

Rating the Packers: Week 3 vs Lions

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Sept 27, 2016

Green Bay - Neither the Green Bay Packers nor the Detroit Lions were close to being at full strength entering the game Sunday, and each side lost at least one starter in the first half.

It became a battle of attrition, and in the end the Packers managed to hold serve at Lambeau Field. It improved their record against the Lions in Wisconsin to 25-1 since 1992.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 34-27 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4)

The Packers should feel good about the progression of Jordy Nelson (played 49 of the 54 snaps on offense). When Minnesota's Xavier Rhodes didn't play last week, it deprived him of a chance to work against one of the top three corners in the division. Detroit's Darius Slay is one of those three, and when they were matched against each other Nelson had three catches for 31 yards. Nelson took advantage of mismatches against linebackers twice for 57. With Slay manned up in the bump zone on third and 2, defensive coordinator Teryl Austin brought the house (eight vs. seven blockers) so Nelson had to get open. As Nelson has done a thousand times before (counting practice), he took an outside release, maintained perfect position in relation to the boundary and caught a perfect pass for the TD with Slay in close coverage. Neither Randall Cobb (42, all at WR) nor Davante Adams (25) won as the other receivers on the play, but Nelson did. He must keep on winning, too. Cobb had just two targets, his fewest in a game when injury wasn't a factor since the 2013 wild-card playoffs. Nickel back Quandre Diggs, who was beaten by Adams for a 14-yard TD, helped keep Cobb under wraps. Adams' TD was really impressive. Win at the line, secure the catch, drop the pads and run over FS Glover Quin at the 2. Trevor Davis (12) kept running and running until CB Nevin Lawson drew a 66-yard penalty for interfering with him. Later, he had a hideous drop on a 13-yard sideline comeback route that will give the coaches pause before increasing his role. Ty Montgomery, Jeff Janis and Jared Abbrederis weren't part of the WR rotation. Jared Cook left with an ankle injury after his 14th snap (six with his hand down). He was in position for a huge day against the Lions' rag-tag collection of linebackers (free agent Zaviar Gooden, who had to play 27 snaps from scrimmage and 21 more on special teams, was so bad the Lions cut him Monday). Richard Rodgers (43, 27 down) looks great, is in tip-top condition and always catches everything. He even came across the formation to upend DE Kerry Hyder with a cut block that sprung Eddie Lacy for 14. Yet, of the team's four "bad" runs, Rodgers played a role in two. Subbing for Cook, Justin Perillo (17, 12 down) was fine.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

You'd be hard-pressed to come up with a negative play for the left side of David Bakhtiari and Lane Taylor. It's a shame that Bakhtiari didn't have a chance to test his development against DE Ziggy Ansah (ankle). Instead, his matchup was Devin Taylor, the veteran stringbean who was coming off a solid outing against Tennessee. He never got a sniff because Bakhtiari was too athletic, too strong and too focused. His feet are underneath him more in the run game this year, enabling him to sustain blocks and not get tossed at the point of attack. Like Bakhtiari, Taylor didn't allow a pressure or "bad" run. The Lions' four-man rotation at DT isn't bad. However, on play after play, Taylor just blocked his man, run or pass. In August, teams had success getting on his edge. The Lions kept trying to bull rush Taylor, but he was too thick and wouldn't be taken back very far. T.J. Lang was on top of his game, too, and pitched a shutout. It was rather shocking to see Bryan Bulaga get beat by Hyder for a sack at the end of the half. It looked like Hyder just got Bulaga's hands off him. The most difficult opponent (NT Haloti Ngata) fell to JC Tretter, who was outweighed by about 50 pounds. Actually, Tretter had more trouble with backup Khyri Thornton, the Packers reject who has resuscitated his career. In 17 snaps, Thornton beat Tretter for two hurries and one-half of a "bad" run. Bulaga and Tretter each drew holding penalties.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

Austin tried with a four-man rush early but soon discovered that without Ansaah it was a hopeless cause. Thus, he ended up sending five or more rushers on 50 percent of dropbacks, a significant increase from 27.6 percent in his four games against Green Bay the past two years. As Austin found out, he didn't really have a linebacker capable of being disruptive. Aaron Rodgers showed exemplary command of the offense. His checks at the line helped Eddie Lacy surpass 100 yards. The 66-yard interference penalty was the result of a pass Rodgers threw running to his left that carried 73 yards. He threw four first-half TD passes, including the beautiful 17-yard strike to Nelson. With little threat from the Lions, Rodgers was free to scan the field or scramble as he saw fit. His decision-making was on the mark, and there was nothing even close to a turnover. He tried and tried with hard counts to goad the Lions into jumping but there was nothing doing. In some ways, the outcome came down to third and 8 late with a seven-point lead. Afforded incredible protection, Rodgers held his water for seven seconds before taking off on a superb 11-yard jaunt. After a nine-yard slant to Adams, that was that.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

On 18 touches, Eddie Lacy was knocked back on merely two. Sixteen times he was falling forward on the tackle, gaining additional yardage and draining the defense. Two of the five tackles that he broke came on his last carry, a nine-yard pound off left tackle that gained the last first down. A few times, Lacy (38) had eight or 10 foes and friends almost on top of him. He just kept churning his legs. Lacy was patient waiting for holes to open. His only "bad" run was an inexplicable decision to bounce an inside zone wide left. Many times it came down to Quin against Lacy in the open field. However, Lacy was charged with a sack when he did a terrible job in blitz pickup and let the 207-pound Quin knock him straight back forcing Rodgers to flee. As Rodgers took off, Lacy stood there and watched. Other times, he'd just walk off the field. Three games into 2015, James Starks had played 102 snaps. His 12 Sunday increased his three-game total to 60. On his lone carry he didn't press the hole and suffered a yard loss. He was off in protection, too. FB Aaron Ripkowski had 11 first-half snaps before departing (back). He did the job. Cobb wasn't used from the backfield but Montgomery (four) was.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Minus Letroy Guion (knee), Kenny Clark (42 of the 68 snaps on defense) started alongside Mike Daniels (46) in sub and Dean Lowry (11) started at 5-technique in the seven snaps when the 3-4 base was employed. Clark did an adequate job at the point of attack but didn't come close to dominating C Travis Swanson, a two-year starter with a serious shortage of power. Clark showed good lateral movement, chased down a screen and showed promise. Daniels registered all three of the pressures by the D-line but none came against RG Larry Warford, the Lions' best blocker. Their battles were a treat to watch. Actually, LG Laken Tomlinson appeared to elevate his game, which opponents realize they must against the rampaging Daniels or get embarrassed. On third and goal from the 1, Daniels blew up Warford and made a tackle for minus-1. Lowry made two strong plays at the point, including a tackle for loss against LT Taylor Decker. Christian Ringo (24) delivered considerable penetration but can't allow his aggressiveness to affect the integrity of the run fits. Rookie NT Brian Price didn't look out of place in his 10-snap debut.

LINEBACKERS (4)

Without Clay Matthews (hamstring-ankle) and Datone Jones (knee), the other four OLBs all had to play better and more. It's probably safe to say all of them did. Anxious about Matthew Stafford's recent blitz-killing ability, Dom Capers rushed five or more on just 10.9 percent of dropbacks. Only once since Capers became coordinator in 2009 has he blitzed less (4.9 percent, 2009 wild-card playoff in Arizona). Nick Perry, playing 28 of his 51 snaps on Matthews' right side, might have played his finest game in five years. The first of his four pressures came on the first play. The first of his seven tackles (two for loss) came on the second play. He provided critical fourth-quarter pass rush, nicking Decker for a sack and chasing down Stafford for another. Coach Jim Caldwell paid Perry a compliment by ordering him double-teamed at the bitter end. When Capers dropped Perry four times in coverage, Stafford exploited him twice for 29 yards. The throat-slash penalty can't happen again, either. Julius

Peppers (20 OLB, 12 DL) joined Perry in overpowering TEs Eric Ebron and Cole Wick in the run game. Kyle Fackrell (37) and Jayrone Elliott (28) contributed, too. Fackrell was out of position on a run early. He came back with a nice spin against Decker that might have been a sack if he hadn't tripped. Fackrell's best moment came when he knocked the 311-pound Decker off balance with a blow to the chest and finished it off with burst for a sack in 2.6 seconds. Fooled in the past, Elliott stayed home to destroy a reverse for minus-8. His pass rush, however, was negligible. Once again, the play inside from Jake Ryan (56), Joe Thomas (38) and Blake Martinez (30) was solid. Ryan found the ball after slipping blockers and made a terrific open-field tackle. Thomas blew up Ebron in the middle and dropped a pick. Martinez keeps lining up teammates and getting around the ball.

SECONDARY (½)

SS Micah Hyde (67), subbing for Morgan Burnett (hamstring), and LaDarius Gunter (63) also dropped interceptions. The failing grade and the complexion of the game would have changed if those balls had been caught. The one great play was made by Damarious Randall (57), who attached himself to Ebron like a lamprey to a lake trout and returned the stolen pass 44 yards. Later, Randall jumped the flat routes in Cover 2 hunting for another pick and gave Stafford the chance to drive the ball to the boundary before the safety could get over. Marvin Jones (six catches, 205 yards) had a career day; he owned the secondary. His 35-yard TD appeared to come against "quarters" (four-across) coverage in which Randall and Hyde shared responsibility. Randall fell, and Hyde bit on the fake and left Randall out to dry. Randall got no jam when Jones beat him for 38 on a subtle stutter-and-go. Hyde had problems sticking with Ebron. When Randall left for seven snaps (illness), rookie Josh Hawkins experienced a rude baptism. After a quick read and pass break-up, he missed a tackle. Then Jones took him deep on a 25-yard take-off that ruptured into a 73-yard TD when Hawkins pulled up and didn't finish the play. Rookie FS Kentrell Brice (12) should have tackled Jones but wasn't hustling and in the end wound up three yards short. Gunter was quick to support and provided adequate coverage. Slot Quinten Rollins (67) will continue being targeted until he displays the necessary quickness for the position. Through three games, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (68) hasn't been positioned well in coverage or a forceful hitter against run or pass.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby hit from 36 and 46 yards and averaged 72.4 yards and 3.52 seconds of hang time in seven kickoffs. Jacob Schum went up high to pull down a wayward snap and did an admirable job getting off a 43-yard punt. His two-punt averages were a misleading 41.5 yards (gross), 33.5 (net) and 3.66 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Montgomery was the most poised if not the smartest individual in the stadium. How he handled Sam Martin's kickoff in the dead corner gave the Packers an extra 38 yards of field position and averted potential disaster. Brett Goode called the high snap his worst since taking over the job in 2008. Ron Zook, the special-teams coach, said a divot in the DD GrassMaster surface contributed to the miscue. Kick coverage led by Elliott was sensational. Davis' 34-yard punt return was brought back after penalties on Marwin Evans and Hawkins (declined).

OVERALL RATING: 3.5 footballs

STARS OF THE GAME: 1. Nick Perry; 2. David Bakhtiari; 3. Lane Taylor.