

Rating the Packers: Week 1 vs Seahawks

By Bob McGinn

Posted: Sept. 12, 2017

The Green Bay Packers' defensive front dominated the Seattle Seahawks' offensive line in 2015, 2016 and Sunday at Lambeau Field and generally didn't come close to doing so in 2012 and twice in 2014 at CenturyLink Field.

It's the main reason why the Packers were outscored 78-50 in the three defeats on the road and outscored the Seahawks 82-36 in the three victories at home.

Eleven different offensive linemen started for Seattle in the last three games matching coaches Mike McCarthy and Pete Carroll.

From left to right, the Seahawks started Russell Okung, Justin Britt, Drew Nowak, J.R. Sweezy and Garry Gilliam in their 27-17 defeat in 2015; George Fant, Mark Glowinski, Britt, Germain Ifedi and Bradley Sowell in their 38-10 loss in '16; and Rees Odhiambo, Luke Joeckel, Britt, Glowinski and Ifedi in their 17-9 setback Sunday.

Since taking over in 2010, Carroll and general manager John Schneider have taken the Seahawks to two Super Bowls, winning one, and fashioned a 79-47-1 record (.626).

In many ways, they've done it in spite of the offensive line that has been coached by Tom Cable (since 2011) and assistant Pat Ruel (since '10). Under this administration, the Seahawks have had two players selected for the Pro Bowl: center Max Unger in 2012 and '13, and Okung in '12.

The fact that Carroll and Schneider cannot get it right was clear as day from the first series Sunday. At first, Packers linebacker Nick Perry controlled play. Later, defensive lineman Mike Daniels did.

Coordinator Dom Capers' defense smelled blood early and kept pouncing for 60 minutes. It was one of the Packers' most impressive overall defensive efforts in the McCarthy era.

For the sake of continuity, I'll keep awarding footballs each week for the performance of the Packers' position groups. It's a system that I have been using since 1987. The highest award is 5 footballs; the lowest award is one-half football.

Each week, I'll also select, in order, the three stars of the game. This week the stars are: 1. Mike Daniels; 2. Nick Perry; 3. Morgan Burnett.

The overall football award for the team is 4 ½.

Here is a rating of Green Bay against Seattle, with the Packers' football totals in parentheses:

RECEIVERS (3 ½)

Randall Cobb (played 63 of the 82 snaps on offense) was strutting around with a bounce in his step. He caught nine of 12 targeted throws, didn't drop any (nobody on the team did) and looked quicker than he has in a few years. His average catch point was merely three yards downfield, so the degree of difficulty wasn't high. Probably the best route anyone ran came on third and 5 in the first quarter when Richard Sherman lined up across from Cobb in press coverage out of the left slot. Cobb exploded off the line, cut sharply at the top of the route nine yards downfield and beat Sherman's close coverage to the sideline for a gain of 10. Cobb also drew a holding penalty on Sherman in the fourth quarter. Sherman was targeted on just three of Aaron Rodgers' 42 attempts, none after mid-second quarter. When CB Jeremy Lane was ejected on the Packers' eighth play, rookie Shaquill Griffin became the starter and ex-Patriot Justin Coleman took over in the slot. Before the ejection, Cobb drew a 15-yard penalty for taunting Lane in Green Bay's bench area. Three plays later he could have been hit with another major foul for spinning the ball after his 29-yard reception against a blown coverage. Jordy Nelson (76) wasn't near Sherman on any of his eight targets. He used his craftiness and chemistry with Rodgers to get free with relative ease against Griffin. On the 32-yard touchdown off a free play, Nelson went deep and scored when FS Earl Thomas fell asleep. Just after Nelson scored, he fell down in the end zone. For some reason he was sliding or falling all day, the main reason just eight of his 79 yards came after the catch. The Packers soon will need him to catch passes in stride and burst aggressively toward the end zone. Davante Adams (67) played more than Cobb, something of an indicator that he's now the team's No. 2 wideout. He seemed frustrated to a degree that some routes didn't go as planned and was pretty ordinary. Adams also lucked out that the officials didn't see him instigate the dust-up with Lane. The interception returner was 10 yards away when Adams made a selfish decision to take a gratuitous shot at Lane. He yanked Lane down by the facemask only to have the crew of referee John Parry, which over-officiated all day, toss Lane for a semi-shove. Assistant Luke Getsy needs to get his wide-out room in order. This was the first look at Mike McCarthy's plans for TE Martellus Bennett. Of his 67 snaps, 23 came with his hand down and nine from a wing set just outside the tackle. He was detached from the formation as a split receiver on the other 52%. He can't really run anymore but he's a massive man with clutch hands and is hard to bring down. Bennett also made a terrible choice shoving OLB K.J. Wright, an elite player, after Wright did absolutely nothing wrong legally hitting Rodgers as he dove, not slid just past the first-down marker. His penalty was 15 yards. McCarthy has never tolerated on-field shenanigans like those pulled by Bennett, Cobb and Adams, and it surely would be in the team's best interests if he doesn't start now. Of Lance Kendricks' 21 snaps, 17 were from a three point. Richard Rodgers had to be content with five plays.

OFFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)

Seattle's defensive line is exceptional. Considering the caliber of opponent, Kyle Murphy's first start (for injured Bryan Bulaga) was a success. McCarthy massaged his game plan to assist Murphy, but only to a degree. There were plenty of times Murphy was on an island against Michael Bennett, Cliff Avril and David Bass. He was charged with 1 ½ sacks and two pressures, a far cry from Bulaga's first game against the Seahawks in 2012 when his final tally was six pressures, including three sacks. Murphy is a down-to-earth, matter-of-fact guy with a score of 29 on the Wonderlic intelligence test. Yes, he got beat a few times. Of the five "bad" runs, he was involved in three. But it wasn't as if his feet were getting all tangled up, he was getting knocked off balance or looked in over his head. The best performer was Corey Linsley even though one of his 46 shotgun snaps never got airborne for a fumble. No pressures, no "bad" runs for Linsley. He isn't a big man but no scout could say he struggles against the more massive nose tackles. He's weight-room and functionally strong. It was clear that the Seahawks' intention was to go after Lane Taylor. That made sense because Taylor had difficulty run-blocking in December against Seattle. For much of the first half, ex-Jet Sheldon Richardson brought what he had against Taylor. Using his hands-outside method of pass blocking, Taylor anchored up and more than held his own. He wasn't perfect (two pressures), but the Packers would take that any Sunday against a hard-charging interior talent like Richardson. David Bakhtiari probably faced explosive Frank Clark more than anyone else and, other than a spin move by Clark that led to a sack, turned in a good day's work. The first start in a Green Bay uniform (and 189th of his illustrious career) for Jahri Evans was so-so. The totals were four pressures (two were holding penalties) and one "bad" run.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

In their six meetings Aaron Rodgers is 3-3 against Russell Wilson. For the record, Rodgers' passer rating is 90.2 and Wilson's is 67.6. However, Wilson has rushed for 209 yards compared to 67 for Rodgers. On Sunday, it was no contest, and by his standards Rodgers wasn't sharp. He was partly responsible for two of the four sacks and one of the five knockdowns by holding the ball too long. After 13 years he should be more aware of the injury risk that goes along with that style of play. He flat missed receivers half a dozen times. He even had a delay-of-game penalty. In truth, the Seattle rush wasn't overwhelming. It's probably why coordinator Kris Richard finally decided to start adding a fifth rusher as the second half wore on (overall, his blitz rate was 26.8%). Yet, with nothing really going according to plan, Rodgers stayed positive and eventually conquered one hell of a defense. He did it by running three times for first downs. He did it by exploiting the Seahawks' only weak spots: right cornerback and nickel back. He did it by drawing Michael Bennett offsides twice and Bass once. He did it by recovering Linsley's pathetic snap. He did it by chasing hard after DT Nazair Jones on his unlucky interception. And, to win the day, he did it by spying LB Terence Garvin running, not sprinting, off the field on the only time all day the Seattle coaches waved in SS Brad McDougald. His perfectly thrown bomb to Nelson beat a proud defense and a proud team.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

Ty Montgomery (74) looks more and more like a genuine running back. The Packers went all in that he would, and one game in all is swell. Possibly Montgomery's best run was the 6-yard TD. It was the only time a lineman pulled, and neither Taylor nor Linsley is a speed demon. Montgomery let the blocks develop, resisting the chance to go inside on his own. His reward for waiting was a beautiful hole that was closed at the 2 by Kam Chancellor. Montgomery showed his power by slamming through the feared 230-pound strong safety and into the end zone. He was tattooed by Thomas onto his back early but returned the favor by running over Thomas in front of the Seattle bench. He broke four tackles in 23 touches. He must own his per-carry average of 2.8. He was up and down in protection. On the rookie front, Jamaal Williams played six snaps, Devante Mays played none and Aaron Jones was inactive. On a 6-yard carry, Clark showed up in Williams' face three yards deep in the backfield. Williams stuck his foot in the ground, bounced outside and, with his head down and two arms around the ball turned a negative into a positive. Aaron Ripkowski's 22-snap day included two as the lone setback.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)

Last year, Mike Daniels (played 38 of the 49 snaps on defense) abused the soft interior of the Seattle line for 5 ½ pressures, including three against rookie RG Germain Ifedi and 1 ½ against LG Mark Glowinski. Thus, it was no surprise when he owned this bunch again. He finished with 3 ½ pressures, including a full sack against LG Luke Joeckel in 3.4 seconds and a half-sack against Glowinski (RG) in 2.3. His thrashing of Joeckel resulted in a game-turning forced fumble at the Seattle 6. Plays of this magnitude have been few and far between for Daniels. In 88 previous games, his only forced fumble was a sack of Kansas City's Alex Smith in Game 3 of 2015 that the Chiefs recovered. His red-letter day included a tackle for minus-3 when he annihilated C Justin Britt, Seattle's best blocker. He was stomping around, gesturing, going nuts. He was chattering his feet stepping over trash in pursuit as if it was a bag drill. The Packers played only three snaps of their nominal base 3-4 so Dean Lowry didn't play much (15). Kenny Clark (37) won leverage battles against the 6-6 Britt, clogged run lanes, batted down a pass and continued to be a factor in the rush.

LINEBACKERS (4 ½)

On a down-by-down basis Nick Perry was as effective if not more so than Daniels. Of his 42 snaps, 37 were on the right outside, three standing up on third-and-longs and two on the left outside. On the right side, Perry was just too strong for new LT Rees Odhiambo, an athletic fill-in for injured George Fant (torn ACL). He blew up Odhiambo twice in the first three plays, setting the table for a 5 ½-pressure day. His bad play was jumping offsides on third and 1. On the left side, Clay Matthews (43) looked wound up, played hard and added 1 ½ pressures. Ifedi, a first-time starter at RT, fared better than Odhiambo. Matthews' was double-teamed on 30.8% of his individual rushes. Ahmad Brooks joined Daniels, Perry and Matthews on the starting sub rush unit before exiting after six snaps with a concussion. It was interesting that Seattle twice used RB chips on Brooks. In 12 snaps, Kyler Fackrell probably showed more than he had all summer. He slipped inside of Odhiambo to make a tackle, bulled through RB Chris Carson for a knockdown, recovered Wilson's fumble and set a solid edge. Fackrell might just be a gamer. No one had a clue how the playing time would unfold at inside linebacker. It was Blake Martinez with 42 snaps followed by Jake Ryan and Joe Thomas, each with five. Martinez proved worthy of the start. He was confident in his reads, filled holes fast and hit hard. Actually, Ryan was impressive, too.

SECONDARY (4)

Morgan Burnett (49) never left the field as an inside linebacker in the nickel defense. With Clark and Daniels keeping blockers off him, Burnett's size deficiency wasn't a problem. In coverage, Dom Capers essentially assigned TE Jimmy Graham to Burnett and the results were outstanding. Micah Hyde, the nickel back, used to cover tight ends last year. With Burnett, there's more size to bump with bigger men. Seattle went after Burnett on four of eight plays deep in Green Bay territory. It's where the game was won, and the fact Burnett didn't allow a completion was enormous. At this stage of his career Burnett is more effective moving forward than backward. He's an old-fashioned tough guy who's all in for the team. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (49) saved his biggest play for late when he read Wilson quickly and probably saved a TD by shoving rookie WR Amara Darboh out of bounds minus the ball at the 1. Kentrell Brice (47) got the nod at strong safety over rookie Josh Jones, who wasn't deemed ready and played special teams only. Brice was fortunate to avoid pass interference against Graham in the end-zone corner. The Packers also declared their pecking order at cornerback. The starters were LC Davon House (49) and RC Damarious Randall (40), the nickel back was Quentin Rollins (46), Kevin King (six) and LeDarius Gunter (two) played and Josh Hawkins and Lenzy Pipkins were inactive. House was ragged around the edges but maybe that was to be expected considering he played just three exhibition snaps. Randall was OK. Rollins missed three tackles but threw his body around. The slot has to be the place for him.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby snuck a 40-yard attempt from the left hash just inside the right upright. His four kickoffs averaged 69.3 yards and 3.94 seconds of hang time. Rookie Justin Vogel made a strong debut, averaging 43.8 yards (gross), 42.4 (net) and 4.52 hang time in five punts.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1 ½)

When Ripkowski and Josh Jones didn't squeeze a lane on the opening kickoff, Tyler Lockett had a 43-yard return. Trevor Davis didn't inspire confidence as the punt returner. He made a fair catch at the 5, didn't fair catch another when a defender was right in his face and didn't even try to run up and field a 40-yard punt that hung 4.5 seconds. Hyde is missed. Jeff Janis was back in form, forcing two fair catches. Josh Jones was way offsides on a kickoff.