

Rating the Packers: Week 14 vs Seahawks

By Bob McGinn – Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel

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Green Bay - Pete Carroll hasn't been beaten this badly since being crushed by the Oakland Raiders (33-3) and New York Giants (41-7) in successive weeks of the 2010 season, his first coaching the Seattle Seahawks.

At Southern California from 2001-09, Carroll's Trojans lost by 28 or more points only once.

The point is, Carroll is an outstanding coach and the Seahawks are an outstanding team. But on this snowy Sunday at Lambeau Field neither was a match for Mike McCarthy and the Green Bay Packers.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 38-10 victory, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (4 ½)

The Packers didn't shy away completely from elite LC Richard Sherman, as they did in the Seahawks' 36-16 victory two years ago. It was, however, open season on everyone else in Seattle's back seven, and most ended with burn marks. On the third play, capable nickel back Jeremy Lane was matched outside against Davante Adams (played 53 of the 59 offensive snaps). Adams released cleanly, cut to the sideline, broke up field, raised his right arm, sprinted 33 yards downfield, caught the perfect pass and outran Lane for the 66-yard touchdown. The play had to send shock waves through both teams. Later, Adams was too much for RC DeShawn Shead, whose marginal 4.56 speed hadn't been an issue because he has been so effective getting his hands on receivers and mirroring their movements. Adams, however, is becoming increasingly more difficult to jam at the line. When Shead tried it, Adams froze him with his flashing feet and beat him on a fade for 26. He also ran past Shead for what would have been a 50-yard TD but the ball was overthrown. Jared Cook flanked left expecting safety coverage, but when it was Shead he went ahead and beat him on a 15-yard slant. A chest injury KO'd him after 16 snaps. K.J. Wright, regarded as one of the NFL's best and most consistent 4-3 every-down LBs, might have had the worst game of his career. When McCarthy matched Randall Cobb (32, including one at RB) on Wright with an over route from the slot, Wright couldn't hold up without a rush and the gain was 25. The 9-yard TD to Jordy Nelson (55) came in almost identical circumstances when Wright stumbled as Nelson cleared him. It had to be a disheartening sight for teammates to see one of their prized veterans being exploited. Nelson escaped tight end-zone coverage by SS Kam Chancellor by actually pointing to a spot to Aaron Rodgers and then breaking to it for a 3-yard TD. Nelson isn't a deep threat but he becomes more deadly by the week in the red zone. Talk about sending a message. Faced with the alternative of slipping out of bounds or turning into MLB Bobby Wagner, Cobb chose the latter. He plays the game one way: hard. When Cobb sat out eight snaps with an ankle injury, Geronimo Allison (13) entered instead of Jeff Janis (three). Janis scored on a tear sweep, giving him two successful runs on the play. The Packers have to consider incorporating it on a regular basis. Richard Rodgers (34, 16 from a three-point stance) made a fine move on Wagner, caught the ball for 8 and emerged none the worse for wear after taking an illegal wicked shot from Wright. It was all about taking no guff from the bully-ball Seahawks, and every position group did its part.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

The return of T.J. Lang (57) from a three-week foot injury put the weakest link, Jason Spriggs, back on the bench. Without a logical target, DE-DT Michael Bennett bounced from player to player and didn't have a single pressure in 49 snaps. His five one-on-one rushes against David Bakhtiari were two more than runner-up Lane Taylor faced. Bakhtiari is an athletic technician. The versatile Frank Clark, probably the Seahawks' third best rusher, was shut out, too, after trying hard to solve Bakhtiari. Perhaps even more effective was Bryan Bulaga, who no doubt is motivated by his three-sack nightmare at Seattle in 2012. Bulaga allowed one pressure to LE Cliff Avril besides being the only O-lineman without a "bad" run. The Seahawks are better at home and on a dry surface, but that goes for every team. For this unit to allow merely 2 ½ pressures (including one-half sack) was indicative of extraordinary pass blocking. The run game was a different story. Lang was charged with 2 ½ of the unit's five "bad" runs, getting blown up twice by Bennett. He's not back 100 percent. Lang wasn't bending or nearly as precise as he was pre-injury. Still, just having No. 70's enforcer personality on the field was vital. Corey Linsley reach-blocked NT Tony McDaniel well early before McDaniel got him a few times later. Taylor hung steady in protection, but in the second half was back-doored by McDaniel on a tackle for loss and was too high on a poor pull-block against Chancellor on a failed fourth and 1.

QUARTERBACKS (5)

Under Carroll and Kris Richard, the third of his defensive coordinators in Seattle, the Seahawks stick with what they have always done: single-safety shell, three-deep coverage and four-man rush. McCarthy frequently motioned Nelson to help Rodgers identify matchups to an even greater degree. Carroll almost never disguises. Even when Bennett-Avril-Clark was going nowhere, the Seahawks still blitzed only 14.8 percent. "We didn't blitz," Wagner said. "We trust our front. They've applied pressure all year. We have no reason to not have confidence in them." As Carroll marveled later, Rodgers made it all look so gloriously easy. He flicked that opening TD pass 43 yards into a narrow opening. Rodgers pulled a calf muscle on that throw, and before giving way to Brett Hundley (11) early in the fourth quarter he hung in and around the pocket despite what must have been a strong urge to take off. With his base uncertain, Rodgers was making a lot of arm throws. It made no difference. His velocity was good, and his accuracy was superb. At the 2-minute mark, Richard came with his first pressure of the game and the unblocked Wright leaped in Rodgers' face. He read it calmly and hit Adams with the 26-yard floater. Injured FS Earl Thomas is a major factor in just about every game he has ever played. Backup Steven Terrell was invisible. Rodgers caught the Seahawks twice for 12-man penalties but his hard count, which nabbed Bennett three times last year, was the only part of his game that wasn't in high gear.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

Remember when Ty Montgomery (30, including three at WR) was chopped down and failed to score on fourth down from the 1 against Chicago? This time from the 1, Lang was pushed back about two yards by Bennett. Keeping his poise, Montgomery stepped around the penetration, got low and scored. When Bennett jacked Linsley backward, he went wide avoiding the problem and gained 6. He broke four tackles and showed an able stiff-arm, too. As a receiver, he made Wright look bad in the flat (24 yards) before getting blown backward and short of the first-down marker on a phenomenal frontal shot from Chancellor. James Starks (seven) was next but Christine Michael (17) was inserted on the ensuing play. Michael isn't afraid to run it inside with his hunched-over, two-arms-around-the-ball style. It's good for ball security but reduces his chances for an explosive gain. The assumption is he went the wrong way on a "bad" run. He also was a little too chummy with his old teammates. Aaron Ripkowski (24) has had better days. He ran into his blockers on another failed short-yardage carry and whiffed three times on lead blocks (twice on Wagner). Hitting a moving target for a fullback is as important as horsepower.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

To win big games, a team's best players must play well. Mike Daniels (played 49 of the 71 defensive snaps) did. He showed the way. His pursuit was incredible. Time after time he sprinted out of the scrum to assist downfield. He also fought fire with fire, taking nothing from the opponent but remaining disciplined this time to avoid stupid penalties. Whether it was just the Seahawks or their weak offensive line, Daniels seldom has been this explosive off the ball. He finished with 5 ½ pressures, including three against talented rookie RG Germain Ifedi and 1 ½ against LG Mark Glowinski. He wasn't nearly as good against the run. Nobody was. The Seahawks averaged 5.2 per carry, rushing for 136. Letroy Guion (29) didn't get much of anything done against C Justin Britt, the Seahawks' top blocker. In the eight snaps of the base front, Dean Lowry (34) was the other starter. Because Mike Pennel is suspended and, for the first time, neither Julius Peppers nor Datone Jones played in the line, Lowry played extensively in the sub rush. For the second straight game there was much to like. Two of his three pressures came on counters against RT Bradley Sowell. Lowry is persistent, aware, reckless and flings up his arms when the ball's coming out. Kenny Clark (25) was too up-and-down against the run. Lowry and Clark each had offside penalties.

LINEBACKERS (4 ½)

With Nick Perry (hand) out and Clay Matthews (24) serving only as a designated left-side rusher, the load fell on Peppers (53), Jones (45) and Jayrone Elliott (20). They kept Russell Wilson on the run with 11 pressures. Because of them, Dom Capers' blitz rate could be a paltry 12.5 percent. Partially as a result, there were more bodies downfield to intercept those five passes. Jones led with 5 ½ pressures (four were knockdowns) followed by Matthews (three), Peppers (1 ½) and Elliott (one). The entire unit did excellent work containing Wilson on scrambles and zone-read keepers. One of the few miscues was Jones' unnecessary roughness penalty, his third major foul of the season. Jones has improved reading bootlegs, and he's finishing better, too. Peppers wasn't able to take to school rookie RT George Fant, the ex-basketball player. Although Matthews prefers the right side, his damaged left shoulder limits him to the left side where he can protect himself better. Really, it's a wonder he's even out there. All three of his pressures were at Sowell's expense. Elliott probably played his finest game of the season. He beat rookie LT Rees Odhiambo inside to stack up a third and 1. In a flashback to the 2014 exhibition season, he blew off the ball and zipped by Fant, who has terrific feet and length, for a sack in 2.7 seconds. The lone constant inside was Joe Thomas (71). His main responsibility was to spy Wilson, and he handled it well. He can run and he's smart. Teammates trust him. The trade-off is the interior run when he can't always be kept clean. He gets covered up, and sizable gains often are the result.

SECONDARY (5)

The team record for interceptions in a game (nine) was set in 1943 when the ball was thrown anywhere and everywhere. The last time the Packers had five was the 2006 finale in Chicago (FS Nick Collins two, CB Patrick Dendy, LB A.J. Hawk, CB Charles Woodson). The five Sunday went to Damarious Randall (two), Morgan Burnett, Micah Hyde and Quinten Rollins. Randall's second, Hyde's and Rollins' came on tips and were just a matter of securing an easy catch. They were hustling; takeaways should never be minimized. Burnett's pick was a classic, the type play Pro Bowl voters and others have been awaiting from him. Locked at the line in man coverage against elite TE Jimmy Graham, Burnett (71) undercut the route at the 12-yard break point and snatched the ball in his hands before beginning a 19-yard return. Unchallenged in an open third of the field, some CBs would just sit there. Not Randall, who saw Doug Baldwin running free through the three-deep zone and made a sudden break and hands catch. Burnett played almost the entire game at ILB alongside Thomas. As expected, the Seahawks effectively exploited Burnett's size disadvantage with hard-charging Thomas Rawls (12-67). At the same time, Burnett made a bunch of tackles and helped clamp Graham. Randall (61) would become a better player if he would settle down and just get set before the snap. He's bouncing around sometimes when there's business at hand. Rollins (71) primarily manned the slot and was solid. Baldwin and Jermaine Kearse beat LaDarius Gunter (56) deep but he escaped unscathed. For the 12th time in 13 games Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (71) played every snap.

KICKERS (4)

Attempting to hem in return threat Tyler Lockett, Mason Crosby placed five of his seven kickoffs outside the numbers to the right. His averages were 67.4 yards and 3.94 seconds of hang time. His mistake on a miss from 51 that soared just wide right was playing the wind. He did hit from 38. Jacob Schum looked to be the better punter than ex-Packer Jon Ryan. Schum's four-punt averages were 38.5 (gross, net) and 4.01. He placed three between the 10-18 and forced two fair catches.

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

Aided immeasurably by the marksmanship of the kickers, the coverage units kept Lockett under wraps with a long return of 32 in five attempts. Rookie CB Josh Hawkins had two of the unit's three hard tackles but also drew a holding penalty, his third of the season. Richard Rodgers was fundamentally sound gathering in a skidding onside kick off a wet track.

STARS OF THE GAME: 1. Mike Daniels; 2. Aaron Rodgers; 3. Bryan Bulaga..

OVERALL RATING: 5 footballs