

Rating the Packers: Week 7 vs Bears

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

Posted: Oct. 22, 2016

Green Bay - Short week on the heels of a sobering defeat. Extensive injury list. Two new running backs. An opponent brimming with desperation. Those were some of the obstacles faced by coach Mike McCarthy as the Green Bay Packers formulated a plan to avert an upset by the Chicago Bears on Thursday night at Lambeau Field. Demonstrating the versatility of his offense and his own originality, McCarthy found ways to compensate for the lack of a traditional running game with a spread-'em out, short-pass attack. It took a half for his strategy to manifest itself but, in the second half, it was lights out for the Bears. Here is a rating of the Packers in their 26-10 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (2 ½)

Bears coordinator Vic Fangio prefers zone or off-man coverage. Despite his personnel deficiencies at cornerback, he came out challenging the WRs in press man. It might have worked, too, had it not been for Davante Adams (played 70 of 87 offensive snaps) and the fact his second-best cover man, Bryce Callahan, had to depart after 16 snaps with a hamstring injury. Fangio assigned Jordy Nelson (83) to Tracy Porter, a well-traveled veteran who was questionable (knee). Even at less than full strength, Porter basically owned Nelson. With the ball being thrown 56 times, it was stunning to see merely four go to Nelson. He caught one (for 9 yards), and it came against slow-footed SS Harold Jones-Quartey. It's a cruel game in which everyone eventually gets exposed. How much does Nelson have left? Forced to choose between free agents De'Vante Bausby (three snaps in his career) or Jacoby Glenn to put on Adams, Fangio opted for Bausby (6 feet ½ inch, 185, 4.58). It was a mismatch. Before Glenn, who probably played even worse, was inserted late, Adams caught nine of his 13 passes and gained 77 of his 132 yards against Bausby (he also was penalized twice). It's not Adams' fault his opponents were pathetic. He destroyed whoever was out there with a smashing display of strength, hands and tackle-breaking shiftiness. In the slot, Randall Cobb (71 at WR, seven at RB) had an easy matchup in free agent Cre'Von LeBlanc. He was quick to the flat and impressive after the catch, but he left two TDs on the field. If Cobb snatches an end-zone pass (14 yards) LeBlanc's successful strip doesn't work. If he works his feet properly in the end zone (22 yards), one doesn't come down beyond the end line. Jeff Janis (41) offered little, even false-starting on a hard count. On an early third and 3, he's got to make a head fake and get inside ILB Jerrell Freeman rather than come in upright and slam into him. Neither R. Rodgers (47, 20 in a three-point stance) nor J. Perillo (14, four) was a factor.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Four days after a back injury sidelined him for the last 12 snaps against the Cowboys, Bryan Bulaga turned in another one of the many performances of his seven-year career in which he rose to the occasion against an outstanding rusher. It wasn't until late in the game that Willie Young, who played the majority of his 63 snaps on the left side over Bulaga, beat him for a flush. T.J. Lang had his head on a swivel looking to help Bulaga as much as possible. Most of the time, Bulaga blunted Young's unconventional pass-rushing style with solid sets and good hand placement. Bulaga wasn't perfect. He missed DE Akiem Hicks on the fourth-and-goal run that was stopped. The sack on the right-side strip sack-touchdown by OLB Leonard Floyd went to Don Barclay, who played 16 mid-game snaps when Lang's hip hurt. Barclay was picked on by Young, who went first on a twist and blew up Barclay before Floyd swooped wide and cleaned up. Lang looked a little crooked in his stance much of the game but came back and helped. David Bakhtiari wasn't in top form. Aaron Rodgers' mobility means few edge rushers are willing to chance inside rushes. It's an advantage for Bakhtiari, who didn't react well to Floyd's inside charge and drew partial responsibility for the other sack. Bakhtiari allowed 2½ pressures and one-half "bad" run. On Ty Montgomery's 30-yard run, Bakhtiari missed Floyd off the ball. Still, he used his marvelous athleticism to recover instantly and bounce back between the ball and Floyd. JC Tretter and Lane Taylor both had some problems with Hicks, who was the Bears' best player on defense. If pressures and "bad" runs are combined, they both yielded 2½.

QUARTERBACKS (3)

Aaron Rodgers spent the first half looking like a quarterback who had lost his nerve and was afraid to make a throw downfield. When the Bears' rush did get to him, much of it was his fault for holding the ball too long. He was charged with a team-high 3½ pressures. Besides the two sacks, he was knocked down seven times. It's inviting injury, and he needs to start getting rid of the ball. Fangio tried three or four slot blitzes, but never rushed five the entire second half and ended with a pressure rate of just 10.8%. If not for his woeful secondary the tactics might have paid off because Rodgers was just looking for the obviously open man. He completed a million short passes but not one was of the sensational variety that made him special. The Packers will keep getting aggressive coverage and contested catches if there aren't shots being taken downfield. Only an elite few receivers get much separation in the NFL. Big plays result from quarterbacks with arm talent driving the ball into tight spots or throwing receivers open. Against the Bears, dink and dunk was enough. Rodgers' fumble (recovered for a TD) was his sixth (three lost) this season. His previous six-game fumble totals, starting with 2008, were 5-3, 3-2, 0-0, 1-0, 0-0, 3-0, 4-1 and 1-1. He seemed to be in rather ill humor, gesturing and muttering at teammates and coaches when the offense bogged down and exhibiting little joy over what became a decisive victory. Operating almost entirely from shotgun, he still hasn't lost two straight games to Chicago.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

The plan to mix Ty Montgomery (60, 49 at RB) with Don Jackson went up in smoke when the rookie suffered a hand injury going for a check-down on his sixth snap. Jackson showed some pizzazz and air of confidence on his two runs that suggested he wasn't in awe of the bright lights. Enter Montgomery, who until proven differently will be categorized as a back. How did he impress? In 19 touches he didn't fumble. In 11 targeted passes he didn't have a drop. On his 30-yard run, the longest gain of the game, he accelerated quickly, slipped away from tacklers and bled the run for all it was worth. He broke five tackles in all; two were by ILB Danny Trevathan, a tackling machine since his days at Kentucky. Seven of his 10 receptions (for 51 yards) came as he moved fluidly from the backfield and easily beat coverage. Montgomery needs to score from the 1 against LeBlanc. He can run a draw play, but obviously the Packers can't be sure if he can run inside and outside zones and hold up. The Packers didn't pull a lineman all night. Knile Davis (five) missed a read on one of his two carries but at least embarked on his career in Green Bay. It was remarkable to see Aaron Ripkowski as the lone setback on six of his 22 snaps.

DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Rookie NT Kenny Clark, the first-round draft choice, played just 15 snaps but made them all count. He crunched Cody Whitehair, a capable rookie center, for a no-gain tackle. He penetrated against RG Kyle Long to set up a tackle for loss. He hustled on a screen. He moved fast laterally on a run away and made a punishing tackle. Clark's best game made one eager to see more, but with the Bears as inept as they were there were just 48 plays in which to parcel out playing time. There were six linemen active but on every play just two were on the field. Letroy Guion (16) started but opened the game by jumping offsides and then missed a tackle. Whitehair had more success against Guion than Clark or Mike Pennel (11). Pennel was buried by LG Eric Kush on a 9-yard run, was pulled and then came back to walk back Kush and bat down a pass. It was disappointing not to see Mike Daniels (22) go belly-to-belly against ex-teammate Josh Sitton (ankle), who must have been crestfallen to sit out just the third game of his nine-year career. Daniels beat three different blockers on three runs totaling 1 yard but was whipped at the point by Ted Larsen, Long's replacement after 20 snaps, on a 24-yard run. The only pressure came from Dean Lowry (four), who beat Larsen straight-ahead.

LINEBACKERS (4)

This was one of several games in which the coaches, apparently thinking ahead, cut way back on Clay Matthews' second-half snaps. He sat out the entire fourth quarter after playing very well in 27 snaps, particularly against the run. He slashed off the edge or beat blockers for tackles on four runs netting minus-1, almost getting Ka'Deem Carey for a safety. He also had 2½ pressures, including a left-side stunt. On that play, QB Brian Hoyer suffered a broken left forearm when buried by Matthews and Julius Peppers (18, including five at OLB), who beat Long with a long-armed power rush. Jacked to face his old team, Peppers was active. Meanwhile, Nick Perry (35) has become the mainstay outside the coaches can't do without. Even with the game out of reach, he played all but one of the 19 second-half snaps. He bounced back from a subpar outing with a team-high three pressures, two tackles on runs totaling 1 yard and the first interception of his five-year career. Kyler Fackrell (10) turned the corner against RT Bobby Massie for a hurry. Each week, Blake Martinez (35) really tries to be physical. Whitehair got the best of him on the 24-yard run. He also dropped an interception. However, his desire and hustle paid off with his first pick. Jake Ryan (31) and Joe Thomas (17) were adequate, too.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (4)

After a rugged outing against Dallas, LaDarius Gunter (48) generally was assigned to match against Alshon Jeffery, the Bears' No. 1 weapon. The die was cast on the first series when Hoyer threw twice to Jeffery and Gunter denied the completion. In all, Jeffery was targeted nine times with Gunter in coverage. He caught three, each for 11 yards. It was a good matchup for Gunter, who handles size better than speed. Using his big body, reach, instincts and confidence, Gunter gets a lot out of himself. Dom Capers blitzed just 13.3%, and with the D-line and LBs controlling the run he was able to keep the safeties deep to assist Gunter and Demetri Goodson (48). Other than a 25-yard seam shot to WR Josh Bellamy, Goodson showed he has a legitimate role on defense when Damarious Randall and Quinten Rollins return from injury. Micah Hyde (48), the nickel back for three games, is improving and has to be a candidate to hold that job. Hyde had a 16-yard interference penalty and a vertical throw hit him in the shoulder, but the most important thing is maintaining proper leverage and preventing a completion. Morgan Burnett (48) got more done than Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (48). Martinez's interception was off a tip from Burnett, who played through TE Zach Miller. Kentrell Brice (13), the dime safety, took a great angle from the numbers and delivered a crushing hit on WR Cameron Meredith. He is so explosive.

KICKERS (1)

Mason Crosby missed an extra point from the 38 and appeared to kick the ball somewhat low on a 31-yarder that was blocked. He connected from 32 and 40. Jacob Schum's one punt had a 46-yard net and 4.3 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1 ½)

Hicks drove Taylor back too far and blocked the field goal with his right arm. The missed extra point was preceded by Jason Spriggs' false-start penalty. Trevor Davis was carrying the ball loosely on the opening punt and was saved a lost fumble by Ripkowski's heady, hustling recovery. The two kickoff returns averaged just 17.5 when Ripkowski and Richard Rodgers, the wedge men, didn't get their blocks. Marwin Evans and Brice made terrific tackles. Janis forced two fair catches.

OVERALL RATING: 3 footballs

STARS OF THE GAME: 1. Ty Montgomery; 2. Bryan Bulaga; 3. Davante Adams