

# Packers Team Report Card

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## PASS OFFENSE (D)

Last season, the Packers ranked No. 1 in pass average (yards divided by attempts and sacks). This season, they ranked No. 31. They also were 25th in passing yards (218.9), their worst ranking since the strike season of 1987 when the quarterbacks were Randy Wright, rookie Don Majkowski and replacement players Alan Risher and Willie Gillus. Aaron Rodgers started out wonderfully, posting a passer rating of 115.9 (68.1% completion rate) in a 6-0 start. His marks in Games 7-18 were 82.4 and 57%. His 18-game rating of 91.8 was a career low. Not only did Rodgers play poorly by his standards, so did a receiving corps minus Jordy Nelson. There were just six 100-yard games by receivers, and the total of 58 completions of 20 yards or more was the lowest since '08. Screen passes between 24 and 30 yards accounted for eight of the 58. The Packers ranked 28th in third-down efficiency, their worst finish since before the football renaissance in Green Bay began in '92. Randall Cobb, who ranked 22nd in receptions with 79, saw his total of 20+ grabs crash from 26 to 10. Old pro James Jones did what he could, leading the NFL's 50 top receivers in yards per catch (17.8). The unforgettable Hail Marys in Detroit and Arizona were offset by failed chances to win at the end against the Panthers, Lions, Bears and Vikings. The Packers ranked 24th in percentage of sacks allowed. Ty Montgomery led the club in average yards after the catch with a mediocre 5.47.

## RUSHING OFFENSE (C)

Tied for fourth a year ago in average gain on first down (6.03), the Packers swooned to 31st (4.53) due in part to the inability to run effectively against conventional defenses. Of their 490 carries, 140 were "bad" runs (defined as gains of 1 yard or less in non-short yardage and kneel-down situations). That rate of 28.6% was the highest in Green Bay since '07 (31.6%). T.J. Lang led with a career-high 19½. Richard Rodgers, with 16 1/2, had the most of any tight end during the Mike McCarthy years. The Packers ranked with the NFL's worst running on third and 1 (10 of 18), but were better on fourth-and-1 carries (5 of 7). Eddie Lacy, 8 of 14 in those short-yardage situations, finished 20th in rushing yards (758). Other than 100-yard games in Games 10-11-13, the overweight Lacy was a shell of himself. Neither Lacy nor James Starks, who played 600 snaps to Lacy's 532, could be counted on. They combined to lose five fumbles on rushes, a startling number given the fact RBs lost merely eight on rushes in the previous six years. There was an explosive element with 12 runs of 20 yards or more, including six by each player. Aaron Rodgers was fifth in rushing by QBs with 344 yards, his highest total since '10. The Packers' run rate of 41.1% was just above the league average (40.9%).

## PASS DEFENSE (B+)

The Packers were positioned to have an even higher grade if they had made better use of interception chances. They dropped 18, twice as many as last season, and ended up catching 18. Sam Shields left a poor final impression on his finest season by dropping three in the divisional defeat. After dropping merely four in his first five seasons, Shields led with five followed by Quinten Rollins with four. The 18 picks were a far cry from 2009-'11, when Dom Capers' first three defenses in Green Bay averaged 31.3. Other than that, the Packers were tough to throw on. The vigorous, athletic rush ranked fifth in sack percentage. The big three in pressures (defined as

the combination of sacks, knockdowns and hurries) were Clay Matthews (34 1/2), Julius Peppers (34) and Mike Daniels (32). The best rusher from the back end was Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (one pressure every 5.5 blitzes). The Packers were sixth in TD passes allowed (20) and passing yards allowed (227.6), seventh in opponents' passer rating (80.1) and third-down efficiency (35.9%), and 11th in pass average. Capers blitzed on 36.3% of passes, almost the same frequency as the last three years. Big plays were a problem; foes had 19 passes for more than 35 yards. The longest, 75 yards, by Arizona's Larry Fitzgerald, ended the Packers' season last Sunday.

## RUSH DEFENSE (C+)

When the Packers played their 3-4 base front, and it was on just 17.7% of the snaps, opponents had a beastly time trying to hammer the ball inside. The front seven didn't just drop anchor; it often played across the line of scrimmage. The D-line's total of 22 tackles for loss was its most since '07; the linebackers' total of 31 was its highest since '91. Mike Neal led with a career-best 8 1/2 tackles for loss, followed by Matthews with 7 1/2 and B.J. Raji with seven. In all, the Packers had 62, their most since '09. After ranking 21st in yards (119.1) during the regular season, the Packers allowed an average of just 62 to the Redskins and Cardinals in the playoffs. Opponents had much better luck running against their sub packages. That's where the majority of the 15 rushes for 20 yards or more resulted. Daniels was responsible for a team-high four of the 15. Quarterbacks hit Green Bay for 383 rushing yards and a 5.9 average. Just one of the four 100-yard rushing games (Dallas' Darren McFadden, 9-111) came in the last 11 games. Clinton-Dix easily led the club in tackles with 125. The 133 missed tackles included 14 by Casey Hayward, 13 by Nate Palmer and 12 by Matthews. The position group leaders in tackles per snap were Mike Pennel (DL), Jake Ryan (ILB), Nick Perry (OLB), Rollins (CB) and Morgan Burnett (safeties).

## SPECIAL TEAMS (C)

First-year coordinator Ron Zook engineered a 17th-place finish in the Dallas Morning News' rankings of overall performance, a substantial jump from 32nd in 2014 but on a par with 2011-'13 (tied for 13th, 12th, 19th). Green Bay still trailed the NFC North teams. KO returners Ty Montgomery (31.1, seven attempts) and Jeff Janis (29.0, 14) were the team's best since Najeh Davenport (31.6, 16) in '03. The Packers improved from 23rd to tied for fourth in average start after kickoffs (23.0) but were tied for 27th (22.7) in opponents' average start. Janis (15 tackles) and Demetri Goodson (12) were instrumental in NFL-best punt coverage (4.2). Their aggressiveness as gunners helped Tim Masthay break Jerry Norton's club's record for net punt average (40.2). In other statistical measures, Masthay didn't fare nearly as well. Mason Crosby was one of five full-time kickers to make every extra-point try. His .857 FG mark included a 52-yarder that was mis-hit and would have beaten Detroit. Ameer Abdullah's 104-yard KO return turned around the upset loss to the Lions; the Packers ranked 29th in KO coverage (26.7). Micah Hyde's longest of 30 punt returns was just 17 yards. There were 23 penalties, most since '09, and 24 missed tackles, including four each by Aaron Ripkowski and Ryan. Chris Banjo led in tackles (24) and snaps (375). Kennard Backman and Goodson gave up first downs on fake punts whereas Masthay converted a fake punt. The turnover differential was plus-1.

## PERSONNEL MOVES (C-)

The final four playoff teams all were heavily involved in free agency in the spring, summer and fall. True to form, GM Ted Thompson in his 11th season adhered to his home-grown philosophy of roster building. He hasn't signed an unrestricted free agent since 2012 or traded for a player since 2010. From Jan. 20 to Aug. 1, the Packers signed 34 free agents. The best turned out to be CB LaDarius Gunter, who played 39 snaps. Thompson's only move of consequence was re-signing Jones, who appeared Sept. 5 on the Giants' cut list. Of the nine players added after the opener, three came from reserve lists, four from the practice squad, LB Joe Thomas from the Cowboys' practice squad and LS Rick Lovato from the street. In the draft, Thompson might have hit big with QB Brett Hundley in the fifth round and cornerbacks Damarious Randall and Quinten Rollins in the top two rounds. Montgomery, Jake Ryan and Aaron Ripkowski might be starters, too. Even as the crying need for a tight end became obvious in camp, Thompson passed on Jermaine Gresham and Vernon Davis. He didn't add any speed at WR, either. Management re-signed Letroy Guion and didn't cut Andrew Quarless after their gun-related arrests in Florida. Instead of letting backup SS Sean Richardson go, the Packers retained him by matching the Raiders' exorbitant offer sheet (\$2.35 million guaranteed). With \$6.954M in cap space at year's end, the Packers rolled it over to their 2016 cap.

## COACHING (D-)

Aaron Rodgers played 1,286 of a possible 1,296 snaps. That alone all but guarantees eight victories. The Packers won 10 and a playoff game, of course, but the offense was an impediment most of the way. This was McCarthy's worst coaching job, and it wasn't even close. Overreacting after the setback in Seattle, McCarthy handed off what he does best to a play-calling neophyte, Tom Clements, in a staff reorganization that was top-heavy and largely unworkable. McCarthy finally came to his senses and resumed calling the plays, but the damage had been done and the offense never caught fire. Great coaches adjust to injury and find ways to keep moving the ball, especially those with a franchise quarterback and a strong roster like Green Bay's. McCarthy didn't. Injuries shouldn't have been an issue; [mangameslost.com](http://mangameslost.com), using quantitative and qualitative barometers, ranked Green Bay just 24th among teams hit hardest by injury. McCarthy should have known what Janis was capable of and been playing him all along. He didn't even know his own players, giving Don Barclay and Josh Sitton calamitous late-season starts at LT when the capable JC Tretter was the obvious choice. McCarthy's dominance of the division, remarkable record as a touchdown-or-more favorite, rich history as a second-half-of-the-season team and winning ways at Lambeau Field all were diminished. The 58 penalties on offense were a high for a McCarthy-coached team. What didn't leave McCarthy was his sustained excellence in turnover differential. At plus-6 for 18 games, he's now plus-99 for his 175-game tenure. It's why he has won at a .643 clip.

## OVERALL (C-)

Green Bay and New England began the season as co-favorites to win the Super Bowl. Then the Packers suffered an unexpected collapse on offense that had little to do with personnel but almost everything to do with coaching, utilization of players, development of players and scheme. Never in 24 years with Brett Favre and Rodgers under center have the Packers been this paralyzed offensively. They ranked 23rd in yards (334.6), their worst finish since coach Lindy Infante's last team in 1991 was being quarterbacked by Mike Tomczak, Don Majkowski and Blair Kiel. After leading the NFL in points a year ago, they sunk to 15th. They also were out-gained for only the second time in 23 years. Jordy Nelson and Sam Barrington were the only starters to miss more than five games due to injury. In all, 11 starters missed a total of 59 games; the beat-up starting offensive linemen still played 83% of the snaps. McCarthy's teams hummed right along in 2010, '12 and '13 despite a more onerous injury list. Favored 13 times, they were 11-7 against the spread. With their seventh straight playoff berth clinched by Game 14, the Packers lost at home to the Vikings in the finale with a fifth straight division championship and home playoff game on the line. They rallied smartly to dispatch the Redskins, the weakest of the six NFC playoff teams. Then not even a second Hail Mary touchdown could earn victory in Arizona. When the defense caved in overtime, the Packers' underachieving season was over.