, the 49ers' coordinator from 2011-'14, improved to 5-1 against Rodgers. He ran for 33 yards, and had an 11-yard gain called back. He got the Bears to jump offside three times. He played through a second-half elbow/hand injury. The interception wasn't his fault, but he was lucky another didn't count because of Porter's illegal-contact penalty. He held the ball 7.4 seconds before being sacked and was fortunate not to have fumbled. He completed 51.2% of 43 passes in compiling his lowest passer rating (62.4) for a home game.

RUNNING BACKS (2 ½)

The fumble by Lacy (38), his fourth of 2015, turned the game. Backs often forget what's coming behind them when they break free. Lacy had the ball flapping wide, and Prosinski jarred it free. He also was inches away from committing an unpardonable sin after flipping the ball behind him just after scoring on the screen. Can you imagine the reaction if replay review had reversed the TD? Other than that, Lacy put forth another outstanding game to surpass 100 yards. It probably helped both Lacy and James Starks (35) that the coaches called more runs with Rodgers under center. They combined for 103 yards in 15 carries (6.9) in those situations compared to 9-41 (4.6) from shotgun/pistol. Lacy used his nasty spin move to break three tackles. Starks cut back nicely a few times and stayed hot on screens. On the screen before the half, Starks is too good of a player to let the isolated Prosinski cut him down in the open field. He needs to smell the end zone and get there.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Mike Daniels (49 of the possible 67 defensive snaps) had just one-half pressure and no tackles for loss. It wasn't one of his highlight games. What the statistics didn't show was the impact that Daniels had in this game and many others. On the Bears' first play, he knocked RG Patrick Omameh to a knee and stopped Matt Forte for no gain. He also used his power advantage on rookie C Hroniss Grasu to be disruptive. LG Matt Slauson, a veteran mauler, went toe-to-toe with Daniels and earned a draw. Meantime, B.J. Raji (37) was his customary stout self against the interior run. Letroy Guion started again at 5-technique in the 3-4 (15 snaps) but played so ineffectively that Mike Pennel played more than him in the second half. Pennel led the final count, 20-19. Guion either was washed out or on the ground for three runs at him for 19 yards. When he played high on the goal-line and was displaced, there was too big of a hole for smaller defenders to prevent Jeremy Langford from scoring easily. Guion, a competent nose tackle last year, hasn't played to that level this year. Playing 15 snaps at OLB and 12 at DE, Datone Jones was just adequate. He missed Langford on a 14-yard run, got displaced on a sneak and was fooled on a read-option keep by Jay Cutler. He did slash inside twice to wreck runs.

LINEBACKERS (2)

This entire unit combined for just 3½ pressures. It's the main reason Cutler was able to stand stall in the pocket too many times in what might have been his best of 13 starts against Green Bay. The big disappointment was Julius Peppers (45) with one-half pressure (none against RT Kyle Long). He doesn't have much to offer in pursuit. Neither Mike Neal (41 OLB, six DT) nor Nick Perry (22) could get a sniff against LT Charles Leno, a seventh-round pick in 2014 with long arms and good feet. Neal played with his eyes up and came through with two tackles for loss. Capers kept his blitzing down (33.3%) but nobody was winning their one-on-ones. Peppers saw 31.3% double-teaming on passes. Clay Matthews (60 ILB, seven OLB) registered 1½ pressures and added vitality to the run defense. In coverage, however, he was faked out badly by Langford (who dropped the pass in the clear) and didn't get enough depth against a play-action pass. It was a rough night for Nate Palmer (55), who continued to play ahead of Jake Ryan (zero). He didn't chuck TE Zach Miller on his 3-yard TD catch, was locked up forever by Leno on Alshon Jeffery's 22-yard speed screen and, overall, seemed hesitant about pulling the trigger. To be effective, Palmer can't sit back. He must attack.

SECONDARY (2 ½)

Morgan Burnett (67) is back in form after missing Games 3-6 with a calf injury. His sure, faceup tackling played a major role why Forte and Langford, one of the league's best 1-2 punches, averaged just 3.4 in 27 carries. He has a flair for being in the right spot pre-snap, reads his keys and slips in and around massive bodies to get people down. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (67) wasn't nearly as good, particularly in some man coverage situations. Damarious Randall (36) continues to play a lot of off coverage and is giving up too many completions. He left early with a knee injury and was replaced by Quinten Rollins (27), who had been the dime back for injured Micah Hyde (hip). Rollins was impressive at times covering the fleet-footed Miller, and as a rusher he beat Leno for a sack in 2.7 seconds and posted an unblocked pressure. However, he dropped an easy interception and blew the recovery of Cutler's fumble of a shotgun snap. Sam Shields (66) had another good game. Journeyman Marc Mariani had his head down and was in no position to advance after catching a 1-yard pass on third and 3. Casey Hayward (54) was right on top of Mariani, and outweighs him by 5 pounds. Somehow, Hayward couldn't prevent Mariani from getting the first down, and three plays later the Bears tied the game at 7-7.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby's 50-yard field goal to end the first half was a great kick given the rain and wind. He also hit from 22 and averaged 63 yards and 2.77 seconds of hang time on three kickoffs for distance. In a game in which every yard mattered, Tim Masthay was outpunted by Patrick O'Donnell. Masthay's five-punt averages were 35.6 (gross), 34.2 (net) and 3.71 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Janis broke five — yes, five — tackles in his 64-yard kickoff return. Callahan had a clean shot and decided to hit Janis high. Most returners just go down. Janis ran right through the hit and shook off four more of his pursuers over the final 43 yards. He made S Harold Jones-Quartey miss on his other return. Given his success, Janis probably shouldn't have downed Robbie Gould's fourth-quarter boot that went 3 yards deep and had 3.95 hang time. Trying to get something out of TE Kennard Backman, McCarthy watched in horror as the rookie foolishly came close to touching a live ball. Joe Thomas missed the tackle on Deonte Thompson's 37-yard KO return. Cobb recovered his own fumbled punt.

OVERALL (1)