

2016 Packers Individual Report Card: Defense

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Of the 31 defensive players and specialists receiving grades for the 2016 Green Bay Packers season, none earned an A on Bob McGinn's annual report card. Seven players received B's, 11 C's, eight D's and one an F. Four players had incompletes.

DEFENSIVE LINE (5)

KENNY CLARK: It wasn't until Game 19 that Clark played more snaps than Letroy Guion. Even Mike Pennel was handed some of his playing time from Games 5-12. Those were mistakes. The more the rookie played, the better he played. Just turned 21 in October but brought an impressive mien to the locker room and practice field. Squatty (6-2 ½, 318), strong as an ox. Once he learned to recognize blocking schemes and make better use of his hands, his natural leverage paid off at the point of attack. Played exceptionally well in the playoffs against the Cowboys' formidable line. Finished second among the four defensive linemen in tackles per snap (one every 9.9) and was third in pressures per snap (one every 63.7). He played 414 snaps. B.J. Raji's rookie numbers in 385 snaps were one tackle every 10.4 snaps and one pressure every 128.3. Raji's second season (2010) was easily his best as a pass rusher with one pressure every 32.4 snaps. Clark isn't as explosive or athletic as a young Raji but he did run a faster 40 (5.07 to 5.15). Led the team in recovered fumbles with two. **Grade: C.**

MIKE DANIELS: Played almost the exact number of snaps (802) as he did last year (807) but wasn't as dominant. His tackles per snap declined from one every 11.4 snaps to one every 14.1 while his pressure total of 31 ½ stayed almost exactly the same. Each game, there were five or six plays in which Daniels would make short work of the blocker across from him and either tackle the ball carrier or threaten the passer. If Daniels didn't win with his first move, he was less successful countering to gain an edge or generate a walk-back to the passer. His intensity level never wanes, and he usually wins the leverage battle. At times, he does get covered up or washed. Daniels needs to get healthy and get comfortable playing alongside Clark from the first day of off-season work. **Grade: B.**

LETROY GUION: He started fast. In the first month to six weeks some centers were having major problems trying to reach-block Guion, which in some cases determines the success of a running play. With his bulk (6-3 ½, 325) and long arms (34 7/8 inches), Guion provides an inside presence. He led the D-line in tackles per snap (one every 9.3). He also led the team in tackles for loss (7 ½). His rate of tackles, however, was beneath his first two seasons. Where Guion fell off the face of the earth is pass rush. In 2014, he had 16 pressures in 622 snaps. This year, he had one in 527 snaps. Centers almost automatically turned to double Daniels knowing there was no chance Guion would beat the single block. It takes legs to rush, and after nine seasons about all Guion could do when pass showed was stand there and chicken fight. Next year, he'd be fine as a first-down/short-yardage specialist. Nothing more. **Grade: D+.**

DEAN LOWRY: It wasn't until Pannel was suspended for a second time that the rookie got a chance. He played 142 of his 213 snaps (66.7%) in the last seven games. The results suggested Lowry should have been playing earlier as well. Thoroughly unimpressive in August, Lowry adjusted to playing inside from an outside role at Northwestern. As he did so his ability to make plays that led the Packers to draft him in the fourth round began to show. Lowry can't do anything about his short arms (31). He compensates with a gung-ho attitude, height (6-5 ½) and pass-rushing knack. He led the D-line in pressures per snap (one every 25.1). Depending on the scheme, Lowry should start eventually as a 5-technique. **Grade: C-.**

CHRISTIAN RINGO: A sixth-round draft choice in 2015, he's the same height (6-0 ½) as Daniels and did show some improvement in his second season. However, in 75 snaps, he failed to register a pressure. Ringo did post the only forced fumble by a D-lineman in 19 games when he stripped Seattle RB Alex Collins. **Grade: D.**

LINEBACKERS (10)

JAYRONE ELLIOTT: Ranked sixth in playing time at OLB with 135 snaps. Injured early and late, missing six games, and was a healthy scratch in another. After three seasons he remains most valuable on special teams; he led them in tackles with 14. Elliott did flash; despite minimal playing time he ranked fifth on the team in tackles for loss (four) and had three pressures. Elliott looks great on the hoof, and he can run. The Packers always have hoped to see a little more fire from him. **Grade: D+.**

KYLER FACKRELL: He looked lost during more than a few practices in August but in the exhibition games found ways to apply steady pressure. He wasn't as effective rushing against better tackles in the regular season but still finished with 6 ½ pressures in 176 snaps. The 245-pound Fackrell won't be starting caliber until he makes substantial gains in strength and weight. He's an interesting player. Fackrell was drafted in the third round because of his height (6-5) and speed (4.65), and he has a way of slipping past blocks. He's a gamer. **Grade: D+.**

DATONE JONES: Mistakes cast a shadow on Jones' respectable overall performance. He posted 14 knockdowns, almost twice as many as the next player on the team. Many came on bootlegs when he made a fast read and hit the passer in space. In all, Jones' total of 31 ½ pressures was 13 ½ more than his previous high and tied for third on the team. Of course, just one was a sack. He has never been a finisher. Jones also generates some of his pressures at the expense of lane and gap integrity. Undisciplined players undermine defenses. His seven penalties shared the team lead with Daniels and Aaron Rodgers. With his weight down from 295 to 275 for a second season at OLB, Jones played 414 snaps standing up and 221 down. Jones plays heavy over the tight end and has the strength to be physical. The Packers carefully will weigh Jones' value in a league that values pass rushers. His contract is up. **Grade: C.**

BLAKE MARTINEZ: Starter at WILB in the base and nickel defenses alongside SILB Jake Ryan. Played 399 of his 480 snaps before suffering a sprained MCL in Game 10. Missed three games and was never the same thereafter. Martinez played OK as a rookie but it's fairly obvious the Packers don't want to count on him as the starter. He's tough, delivers a solid strike and gives effort. He's also fairly short-armed (32 5/8), has problems shedding in-line blocks and gets covered up in heavy traffic. Martinez was something of a disappointment in coverage, particularly in the play-action game. **Grade: C-.**

CLAY MATTHEWS: Moving back outside after 1 ½ seasons playing inside, Matthews hoped to be dominant again. Instead, injuries limited him to 51.4% playing time in his most pedestrian season of an eight-year career. In 2010 and '11, his double-team rates on individual pass rushes were 35.2% and 37.8%. This year, his double-team rate was a career-low 22.6%. Matthews amassed pressure totals of 55 and 53 ½ in his second and third seasons. This year, he had to settle for 28 ½, the Packers' fifth-highest total. He didn't have one great game. There's no question that the shoulder injury he incurred on the blind-side block by Eagles RT Allen Barbre in Game 11 severely limited him for the next few games. Of the six OLBs, he ranked last in tackles per snap (one every 22.8). He also set a career-low in tackles for loss with two. Matthews compromises the defense more than he should by flying inside or outside and neglecting gap/lane responsibilities. After averaging 5.7 takeaway plays in his first three seasons, he has had three in each of the last five seasons. **Grade: C+.**

JULIUS PEPPERS: Peppers earned every nickel of his three-year, \$26 million contract. He turned 37 this month and it's hard to say if he wants to play a 16th season and, if so, whether the Packers still want him. Peppers surely wants to win a Super Bowl. His playing time was a career-low 58.3%: 470 snaps at OLB, 252 as a defensive lineman. He posted three turnover plays, one more than last year but eight fewer than in 2014. He led the team in batted balls with five and was second in sacks (8 ½) and pressures (32 ½). A stunning physical specimen, Peppers has missed only two of a possible 251 games due to injury. Both parties have a decision to make. **Grade: B-.**

NICK PERRY: Without question, this was his finest season. If one can differentiate Perry's play before his left hand was broken in Game 12 from after, it's safe to say he was the team's most valuable player on defense. Against the run, he was second among OLBs in tackles per snap (one every 10.5) and third on the team in tackles for loss (career-high 5 ½). He also led the team both in sacks (12) and pressures (36, almost twice his career high of 18 ½ as a rookie). He missed 2 ½ games following hand surgery, then played the last five games with a massive club impairing his grip. Perry brings plenty of muscle to the Packers. Does Perry, however, strike fear into opposing quarterbacks and coordinators? He's unrestricted in March; the Packers or somebody else will determine his value. **Grade: B+.**

JAKE RYAN: In his second season Ryan did little to dispel the idea that the Packers don't have a top-flight inside linebacker. He just doesn't have the size, the speed, the athleticism and the instincts to be a special player. As a stopgap, Ryan has been adequate. Of the nine LBs, he was No. 1 in tackles per snap (one every 6.9). He loves to compete, even in games when the Packers were assured of losing. He does attack the line of scrimmage, and had six tackles for loss in the first eight games. He had only two thereafter. Playing 55.6% of the snaps, he was up and down in coverage. In two seasons he has made just one takeaway play. In 40 blitzes, he earned a pressure just four times. **Grade: C.**

JOE THOMAS: He started out as the dime LB for the second straight season. Then injuries and mediocre performance by Ryan and Martinez led the Packers to play Thomas every snap in Games 9-10-11-13-18-19. He finished with 65.9% playing time, well above 26.8% a year ago. Playing through a back injury, he and Peppers were the only linebackers to play 19 games. Size (6-0 ½, 230) holds him back. He gets knocked around between the tackles. When a guard can't get out to block him, Thomas usually takes good angles and shows pop in his tackles. He led the team in missed tackles with 13 and was exposed at times in coverage. **Grade: C+.**

JORDAN TRIPP: The third-year veteran was signed off the street Dec. 14. Previously, he had been with the Dolphins, Jaguars and Seahawks. An ILB, Tripp played 91 snaps on special teams in five games and made five tackles. **Grade: Incomplete.**

DEFENSIVE BACKS (13)

KENTRELL BRICE: He forced his way onto the field as a rookie free agent from Louisiana Tech, the alma mater of former free agent Tramon Williams. He played 339 snaps on defense (27.4%) and another 347 on special teams, a team high. Brice used his explosive strength and athletic ability to deliver a series of legal, vicious hits. No one on the team was a more reckless, violent tackler. A compact 5-11 ½ and 199, Brice has run a 4.43 40, vertical-jumped 42 inches and bench-pressed 21 times. He wasn't playing at a higher level this season because the speed of the NFL game caused too much hesitation in his play. He was late reacting too often. His physical attributes were more evident in slow exhibition football than the real thing. He might turn out to be the best player in this rookie class. **Grade: C-.**

MORGAN BURNETT: Few players in the locker room have earned more respect than Burnett. He's gentlemanly, approachable, committed to the team and dedicated to his craft. Of the NFL's 64 starting safeties, one scout ranked him in the top 20 to 25. In seven seasons Burnett has done everything possible to maximize his potential. He knows where to be and is productive when he gets there, especially against the run. He led the secondary in tackles per snap (one every 10.2) and the safeties in passes defended per snap (one every 78.7). He allowed four plays of 20 yards or more after averaging 4.7 in his first six years. For the first time, Burnett played extensively at ILB in the nickel. He took a beating from 300-pound blockers but it wasn't anything he couldn't handle. His playing time was 88.9% despite missing 1 ½ games due to injury. **Grade: B.**

HA HA CLINTON-DIX: Played all 1,239 snaps. More of the free safety to Burnett's strong but plenty strong enough to mix it up at the line. Brings somewhat of a glowering presence to the secondary. Has made tremendous strides as a tackler. Missed a team-high 16 tackles as a rookie before cutting back to nine last year and just three this year. For the sake of comparison, Burnett missed eight. Clinton-Dix also led the team in takeaway plays with six. He intercepted five passes, not dropping any. However, he continues to make too many miscues in coverage. He allowed eight plays of 20 yards or more, well up from three a year ago and back to his erratic rookie form, when he had 8 ½. There's still too much guesswork in his game, and it affects the defense. **Grade: B.**

MAKINTON DORLEANT: Feisty free agent was battling fellow rookie Josh Hawkins for the final berth at cornerback when a hamstring injury sent him to injured reserve for the first 11 games. He played five snaps on defense upon his return before a torn ACL ended his season in Game 16. **Grade: Incomplete.**

MARWIN EVANS: First player from Milwaukee (Oak Creek High School) to play for the Packers in a long time. Had a good year on special teams, tying for second in tackles with 11 in 266 snaps. Played 43 snaps on defense, including 25 in the NFC title game. Not nearly as good as Brice at season's end. Still, with his size (5-11 ½, 208), speed (4.47), striking ability and expected improvement, he should have a future. **Grade: D.**

DEMETRI GOODSON: Came off a four-game suspension and stepped immediately onto the field against Dallas, Chicago and Atlanta, playing 145 snaps after having played just 74 in his first two seasons. Performed competently in two of the three games. Competitive athlete and solid tackler. Was showing development in coverage. Blew out his knee in Game 10 and underwent season-ending surgery. **Grade: D+.**

LaDARIUS GUNTER: Went to training camp as the No. 4 cornerback and ended camp as No. 4. He was No. 3 by Game 2, No. 2 by Game 4 and No. 1 from Game 5 on. An undrafted rookie in 2015, Gunter ended up playing 1,082 snaps (85.7%). He shadowed Julio Jones not once but twice, Dez Bryant and Odell Beckham Jr., among others. No matter how hard he competed, Gunter didn't have the speed or the skill to match up. He did his best. He forced two fumbles. He was physical. He frustrated some far more athletically gifted opponents. Gunter, however, was burned more and more as the season progressed and teams discovered his shortcomings. He allowed 11 ½ passes of 20 yards or more, which still was 1 ½ fewer than Damarious Randall last year, and eight TD passes. When injuries mounted, Gunter wasn't able to tackle effectively and ended up missing 10, the second highest total on the team. And he also never intercepted a pass, dropping two. **Grade: C-.**

JOSH HAWKINS: Rookie free agent played well on defense and special teams all summer. Maybe it was fool's gold because Hawkins was considered too undependable to get on the field despite the problems at cornerback. After blowing a coverage late in the first half to give Detroit's Marvin Jones a 73-yard TD, he was banished for months until there was no alternative except to play him for 15 snaps in the playoffs against Dallas. That wasn't pretty, either. Hawkins also tied for the team lead in penalties on special teams with four, leading to his removal for three weeks late in the season. If the Packers can tolerate mistakes, he'll be back in camp. **Grade: F.**

MICAH HYDE: When the season started Hyde was the No. 3 safety hoping to scratch out playing time as the dime safety and punt returner. When it ended he ranked as the team's most effective cover man. That might not be saying much. It also can be said, however, that the Packers never would have made the playoffs without him. Hyde played a career-high 994 snaps (80.2%), intercepted four passes in the last seven games and generally manned the slot as nickel back over the last 16 games. He's a tough, versatile and heady player. His stretched-out, goal-line interception against the Browns was the defensive play of the exhibition season. In the regular season, two of the team's four most skillful picks (front pylon in Detroit, bubble screen in Dallas) were his. Some quarterbacks and receivers feasted on Hyde. He allowed a career-high 7 ½ completions of 20 yards or more while equaling his career-high in TD passes allowed with 4 ½. His average speed will always have the Packers trying to replace him. Only that time hasn't come. He should be re-signed. **Grade: B-.**

DAMARIOUS RANDALL: He was the player of the game on opening day in Jacksonville. The next Sunday, he was torched by Minnesota's Stefon Diggs. One week after that, he left the field for what would be the first of countless times due to illness or injury. Many players improve in their second season. Randall regressed. Even though his playing time was just 56.3%, he was responsible for 8 ½ TD passes. The last corner in Green Bay to allow that many was Al Harris in 2004. The last corner to allow more was Craig Newsome (10 ½) in '95. Randall also allowed nine plays of 20 yards or more, was an easy mark for quarterbacks down the stretch and all too often was a disinterested, timid tackler. The groin surgery he underwent Oct. 22 that forced him out of five games didn't help. Randall carried himself with bravado but teammates could see right through that. He was forever late lining up, almost as if he didn't need to be in football position at the snap. He has ball skills and speed. Two of his four picks (stealing the ball from Detroit's Eric Ebron, ranging far to deny Seattle's Doug Baldwin a long TD) were magnificent. But when a second-year player is as non-competitive as Randall has been for the last 1 ½ seasons, it's difficult to expect much change for the better. **Grade: D.**

QUINTEN ROLLINS: His second season was almost as disappointing as Randall's. He appeared to lose confidence in coverage, repeatedly failed to locate the ball downfield, and didn't tackle well. Some scouts feared Rollins' 4.54 speed might not be good enough for him to play outside. So far, those scouts were right. Injuries and poor performance limited him to 58.4% playing time. After not allowing a single TD pass as a rookie Rollins yielded 4 ½ to go with eight completions of 20 yards or more. The ball skills that he displayed for one season in the Mid-American Conference haven't translated to the NFL. His only pick was tipped to him by Gunter, and he hasn't forced or recovered a fumble in two years. On the plus side, he didn't have a penalty in either season. Rollins probably would be physical enough to play safety but the Packers don't need him there. **Grade: D.**

SAM SHIELDS: Early in training camp Shields said there was nothing to prevent him from playing as well as Richard Sherman and other elite corners. Late on opening day, he lanced in from the side and threw his head in the way of Jaguars RB T.J. Yeldon. The result was the fifth concussion of his career. It ended his seventh season and, at 29, quite possibly his career. **Grade: Incomplete.**

HERB WATERS: A four-year WR at Miami, Waters did an adequate job as a rookie free agent before being cut Sept. 3. The Packers signed him to the practice squad and immediately moved him to CB. Waters has the size (5-11 ½, 192), speed (4.50), athleticism (38 ½-inch vertical jump) and arm length (32 5/8) to play the position. Regarded as a rugged blocker and good special-teams player in college, he might have the toughness for defense, too. At this point, his future might be as promising if not more so than any of the other CBs. **Grade: Incomplete.**