

Rating the Packers: Week 15 at Raiders

By Bob McGinn – *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

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Green Bay - Playoff teams run the ball in the fourth quarter and rush the passer in the fourth quarter.

The Green Bay Packers did both Sunday at O.co Coliseum and defeated the Oakland Raiders, 30-20, clinching a berth in the NFC playoffs with two games remaining. As uneven as the offense was, the Packers still have averaged 29 points in two games with Mike McCarthy calling the plays compared to 24.1 in 12 games with Tom Clements calling the plays. That generally would be regarded as progress.

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

RECEIVERS (2)

Aaron Rodgers said Jared Abbrederis needs to play more. Of Abbrederis' career-high 27 snaps Sunday, every one came with another receiver stationed out with him. At 6 foot 1, Abbrederis is the same height as Davante Adams (63 of a possible 76 snaps). Their 40-yard dash times of about 4.55 seconds are almost identical. At 215, Adams does possess a 20-pound advantage. But as mediocre as Adams has played, there's no reason not to give Abbrederis some snaps on the perimeter. He works hard, makes himself available to Rodgers and wins contested catches. Adams was open on a 45-yard bomb but just didn't have the burst to go get it. He also dropped a 14-yard TD pass and didn't accomplish much against DJ Hayden, the Raiders' fourth cornerback. Abbrederis pancaked FS Charles Woodson on a running play; blocking hasn't been a strength of Adams'. James Jones (60) wasn't effective against the underrated David Amerson but against the other corners he had a big game. He was physical, in sync with Rodgers on back-shoulder tosses and admitted to pushing off on his two interference penalties. TJ Carrie did well pressing Randall Cobb (56 at WR, season-high 10 at RB), but Cobb made Carrie pay twice on interference fouls for 45 yards. He really worked to get open and made both Carrie and Woodson miss on a 19-yard rec. Richard Rodgers (40) didn't even see the field in the first three series. Late in the first half, McCarthy had a stoppage of play to select a third-and-5 play. He inserted Justin Perillo (12) for the first time and watched him make the catch for 5 with WLB Malcolm Smith all over him. For the first time, FB Aaron Ripkowski took a snap as a conventional TE in short yardage. Jeff Janis (13) could have come back stronger for the ball that was intercepted. He also was surprised by SS Taylor Mays and drew a holding penalty on a run and, even though Rodgers' red-zone pass was thrown too high and too hard, he should have caught it.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

One week after LE Khalil Mack gouged Denver for five sacks, Bryan Bulaga limited him to one sack and no pressures. Considering McCarthy almost never helped Bulaga and he's playing on a bad ankle, it has to rank among the finest performances of his six-year career. Bulaga was forced to turn his head inside and look at the ball because of crowd noise. The wet, loose grass field slowed down Mack but probably affected Bulaga just as much. Bulaga showed the ability to get into Mack on rushes and push him outside on runs. David Bakhtiari left with an ankle injury after 67 snaps, but of the last 15 or 20 the majority came with Mack to his side. Bakhtiari was outstanding, yielding neither a pressure nor a "bad" run. After the game, Josh Sitton had a gigantic ice bag lashed to his back that was sticking out from under his shirt. They say the legs and back work together, and Sitton isn't showing quite as much punch as he once did in his drive blocks. He still usually prevents his man from disrupting the play, but with the back he appears to be getting less movement and even being displaced a little more. An NFL season is a total grind for linemen. JC Tretter also didn't have a pressure or a "bad" run. Obviously, he's a good player. There are plays in which he's overpowered or fails to sustain, but for the most part he compensates well for what he might lack physically. T.J. Lang was sharper in protection (one pressure) than in the run game (2½ "bad" runs).

QUARTERBACKS (3½)

Aaron Rodgers ranks an unspeakable 12th in passer rating. With six to be selected for the Pro Bowl, his chances for a fifth berth in seven years can't be promising. As many of his contemporaries fire away downfield, his average gain per pass of 6.76 yards is tied for 28th. It's almost as if his role has become that of a glorified game manager, which can't be good for an MVP's ego. Other than a forced interception in the red zone that was completely out of character, he bounced around effectively to beat a defense coordinated by Ken Norton that blitzed heavily (48.8% on passes). He scrambled with his eyes downfield and rifled a shot to Cobb for 23. Operating under center about as much as shotgun, Rodgers twice got back to turning called runs into quick hitches when the cornerback was playing soft. He caught coach Jack Del Rio twice trying to substitute and drew both a penalty and a Raider timeout. The Raiders were disciplined against his repeated hard counts. On first and goal from the 1, Rodgers showed beautiful ball-handling on a play-action pass. But, instead of waiting an instant longer for Richard Rodgers to fake his block, he threw the ball prematurely and his tight end wasn't ready. It's unclear why he wasted a timeout midway through the second quarter instead of taking the delay penalty. Five yards wouldn't have affected Tim Masthay with the ball near midfield.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

No player wants to gain a reputation for not knowing what he'll provide one week to the next. Eddie Lacy (28), who started for the second game in a row, is becoming one of those players. In 11 carries, he failed to break a single tackle. One time he took the ball outside when there was no one out there blocking. He apparently knows when the game plan isn't built around him. In those situations, he can't come across as looking disinterested or uninspired. One reason John Kuhn played a career-high 47 snaps was his stellar work against Norton's wholesale blitzing. The Packers trumpeted the fact that Lacy had become a three-down back. Early in the second quarter, Lacy peeked outside and then was a bit late getting back inside to pick up LB Ben Heeney, a hard-charging rookie. Giving halfhearted effort, Lacy's blow didn't slow Heeney enough to prevent him from sacking Rodgers in 2.7 seconds. When Kuhn started playing on passing downs in the second half, it was like 2010 and '12 all over again. He ran over Carrie on a 5-yard TD run, stopped Heeney cold several times on middle rushes and at times was an effective lead blocker for the run. James Starks (21) fumbled for the third time in three games. He was holding the ball securely but LB Benson Mayowa just ripped it out. Starks' 25-yard burst would have been 3 if he hadn't beat the tackle of Smith. The only time McCarthy used the pistol formation was with Cobb directly behind Rodgers. In his 10 snaps, Cobb sparked the slow-starting ground game.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3)

When Letroy Guion (23 of a possible 77 snaps) returned from NFL suspension in Game 4, he looked more like a weightlifter than a football player. Obviously, Guion had spent countless hours pumping iron. At the same time, he looked so stiff on the field that the game almost appeared foreign to him. It has taken three months, but now Guion is starting to make more athletic moves and plays. He shed the Raiders' capable center, Rodney Hudson, and stuffed Latavius Murray for 1. Yet, Guion still isn't always aware. On a stunt working inside to outside, he redirected his surge back inside leaving an open side of the field for Derek Carr to take on a 19-yard scramble. Celebrating his new contract extension, Mike Daniels (41) had 2½ of the unit's 5 pressures. Maintaining extreme leverage, he walked back massive LG Gabe Jackson a few times. You wouldn't have wanted to be within 20 yards when those two rhinos locked horns. When the Packers played their 3-4 base just twice, B.J. Raji got away with playing just 23 snaps. On an early third and 1, unpredictable Mike Pennel (21) got too high and was badly displaced. Later, he beat a double team in a similar situation and made the tackle for no gain.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Julius Peppers (31 snaps at OLB, 19 at DL) recorded 2½ of the three sacks, including 1½ on power rushes against Jackson and one off the edge against backup RT J'Marcus Webb. Offensive coordinator Bill Musgrave double-teamed Peppers on just four of his 27 individual rushes, and for long stretches Webb and others held up. Often, Peppers is able to rev it up almost on demand and make plays of significance. However, Peppers was yelling at the secondary instead of being ready when Carr asked for the ball on a third-and-2 sneak for 4 that was right at him. Mike Neal (40 at OLB, 11 at DL) registered 3½ pressures in his best rushing effort in weeks. Most of his damage came against Webb, a player he knew from his days with the Bears and Vikings. Neal also beat the block of rugged TE Lee Smith for a tackle for loss, giving him 4½ in the last six games. Neither Nick Perry (31) nor Jayrone Elliott (11) had much impact. Based on unofficial statisticians, Clay Matthews (50 at ILB, 22 at OLB) didn't make a tackle. Is that possible? Carr and Musgrave seemed to be trying to run away from Matthews. He also blew a tackle of Murray that would have been minus-5; in all, he missed three. LT Donald Penn did a lot of cutting in protection, and other than a few big bull rushes Matthews couldn't solve him. Making his third start, Jake Ryan (53) was OK. Each week, he plays more under control. When linemen get out on him, Ryan lacks the upper-body strength to get off the block. When free to scrape and flow, he has a feel for blocking combinations and is an adequate tackler (he missed two Sunday). Dime LB Joe Thomas (26) failed to get Marcel Reece's 29-yard screen turned inside.

SECONDARY (3)

Rookies Damarious Randall (72) and Quinten Rollins (season-high 73) got long looks against a top-flight WR corps and quarterback. Shadowed by Randall throughout, rookie standout Amari Cooper caught all six of the passes thrown to him with Randall in coverage for 120 yards and two TDs (he also drew a 23-yard penalty for interference). Electing to play press coverage, Randall must have thought he could run with Cooper because he gave him an unchallenged outside release. He turned it into a track meet, one he couldn't win. Dom Capers, who blitzed merely 20% on passes, finally shut off Cooper's take-off routes by going to two-safety coverage. Because the leaping Seth Roberts partially obscured Randall's vision, his catch of an overthrown pass wasn't as easy as it looked. Then his speed turned the pick into a 43-yard TD. Matched against veteran Michael Crabtree, Rollins gave up six completions in 10 attempts for 70 yards. Rollins got beat on a fade for 18, a back shoulder for 23 and assorted outs, but he also tipped away a pass in the end-zone corner and supported fast against the run. Casey Hayward (75) was steady as ever in coverage and a controlled, almost delicate tackler. He missed twice, one early on the screen that ruptured. The Raiders worked hard to get TEs Clive Walford and Mychal Rivera going but Micah Hyde (29) wouldn't have it. Out of a trips formation, Hyde read Walford's seam route, turned his head back perfectly and made a fantastic interception and 34-yard return. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (77) missed three tackles. He appears more energized at the line of scrimmage. Morgan Burnett (77) played well.

KICKERS (4)

Tim Masthay's four-punt averages (52.8 gross, 48.5 net, 4.01 seconds of hang time) were outstanding given the rain and wind. He did benefit from 22 yards of roll on a punt with 3.15 hang time. Mason Crosby hit from 21, 33 and 24 yards but had a 49-yarder blocked with 1 minute, 12 seconds left. McCarthy said he made a mistake even attempting it. Crosby averaged 67.9 yards and 3.82 hang time on seven kickoffs.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3½)

Hyde did good work running up to field line-drive punts for gains totaling 24 yards. The kickoff-return unit was overwhelmed by the Raiders until Janis hit a seam and blasted through it for 47. Guion did a lousy job failing to keep his balance on the blocked field goal so DE Denico Autry got to it. Careless play from Thomas almost led to a blocked punt for Masthay. Hard hits in coverage were delivered by Ripkowski (two), Janis and Rollins.

OVERALL (3½)

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