

# Rating the Packers: Week 11 at Redskins

*By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

*Posted: Nov. 22, 2016*

**Green Bay** - Ten months ago, in an NFC wild-card playoff game at FedEx Field, the Green Bay Packers' pass rush and overall defense helped carry the day after the entire team looked dead for the first 18 minutes.

Instead of running for his life, Kirk Cousins had the protection Sunday night to work both sides of the field. For a quarterback with modest mobility and an accurate arm, time in the pocket can be the difference between 515 yards of total offense and 354 in the playoff game.

"I think the third-down conversions were the key to the game," Washington coach Jay Gruden said Monday. "Kirk was able to get through his progressions. He was able to wait for people to clear, get open, which is huge." Here is a rating of the Packers in their 33-32 setback, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

## **RECEIVERS ( 3 ½ )**

The corps of wide receivers hasn't made many exceptional plays this season so Randall Cobb's 47-yard reception on third-and-12 in the fourth quarter stood out. From the slot left, Cobb (played 60 of the 70 snaps on offense) beat rookie Kendall Fuller inside and caught the ball seven yards downfield. He spun off Fuller, turned up the field and ran through the tackle of SS Donte Whitner, a heavy hitter for years. When the Packers scored a few plays later, it was still a five-point game with 10 minutes left. One week after Minnesota's Stefon Diggs dominated Fuller, Cobb didn't get it going until the third quarter when he made a tough catch against the rookie on a vertical route for 22. Cobb could become more of a factor down the stretch now that there's a tight end (Jared Cook) to relieve some pressure in the middle of the field. Playing for the first time since suffering a high-ankle sprain in Game 3, Cook (43) posted the fourth 100-yard game of his eight-year career. Scouts said the weakness of the Redskins' defense was the inability of strong safeties Duke Ihenacho and Whitner to match up. When Cook set wide right, he released nicely and beat Whitner for a 47-yard bomb. It was 25 yards longer than any reception by a Packers tight end this season. Later, he beat Ihenacho from the slot for 29. In the red zone, Cook used his big body and quick feet at the line to defeat one-on-one coverage from FS Will Blackmon on a slant for a 6-yard TD. He could be an immense plus in the red zone. For some reason, Cook repeatedly was late out of his stance in 10 three-point plays. He also dropped two passes, including one on the goal-line that called for a wheel route but there was no need for it without a defender in sight. As a rather stiff, upright runner, Cook must take extra precaution. His lost fumble in the fourth quarter was unacceptable. Richard Rodgers played a season-low 21 snaps (four in a three-point stance) but it was one of his best games. His refusal to go down easily sparked the slow-starting offense. However, he was late twice coming across in pass protection. Jordy Nelson (70) doesn't scare teams anymore even though his TD reception was his ninth. He offers little after the catch, and at times is moving backward. At some point there might be interest in seeing more of the younger players. You can tell Davante Adams (67) doesn't mind the rough stuff inside. It was a slow day for him until he turned a 10-yard catch into 37 with decisive run after the catch.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE ( 2 )**

RG Don Barclay (39) injured his shoulder in pregame warmups and played poorly in the first half. The move to Jason Spriggs (31) at the start of the third quarter should have been made earlier. Barclay wasn't nearly as effective this week as last week against Tennessee. On two occasions he appeared to panic when unable to get his hands inside the defender and grabbed, drawing holding penalties. Of the seven pressures yielded by the O-line, Barclay was charged with 3 ½. Spriggs played 27 snaps at RG before taking over for LT David Bakhtiari in the final four. Old pro Cullen Jenkins got after Spriggs initially with a spin move and a trashing. Despite having almost no playing experience at guard and lacking the ideal mass/strength for inside, the only evidence of weakness came on a bull rush by wide body Chris Baker. On the three runs in which there was a pulling lineman, Spriggs came around the corner once and made solid contact on ILB Will Compton. Bryan Bulaga had another solid effort against LOLB Ryan Kerrigan and Bakhtiari, playing on a balky knee, shut out ROLB Preston Smith. Bulaga's decision to play this season at 310 pounds, about 10 fewer than in the past, was a good one. He's lighter on his feet and hasn't missed time. Corey Linsley was back-doored by Baker on the second play. Of the two "bad" runs charged to the unit, Linsley had 1 1/2. It looked like Aaron Rodgers' fumble was due in part to Linsley's premature snap. No sacks, no pressures and no "bad" runs for Lane Taylor. He mashes around and usually blocks his man.

## **QUARTERBACKS ( 4 ½ )**

His teammates dropped more passes than they have in most games. It was 38 degrees, a cold north wind gusted to 25 mph, the Redskins' fans were jacked and there were fewer Cheeseheads than at most road venues. It was fairly apparent the Packers would be fighting an uphill battle all night. Aaron Rodgers started poorly once again, completing one of his first five for no yards and no first downs in three series. He turned his play and the offense around from late first quarter on, passing for 351 yards and three TDs. On a 17-play TD drive, he eluded rushers that had him dead to rights two or three times and made significant gains with his arm and feet. The highlight came on third-and-goal from the 13 when he absorbed an illegal high shot from blitzing Su'a Cravens and gunned a TD to Nelson. On two of his three scrambles (for 33 yards), he dove head-first making sure it was a maximum gain. Coordinator Joe Barry blitzed 30.8 percent, slightly more than in the playoff game. Rodgers reacted well to whatever Barry tried, kept his emotions in check and was a pillar of strength throughout. For the second straight game Brett Hundley was unimpressive playing the last series, particularly his fumbled shotgun snap.

## **RUNNING BACKS ( 3 )**

James Starks (33) and Ty Montgomery (29) split time, and Aaron Ripkowski saw 14 snaps. Almost every reception for Starks is an adventure. He has improved as a receiver over the years, but there's a limit, too. He dropped an easy screen pass that figured to be a 10-yard gain. When the Redskins short-circuited, Starks was alone on a check-down with an empty half of the field over which he traversed for a 31-yard TD. He might have been pink-slipped on the spot with a drop there in front of the Packers' bench. Starks gained 71 from scrimmage compared to Montgomery's 44. Montgomery keeps his feet moving and usually gets a yard or two more than what's blocked. He also dropped a pass. Ripkowski's collision with Compton on an old-fashioned line buck was memorable.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE ( ½ )**

In the playoff game, Mike Daniels (played 44 of the 66 snaps on defense) was a tower of power with 3 ½ pressures and two or three tackles in which he stacked and shed blockers. Much of his damage came against RG Brandon Scherff, a rookie. Since then the Redskins have improved up front, especially Scherff, who has drawn praise from scouts as one of the league's top guards. This time, Daniels had to settle for one-half pressure. His knockdown of Cousins didn't count because the roughing-the-passer penalty on third-and-6 sustained what was a scoring drive. Daniels' best moment came when he blew up Scherff and stopped Robert Kelley for minus-3. Letroy Guion (36), Kenny Clark (24), Mike Pennel (11) and Dean Lowry (two) didn't register a pressure, but that's nothing new. Until this group begins generating some heat from the nickel (there were just four snaps of base), the players won't be recognized. It's just the way it is. Guion has been and remains a major challenge for foes attempting to reach-block him. When LG Shawn Lauvao tried it early, Guion registered a tackle for loss. When C Spencer Long tried later, Guion would have none of it and the result was another TFL. He's powerful, he's prideful and his performance level is consistent. Clark had a terrific rush and run stop against Lauvao. Pennel's production has dwindled.

## **LINEBACKERS ( ½ )**

It's usually pointless to speculate about a player's level of health. If he's in uniform and plays 56 snaps, as did Clay Matthews, he has to be considered 100 percent. Thus, it was surprising to see him get stymied by LT Ty Nsekhe, the fill-in for suspended standout Trent Williams. Matthews had 1 ½ pressures (one-half against the big, talented Nsekhe) despite just 22.7 percent double-teaming. Matthews tried speed, power, speed-to-power, spin, six stunts and whatever else he could think of to beat his tormentor and disrupt Cousins. You could say Nsekhe throttled him. Of interest was the fact that Nick Perry's first rush against Nsekhe (with nine minutes left) resulted in the big man being forced to hold him. Perry (54) beat RT Morgan Moses for a sack and pressure in the first series but didn't slip past him again. As usual, Perry was too strong and earnest to stay blocked for long in the run game. He's just a bull on the edge. Julius Peppers (28, 14 at OLB) beat Moses in 3.2 seconds for the team's other sack, vaulted high to bat a screen pass and had a tackle for loss. Datone Jones (25, 13 at OLB) was deathly quiet until he drew a penalty (and inevitably a fine) for intentionally stepping on Nsekhe's helmet and facemask. Minus Jake Ryan, the ILB play of Joe Thomas (68), Blake Martinez (45) and Carl Bradford (seven) was below par. Thomas missed two tackles and routinely was engulfed. He's too small for steady service. Martinez is making mistakes. He keeps biting on play-action, compromising pass coverage and taking himself out of runs with improper reads. His excellent sideline pass breakup was offset by a pass-interference penalty. Bradford was swatted to the ground by Nsekhe on Kelley's 66-yard run, and ended up pancaked again on Kelley's 4-yard TD run on the next play. The Packers must think long and hard about playing him again.

## **SECONDARY ( ½ )**

Playing his third game since returning from a groin injury, Quinten Rollins (52) remains in a funk. The coaches' decision to start LC Demetri Goodson (10) ahead of Rollins no doubt was meaningful. After Goodson suffered a serious knee injury when LB Terence Garvin rolled into him, Rollins had to play. Cousins used Rollins' side as a safe haven for whenever he needed a short-to-intermediate completion. Rollins is hanging around the edges and giving too much cushion as if he worries constantly about getting beat deep. He wouldn't even challenge backup Ryan Grant. Rollins didn't put himself in position to compete against Jamison Crowder's 44-yard bomb behind him for a TD. The speed deficiency holds back LaDarius Gunter (66), too. There were extenuating circumstances on Pierre Garcon's 70-yard TD, but Garcon isn't very fast and at the very least Gunter has to get him down. Injuries at the position have forced Micah Hyde (65) to be the nickel back for about seven games. Like Gunter, Hyde battles every inch of the way. If he isn't in perfect position and technique-sound, there are times he'll lose. Morgan Burnett (68) was the best player in the secondary but his missed tackle on the 66-yard run loomed large. He broke up two middle-of-the-field throws and appeared to play as hard if not harder than anyone on defense. In his third season, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (68) shouldn't be so inconsistent in almost everything that he does.

### **KICKERS (1 ½)**

Mason Crosby hit from 36 with the wind and missed a few feet to the left from 36 against the wind. His four kickoffs for distance averaged 70.5 yards and 4.11 seconds of hang time. Jacob Schum placed two of his three punts outside the numbers. His averages were 46 yards (gross), 43.3 (net) and 4.33 (hang time).

### **SPECIAL TEAMS ( ½ )**

Replacing Trevor Davis, Cobb was deep four times as the punt returner, his first snaps of the season on special teams, and had a 10-yard runback. Jeff Janis might be close to playing himself off the team. He whiffed on Crowder covering a punt. His blocking was inadequate for returns. He almost interfered with Montgomery as his teammate fielded a kickoff. However, his most grievous offense was freezing on a kickoff, letting it bounce and then fanning on the recovery. An alert Richard Rodgers recovered at the 2, saving the day.

**STARS OF THE GAME:** 1. Aaron Rodgers; 2. Randall Cobb; 3. Julius Peppers..

**OVERALL RATING:** 2 footballs