

Rating the Packers: Week 6 vs Cowboys

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Coach Jason Garrett and the Dallas Cowboys took away everything that's near and dear to the Green Bay Packers on Sunday at Lambeau Field. Passing game. Run defense. Turnover differential. Ten months after they were shelled 28-7 on the same field, the Cowboys owned the Packers from start to finish in their 30-16 victory.

"I have great confidence that we'll perform at the level that we have the last 10 and a half years," coach Mike McCarthy said Monday. "This is not the way we play football, and we will do a better job."

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

RECEIVERS (1 ½)

You've got to admire the way Randall Cobb battled (played 53 of the 70 snaps on offense, including two at RB). Three times he defeated coverage and was in the clear for big gains when the passes were thrown beyond his reach. As frustrating as that must have been, he kept playing hard and was rewarded with his first TD of the season with seven minutes left. Cobb also showed bravery cracking back with gusto on MLB Anthony Hitchens, and going for a second block in traffic on another occasion when he already had blocked a bigger man. Cobb doesn't have the overall game of Dallas' Cole Beasley but with better quarterbacking and more innovative route combinations he'd be more productive. It was another mediocre showing for Jordy Nelson (64 snaps). Of his 68 receiving yards, merely four came after the catch. At times, it almost seemed like he didn't have any legs. His fumble on an 18-yard dig route was just the second from scrimmage of his nine-year career. The first was against the Giants in December 2010 as he stretched for a first down on third and 8. No NFL receiver has been more aware than Nelson when it comes to ball security. SS Barry Church drove his shoulder into the ball but Nelson probably had time to drop his pads and absorb the blow better. His blocking was hit-or-miss as well. Davante Adams (31) showed a lot of guts catching a 12-yard slant knowing a LB (Sean Lee) would be waiting to whack him. The result was a concussion. Adams also had a bad drop, but the offense missed him. Jeff Janis (32), Ty Montgomery (35, including 13 at WR), Trevor Davis (12) and Jared Abbrederis (four) also played. McCarthy tried to use Davis' speed on a play-action bomb but he didn't sell the double move and so there was no separation. It's critical that one of these players emerges in the last 11 games. The tight ends, Richard Rodgers (47, including 21 in a three-points stance) and Justin Perillo (16, 8), weren't factors.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3)

In the first four games, opponents used a total of four three-man rushes. Defensive coordinator Rod Marinelli rushed with three on 14 of 48 dropbacks, a total that was the most against Green Bay since New England also had 14 in November 2014. In all, Marinelli rushed with five or more just 14.6 percent, and not once with more than five. So the task of protecting the passer thus was made easier, and the Packers fared well with four pressures allowed. The lone sack came at the bitter end when towering David Irving outworked JC Tretter out of a three-man rush and the ball came out. This wasn't one of Tretter's better games. He and T.J. Lang were responsible for the failed third and 1 early by allowing penetration to NT Terrell McClain, who played a part in three of the eight "bad" runs. On the ill-advised QB draw, Tretter was unable to sustain against Irving and Aaron Rodgers coughed it up. He also didn't get any movement against Irving at the point of attack on Montgomery's late fumble. Probably the best player was Bryan Bulaga, who sat out the last 12 snaps with a knee injury. Bulaga did whiff on a fumble recovery, but gained a slight decision over capable DE Tyrone Crawford. Spriggs, who had four snaps at TE and another in the backfield, was OK until his last two snaps at RT when DE Ryan Davis trashed him on a pass and a run. Neither Lang nor David Bakhtiari sustained run blocks as well as they have been. Lane Taylor was the only starter without a pressure but was charged with 1 ½ "bad" runs.

QUARTERBACKS (½)

The 137th start of Aaron Rodgers' career was among his five worst. First down at the 1 and he checks to a QB draw. That takes a lot of chutzpah. ILB Justin Durant, who was spying Rodgers, showed up in the hole. Instead of just getting on the ground, Rodgers meandered into the lair of the monsters without lowering his pads or putting two arms around the ball. He's athletic and strong, but not that athletic and strong. Did he really expect the welcome mat to be out? When Irving got done with him, the ball was flying out. Then, on the only time Rodgers was knocked down in the pocket, he couldn't even secure the ball and fumbled again. Aging quarterbacks tend to start fumbling. The interception was just awful. Church had the tight end in man coverage, the tight end blocked and Church wasn't blitzing. Church had to be somewhere, but Rodgers didn't process it and never saw him. Seven times he was off-target with throws, and more than half should be routine for such an accomplished player. He's not throwing receivers open, and he almost got Nelson rung up by a LB on a wayward slant. All of these misfires occurred with impeccable protection, too. None of this was an issue until 12 months ago. He made some wacky decisions, like the swing pass to Cobb for minus-6 when Richard Rodgers was sitting down uncovered in the middle five yards downfield. His failure to spike the ball at the end of the half cost a 32-yard FG attempt. His best plays were catching the Cowboys twice for 12 men on the field and his exceptional two-shell beater to Nelson for 25. It was his only big play.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

The courageous performance of Eddie Lacy (31) brought to mind the NFL scout who said in 2013, "He just keeps on going through injuries." Alabama's Nick Saban taught him that and Lacy hasn't forgotten. He was in and out with a left ankle injury, trying different shoes and tape jobs. He sucked it up and just played, and played very well. His 25-yard run was going nowhere with the nose tackle in his face after beating Tretter. Lacy put his right foot down and cut inside, then put his left foot down to avoid trash and out the gate he went. It was a startling display of run skill and vision. When Taylor got knocked back into the backfield, he cut back for 10. Lacy's value is most apparent on poorly blocked plays. With cornerbacks trying to cut him low, he hurdled four of them on a bad wheel. Despite the penetration on third and 1, Aaron Ripkowski (18) should be able to find the opening outside instead of running into his own man. As a blocker, he really did the job. Montgomery (22) caught six of his 10 passes as a RB for 52 yards. He didn't break any tackles but also didn't mess around getting north-south. He also fumbled twice, and was carrying the ball loosely each time. He's not hardened to take body blows inside, and McCarthy will have to weigh that against future playing time.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1)

With the Cowboys making extensive use of base and jumbo sets the Packers played 28 snaps in the 3-4, their highest total in more than 1 ½ seasons. On 20 of those snaps the NT was Letroy Guion (played 38 of the 65 defensive snaps). Guion hasn't found the ball yet. Operating against physical C Travis Frederick, Guion was on the ground constantly or shoved out of the way. He got schooled. Back from a four-game suspension, Mike Pennel (13) played two snaps inside for Guion and has to be a consideration for expanded action. Pennel and Kenny Clark (26), who traded off at 5-technique with Datone Jones in the base, both were more effective than Guion. Pennel will have dominating snaps because of his size and length. Clark's natural leverage is evident. Holding his own against a line like the Cowboys' should bolster Clark's confidence. Mike Daniels (48) gave phenomenal effort. His jousts with RG Zack Martin and LG Ronald Leary were a pleasure to watch. Sometimes Daniels' lack of height can be an advantage. But, against big men that also are good, he has trouble seeing the ball and will get engulfed. Daniels had 1 ½ pressures.

LINEBACKERS (1)

Perhaps the best player was Jones, who played eight of his 33 snaps standing up. Julius Peppers (32 snaps, 21 at OLB) had two pressures, including a strip-sack against RT Doug Free, and Jones had 1 ½ . The other four OLBs – Nick Perry (49), Clay Matthews (45, 38 outside), Jayrone Elliott (nine) and Kyler Fackrell (seven) – were shut out. Jones wasn't bad at the point of attack at 5-technique in base, played with surprising strength and was active. Peppers had some nice rushes but continued to have recognition problems against the run. This was Perry's worst game of the season. He never threatened Dak Prescott and his plays in the run game were made laterally rather than straight-ahead. Despite just 21.4 percent double-teaming Matthews couldn't make any headway against LT Tyron Smith. Obviously, Smith is an incredible performer, but for Matthews to rejoin the ranks of the elite he needed a better showing than this. For the first time Matthews played seven snaps at ILB next to Morgan Burnett in a run-stop variation of the base. He overran a carry by Ezekiel Elliott for 14 and wasn't sharp. Maybe the Packers shouldn't have played Elliott or Fackrell against such a formidable foe. They looked overmatched. The play of ILBs Blake Martinez (46) and Jake Ryan (45), solid in the first month, dropped against first-rate blockers. For the first time they had to deal with O-linemen getting out on them. Until the fourth quarter, they were doing more catching than attacking. At times, both players ran through trying to tackle Elliott behind the line but didn't succeed. As the Cowboys ran out the clock Ryan kept playing with feverish recklessness even though he was getting mauled by Frederick. Martinez was exploited at times in coverage. Joe Thomas (10) made a sparkling mid-air recovery of Prescott's fumble.

SECONDARY (2)

Burnett (65) was the top player. When Prescott made a mistake, Burnett made him pay for an errant toss by making a tough low catch to break the rookie's record streak without an interception. Burnett also broke up two passes and generally tackled well, although Elliott's speed made him and everyone else in the secondary look bad at times. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (65) delivered some hard hits but was slow to react and/or out of position on a pair of long runs. Minus Sam Shields (concussion) and Quinten Rollins (groin), Damarious Randall lasted 18 snaps before leaving with an aggravated groin injury. LaDarius Gunter (64) had been playing well at right corner, the position where he made a name for himself the week before against the Giants' Odell Beckham Jr. When Randall exited, Gunter shifted to the left side to accommodate Demetri Goodson (36) on the right side. Some scouts say it's not always easy for corners to switch sides because of the footwork. Gunter was awful on the left side. In the final minute of the first half, Terrance Williams made him fall on a 42-yard bomb and Brice Butler ran by him for a 20-yard TD. When little Lucky Whitehead motioned to Gunter's side on third and 1, Gunter didn't back off. No way Whitehead is on the field to block. Then Whitehead ran by Gunter for 36, a drive that ended when Beasley lulled Gunter into giving up a too-easy 4-yard TD. Goodson did compete coming off suspension, although he got a break when Butler dropped a 45-yard pass behind him. Randall gave up three completions to Williams before departing. Micah Hyde (53), the nickel back, lost track of Beasley just long enough and it was a 1-yard TD.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby connected from 37, 43 and 34 yards, and averaged 73 yards and 3.54 seconds of hang time on four kickoffs. His onside kick was poor. Jacob Schum's only punt (47, 4.36) hit at the 1 and bounced back to the 3.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Davis ran up under Chris Jones' 41-yard, 4.25-second punt, made a sharp cut away from LS Louis-Phillippe Ladouceur and bolted 25 yards. The team's longest last year was 17. With the offense proving incapable of big plays, why were Janis and Montgomery taking a knee on kickoffs just one and three yards deep? With the game all but over, apparently Montgomery got the go-ahead to bring one out from the goal-line and the result was a 40-yard return. By the way, Cobb hasn't played a snap on special teams this season. In no way should the Packers discount using any player with explosive ability.

OVERALL RATING: 1.5 footballs

STARS OF THE GAME: 1. Eddie Lacy; 2. Randall Cobb; 3. Morgan Burnett.