

Rating the Packers: Week 2 at Falcons

By Bob McGinn Posted: Sept. 18, 2017

It would be a mistake for the Green Bay Packers to attribute their one-sided defeat Sunday night in Atlanta to injuries or playing on the road in a brand-new stadium. Three losses to the same team in less than 12 months says the other team is better and that you need to do something different, if not dramatically different, if there is another meeting in the playoffs. One week after saluting his defense for “playing to our vision and philosophy” against Seattle, Mike McCarthy saw the unit shredded for the third time by the Falcons. What should be and probably is most troubling to McCarthy is the fact that the Falcons haven’t turned the ball over once in the three games. Takeaways are the great equalizer for defenses that allow substantial points and yards, which probably describes the Packers this season. The return at some point of Mike Daniels obviously would loom large, but if Dom Capers’ unit can’t force the ball from Matt Ryan, Julio Jones, Devonta Freeman and Co. it would be hard for the Packers to reverse the outcome.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 34-23 loss to the Falcons, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Davante Adams; 2. Ty Montgomery; 3. Kevin King.

The overall football award was 1 ½.

RECEIVERS (1)

Davante Adams (played 71 of the 76 snaps on offense) wasn’t without fault. He should have gained something from all the tackling-of-dummies drills in August when CB Desmond Trufant picked up the backward pass. He was right there to bring down Trufant near the 5 but gave a woeful effort and didn’t even lay a glove on him. He also had one of the unit’s six dropped passes. Yet, Adams made more big plays than anyone else on the team. His diving 33-yard TD at the front level pylon was spectacular. Yes, Adams ran 4.55 coming out in 2014, but he’s playing faster than that now. He showed a second gear to get by CB Robert Alford, who was clocked in 4.36 in ’13. With the Packers hopelessly behind, Adams also converted third- and fourth-downs against Alford with inside-breaking routes. There were complaints about the slick condition of the new FieldTurf at Mercedes-Benz Stadium after two college games were played there. Jordy Nelson fell victim to the turf monster on his seventh snap, suffering a game-ending quadriceps injury. Randall Cobb (54) caught six of nine passes thrown his way; he lost a 36-yard reception when Martellus Bennett was tagged with a disputed pass-interference penalty. Cobb dipped in and then out beautifully on a jet sweep for a gain of 10 on third and 4. He used to run those frequently in his early years. He also broke two tackles on a sideline catch and saved a likely interception for his quarterback by lunging forward to prevent nickel back Brian Poole from making the catch. It certainly would appear that Geronimo Allison (61) must share partial blame for Trufant’s interception by not running his take-off route to completion. His pass-interference penalty was blatant and cost Cobb a touchdown. When Cobb hurt his shoulder in the fourth quarter, Trevor Davis played 17 snaps and Jeff Janis played the final play of the game for his only snap from scrimmage. Bennett (62, including 14 with his hand down) brought back memories of Jermichael Finley in 2011 (13 drops) with four drops of his own. Two were nullified by penalty but that wouldn’t ease the concern his coaches and teammates must have after seeing that exhibition. For the Patriots last season he dropped only two and caught 55. It was interesting to see Bennett, after being bumped by SS Keanu Neal on a third-and-8 slant, not even asking for an interference penalty. He did get the call. On the other hand, Bennett continued to demonstrate the ability to base block defensive ends. Lance Kendricks (13, seven hand down) had an awful game. Despite minimal playing time, he was partially responsible for two of the club’s four “bad” run. He missed a back-side cut of DE Derrick Shelby, and LB De’Vondre Campbell at the point of attack. Plus, he false-started. At this point, Aaron Rodgers seems more in tune with old standby Richard Rodgers (10, four hand down) than Kendricks. Maybe it’s the white shoes but Rodgers looks sleek and is moving well. However, he did drop a pass, and Kendricks clearly was the better blocker all summer.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2)

Not having David Bakhtiari (hamstring) or Bryan Bulaga (ankle) was a cruel blow. Jason Spriggs (hamstring)? Kyle Murphy already has shown he's better than Spriggs and, based on his surprisingly efficient work at right tackle, Justin McCray probably is, too. McCray false-started on third and 1 but allowed just one hurry and didn't have a "bad" run. He got in some awkward positions in pass protection and was fortunate the quarterback was covering for him by getting the ball out. He also stayed in front of people, showed a stiff punch and played a resourceful, cerebral game. For a thick, shorter guard-center to hang in against veterans Vic Beasley and Brooks Reed was remarkable. One week after holding up at right tackle against Seattle, Murphy didn't embarrass himself at left tackle. Defensive ends Takk McKinley and Adrian Clayborn had two pressures apiece against Murphy, and one of Clayborn's was a sack. He also drew a false start but had no glaring misses blocking for the run. Lane Taylor folded behind the line into the opposite A gap four times on runs totaling 12 yards and a TD. He didn't have a great day in protection, allowing 2 ½ pressures. Corey Linsley kept the ship afloat with crisp managerial work against a defensive coordinator (Marquand Manuel) who blitzed merely 10.4% but ran a bunch of stunts. A mauler, Jahri Evans was put in position to succeed by using his mass to angle-block down as Taylor folded behind. He is a powerful man. His vulnerabilities in protection (2 ½ pressures) remain evident.

QUARTERBACKS (2 ½)

To beat the Falcons, given the circumstances, was a tough assignment. Still, Aaron Rodgers is regarded by some as the best player in football. Is it too much to ask him to produce more than seven points in the first half against a capable but certainly not dominant defense? Of course not. He overthrew half a dozen open receivers. There were big-play opportunities, but in a huge moment it wasn't his night. Certainly the six drops were a problem. The protection, however, was adequate. Of the three sacks and four knockdowns, Rodgers invited some of the punishment and was partially at fault for one-half sack and 1 ½ knockdowns. Why on earth would he roll out, pull his arm back, reload and, after 5.1 seconds allow Clayborn anywhere near him? Clayborn dealt Rodgers a bone-rattling blow that could have caused injury. Rodgers need not prove his toughness to anyone. He got up after taking three withering shots, adjusted his chinstrap and hardly changed expression. That was impressive. Again, he was partially at fault for the only two giveaways in the game. The TD pass to Adams was terrific. Of the Packers' 76 snaps, Rodgers stood in shotgun for 62. Crowd noise didn't appear to be a factor. The crowd was late to arrive and early to leave. That's Atlanta. Now Rodgers needs to get back to his elite level of performance in his first five games against the Falcons and not the pedestrian level of his last two.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

Ty Montgomery gained 110 yards in 16 touches. He wasn't Devonta Freeman but the Packers had a solid running back in their lineup. He logged 65 snaps, with 15 coming after motioning out to the slot as a split receiver. He broke just two tackles; the Falcons' defenders didn't miss anywhere near the total of 14 blown by Green Bay's defense. Montgomery bleeds what he can out of runs. In the opening drive, he didn't like what was there in the A-B gaps to the left so he cut hard back to the right and swept the edge for 7. He ran through Neal at the end of the run. On the next play, the Falcons blew a coverage leaving Montgomery by himself at the Atlanta 21. It's a situation in which he absolutely must smell and reach the end zone. Instead, he rammed into Neal inside the 5 and was taken down at the 2. He was charged with a sack when his chip was poorly executed and knocked off McCray, who had position against Campbell. Next time, Montgomery must approach the chip from outside in. Rookie Jamaal Williams (11) took a handoff with the Falcons seemingly misaligned with two 3-techniques and a bubble over center. It seemed at minimum a 5-yard gain. When Williams ran into his own blocker the disappointing gain was 2. Compared to Falcons FB Derrick Coleman, the blocking of Aaron Ripkowski (eight) doesn't even begin to compare. Coleman hurts people. Purely a finesse blocker, Ripkowski sometimes seems so concerned about missing that he throttles back and just tries to get a piece of his man.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1)

Mike Daniels (played seven of the 58 snaps on defense) bumped an offensive lineman and Julio Jones on the goal-line, injured his left hamstring and didn't return. It was a tremendous blow. The major weakness of the Falcons' offense the week before in Chicago was RG Wes Schweitzer, who was making just his second start Sunday night. Minus Daniels, the others didn't have the talent to wreck plays. It was a bleary day for Kenny Clark (47), Dean Lowry (34) and Quinton Dial (33). The Falcons suffered a significant blow themselves when RT Ryan Schraeder exited with a concussion on his ninth snap. Ex-Bronco Ty Sambrailo wasn't nearly as good but, other than Clay Matthews, none of the D-linemen could exploit him. Clark learned a lesson or two from Alex Mack, one of the NFL's biggest and best centers. Mack put Clark on his back blocking for a TD run. Clark never got near Matt Ryan. As attested by their statistics (25 carries, 126 yards), Tevin Coleman and Freeman found running lanes all night. Lowry is a high-energy, extra-effort performer. He just didn't make much happen. Making his Green Bay debut, Dial was hard to move and found the ball a few times.

LINEBACKERS (1 ½)

Last week, Morgan Burnett (58) was included among the defensive backs. Barring another change, Burnett is playing inside linebacker and will be included here. He made a fine deflection of a third-and-9 pass to Jones and was sure to maintain leverage as he broke down on ball carriers. It probably would help Burnett overcome his size deficiency if he disguised his run-fit responsibility/alignment until later in the play clock. On Coleman's 3-yard TD catch, Burnett must fight through the pick of TE Austin Hooper and get to the back in the flat. Blake Martinez (38) started alongside Burnett, Jake Ryan (17) relieved Martinez and Joe Thomas (14) played the dime. Martinez beat Coleman for a sack in 2.1 seconds, broke through in a jam-type front to record a tackle for loss and had a second solid outing. When Mohamed Sanu wasn't jammed at the line, Ryan had little chance to get sufficient depth on a 27-yard over route. Thomas also beat Coleman for a split sack with Matthews. Despite losing Schraeder, a dependable four-year starter, coordinator Steve Sarkisian double-teamed Matthews (52) on merely 11% of dropbacks. Matthews had a team-high 3 ½ pressures, including 1 ½ sacks, but the longer the game went the less success he had against Sambrailo. Matthews is healthy, playing with passion and a key cog in the defense. After a strong opener, Nick Perry (53) came back to earth against LT Jake Matthews and had just one pressure. Unlike some tackles, Matthews has the horsepower to match up physically. If a player can do that against Perry, and that's a big if, he can control him. Kyler Fackrell (19) just doesn't play to his 4.65 40 time. Ryan ran 4.89 a decade ago, but Fackrell couldn't come close to chasing him down on an 8-yard scramble.

SECONDARY (one-half)

Man coverage, the Packers' calling card, was the plan with Damarious Randall (28) and Davon House (49) outside and Quinten Rollins (34) in the slot. Each one of them had several poor snaps that led to Kevin King (46) replacing Randall outside and Randall taking Rollins' slot position. King, the rookie, was by far the best player in the secondary and should be given every chance now to start. Unlike some of his teammates, King didn't look afraid of Jones or the Falcons' prolific offense. He broke up passes to Justin Hardy and Jones, and made a great play in the end-zone corner to deny Jones a touchdown. King tackled much better than the other three, too. Randall has athleticism but plays to his own drum. He's lazy with his hands and his eyes, plays small and isn't competitive. Rollins will throw his body around in the box against the run or on the blitz. He missed three tackles in the open field, however, by failing to wrap. Several times, he also stayed blocked too long. House showed little awareness for the second game in a row, creating avenues for two long runs by not protecting the sideline. At this point, you don't see speed or quickness from him. Josh Hawkins (one) could be on the field soon. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (58) and Kentrell Brice (21) had lapses and allowed sizeable gains. Brice's explosive strike always is welcome but he missed two more tackles, too. When Brice left with a groin injury rookie Josh Jones made an uneventful 29-play debut.

KICKERS (2)

Mason Crosby connected from 41. His five kickoffs averaged 67.2 yards and 4.03 seconds of hang time. Justin Vogel wasn't consistent, averaging 39.7 yards (gross, net) and 4.45 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2)

Two years ago, Janis was a feared kickoff returner because of speed, strength and size. Now he must have been instructed to take no chances. Matt Boshers' seven kickoffs all went for touchbacks, including his last that was begging to be returned from three yards deep and with modest hang time (3.96). Davis made good decisions, fair-catching three punts. Josh Jones made a big hit at the 14 on the opening kickoff. He and Janis are first-rate gunners.