

# Rating the Packers: Week 4 vs Bears

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The NFL usually isn't like that. More times than not, the Green Bay-Chicago rivalry has been marked by close, hard-fought games.

It was like a breezy walk in the park for the Packers Thursday night at Lambeau Field. The Bears weren't ready to play and the more talented Packers were, and the result was a blowout from start to finish.

Each of the Packers' five touchdowns were scored with relative ease. The Bears' four giveaways didn't require an inordinate amount of skill on the part of the Packers, either.

Dressed in all-white uniforms, the Packers looked and played much faster than the Bears. Just about everything worked. It was smiles and hugs all the way around on a stress-free night.

Halfway through his fifth season as coach of the Packers, Mike McCarthy had a losing record (4-5) against coach Lovie Smith and the Bears.

After that, McCarthy went 6-0 against Smith, and Smith was fired; 3-1 against Marc Trestman, and Trestman was fired; and the Packers' 35-14 victory Thursday lifted his record against John Fox to 4-1 and moved Fox one step closer to losing his job.

Now 17-7, McCarthy's winning percentage of .708 ranks sixth among the men who have coached five or more games in the rivalry.

McCarthy trails Green Bay's Mike Holmgren, 12-2 (.857) from 1992-'98; Chicago's Jack Pardee, 5-1 (.833) from 1975-'77; Green Bay's Dan Devine, 6-2 (.750) from 1971-'74; Chicago's Mike Ditka, 15-5 (.750) from 1982-'92, and Green Bay's Vince Lombardi, 13-5 (.722) from 1959-'67.

Only two men, Chicago's George Halas and Green Bay's Curly Lambeau, have coached more games than McCarthy against the respective archrival.

Halas went 43-30-4 (.584) against the Packers from 1920-'29, 1933-'42, 1946-'55 and 1958-'67.

Lambeau went 21-35-5 (.385) against the Bears from 1921-'49.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Bears, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Lane Taylor; 2. Clay Matthews; 3. Aaron Rodgers.

As a team, the Packers received 4 footballs.

## **RECEIVERS (3)**

Geronimo Allison probably would have been the Bears' No. 1 wide receiver Thursday night. The return of Randall Cobb from a chest injury relegated Allison to No. 4 status. Allison eventually finished with 16 plays, but until Davante Adams left with a concussion on the Packers' 45th snap Allison had played only eight. One week after totaling 122 yards in eight targets, there apparently wasn't a need to target him at all. Cobb (played 33 of the 55 snaps on offense), three other wideouts and TE Martellus Bennett lined up in a personnel grouping used infrequently this season. In most empty sets, McCarthy flanked RB Ty Montgomery as the fifth receiver. The first time the Packers employed it, the Bears remained in a 4-2 defense and matched ILB Danny Trevathan on Cobb. In a mismatch, Cobb made a one-handed catch inside for 12 yards; he was fortunate his fumble was ruled down by contact. On the goal-line, Cobb beat a highly capable nickel back, Bryce Callahan, on sheer quickness for a 2-yard TD. Adams (40) returned home Friday after being knocked out and removed by stretcher after an illegal hit by Trevathan. "Everything looks good," McCarthy said Friday afternoon. "He's technically in the concussion protocol." Jordy Nelson (51) seemed startled after hauling in a 44-yard bomb. For some reason, he has appeared uncomfortable after the catch this season. With his two defenders off balance, Nelson finally high-tailed it for the end zone but was run down from behind by FS Adrian Amos. His TD catches of 4 and 8 yards were among the simplest of his career. The Bears' secondary, coached by Ed Donatell, was atrocious in the red zone. Earlier, Nelson dropped a third-down pass far down the sideline and a 9-yard slant. Martellus Bennett (43, 20 with his hand down) flashed some emotion after a 26-yard bootleg pass after CB Kyle Fuller lost track of him. On five other receptions (for 13 yards) he had to gather himself and was cut down almost immediately. Lance Kendricks (18, 11 down) and Richard Rodgers (10, three down) also played.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)**

Minus his five top tackles, McCarthy moved LG Lane Taylor to left tackle rather than use rookie Adam Pankey or newcomer Ulrick John. Even though he had no experience at the position and a short week to prepare, Taylor handled the assignment like a pro. On the first play he looked like a seasoned left tackle, swatting OLB Willie Young up the field knowing a run was headed underneath him. He passed off stunts smoothly, looked remarkably comfortable in a two-point stance and moved his feet just fine against OLB Leonard Floyd. Other than a back-door miss against DE Mitch Unrein for a "bad" run and a hurry by Young, Taylor pitched a shutout. Perhaps equally concerning for the staff was how LG Lucas Patrick would hold up. This was his regular-season debut. Like Taylor, Patrick allayed fears early by dumping NT Eddie Goldman on the first snap and pancaking Young on the third. Something of a rambunctious personality, Patrick showed a large degree of nastiness later when he finished Goldman with pizzazz. He was swiveling his head in pass pro, looking for work when uncovered. He was even used to pull four times in power plays that gained 11 yards. Goldman earned at least a draw, beating Patrick for a pair of hurries and badly a third time but the ball was out. Justin McCray, the other backup starter, finds ways to move people in the run game. Akiem Hicks is one of the stoutest 3-4 ends in the league but McCray met strength with strength against him. He did allow three pressures; two were by OLB Pernell McPhee, including an up-field sack in 2.8 seconds. His holding penalty wiped out a TD. For the second game in a row center Corey Linsley was outstanding. Not only is Linsley playing with balance and strength, but he also has a great sense knowing when to leave the double-team block to get on the linebacker. One-half pressure and one-half "bad" run represented a solid day's work for Jahri Evans.

## **QUARTERBACKS (4 ½)**

Aaron Rodgers lives for the next major challenge in life. He had one here with a patchwork offensive line and the loss of the top two running backs in the first 20 snaps. Obviously, no team can win handily in such a situation unless its quarterback elevates the play of the newbies around him. A scout-teamer himself back in the day, he seemed energized by seeing free agents Patrick and McCray in the lineup, Taylor working so hard to protect his blind side and rookies trying to make impressions in the backfield. They looked to him for approval, and that they got. He helped the line by keeping a close eye on the box and avoiding bad plays. Defensive coordinator Vic Fangio had Rodgers' number during their four matchups when he was in San Francisco but this time it was Rodgers by knockout. Fangio blitzed 22.6% on passes to no avail, was destroyed in the red zone and never came close to an interception. Rodgers was down just twice all day, and the second was partially his fault for not getting the ball out of his hands. On the 58-yard strike to Nelson, Rodgers charged up in the pocket and, based on the flat trajectory of the throw and the location of the players, might have actually tried and succeeded in completing a back-shoulder bomb. The ball appeared to be intentionally underthrown so only Nelson could get to it. The Packers didn't need big numbers from their quarterback. What Rodgers provided – patience, professionalism and a sunny attitude – were more than enough to win the night.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

Ty Montgomery was off to an excellent start, breaking three tackles in his first five carries. Alas, his fifth snap was his last. Fuller's solo tackle on the sideline didn't look especially hard but Montgomery had to leave with damaged ribs. This was about the sixth time in four games Montgomery had to leave at least temporarily due to injury. He's always hurt. Punishment at the most precarious position is inevitable. Sometimes it seems as if Montgomery tries to brace himself for the hit. All you can do is run naturally and avoid as much contact as possible. Jamaal Williams (12) touched the ball five times for 13 yards before injuring his left knee in a pile. He's a throwback to the 1960s when fullbacks like Nick Pietrosante of the Lions would wrap two arms around the ball, lower their head and buck the line. From that point, Aaron Jones played all of his 30 snaps just as Aaron Ripkowski played 10 of his 13. Jones didn't break any tackles but his 13-carry, 49-yard debut was more than adequate. When Hicks smashed McCray into the hole Jones was headed, he found daylight cutting back for 6. He made a subtle cut off blocks by Evans and Linsley for a 2-yard TD. He showed good balance on contact, some burst to the edge and no fear when a tough yard was necessary. Cobb played his first snap from the backfield in the first series and caught a 4-yard pass. If Montgomery is sidelined, Cobb is an attractive five-to-10 snap backfield option given the presence of Allison and other depth at wide receiver.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Minus mainstay Mike Daniels, who has played seven snaps in Games 2-4, the Packers made rookie Montravius Adams inactive and took the risk of confronting a run-first opponent with only four defensive linemen active. Dom Capers played a season-high 35.3% in his 3-4 base defense, and in the first half when the outcome was decided the results couldn't have been better. The starters were Dean Lowry at 5-technique, Kenny Clark on the nose and Quinton Dial at 3-technique. The best player was Clark (played 46 of the 68 snaps on defense). His matchup with C Cody Whitehair, a second-round pick in Clark's 2016 draft class, was a sizzler. Barring injury, they might play 15 to 20 times against each other before their careers are done. Clark stuffed Whitehair on two rushes for no yards. He also recorded a tackle for loss against RT Bobby Massie. His one pressure came against Whitehair. The blemish was his two off-sides penalties. Lining up at 1, 3 and 5 techniques, Dial (33) was adequate. Lowry (47) was threatening Mike Glennon at times but ended with one pressure. Together with Ricky Jean Francois (23), the front prevented the Bears' five preferred starting offensive linemen from getting their running backs to the line without interference. The Steelers' more publicized 3-4 base defense failed miserably (222 yards rushing) against Jordan Howard and Tarik Cohen four days earlier.

## **LINEBACKERS (4)**

Elite guards Kyle Long and Josh Sitton didn't yield a pressure. Thus, the Packers desperately needed edge rush from Clay Matthews (45), Nick Perry (33), Ahmad Brooks (37), Kyler Fackrell (24) and Chris Odom (eight). Of the Packers' meager total of eight pressures, Matthews had almost half with 3 ½. Brooks, with one, was the only other outside linebacker to produce. On the Bears' first snap Capers used a standard five-man rush from his 3-4. It left TE Dion Sims one-on-one with Matthews, who slipped around him and strip-sacked Glennon in 3.8 seconds. When Jake Ryan outhustled the Bears for the recovery at the 3, it was 14-0 a moment later. The team's only knockdowns came from Matthews: one against Whitehair that helped cause Glennon to throw an interception, and one on an inside charge against Massie. Brooks is a hand fighter who doesn't take any guff from anyone. His production was modest, as was Perry's. But for the most part they set a competitive edge against the run. The Bears' longest rush, 16 yards by Howard on a counter, broke when Perry went inside of Long's pull block to make the perimeter available. Fackrell and Odom were non-factors. Based on just 16 snaps over two games, it would appear Odom is in the early stages of making the transition from 4-3 defensive end in Atlanta to 3-4 outside linebacker in Green Bay. Blake Martinez' solid day included beating the roughhousing Long to the spot on a 2-yard gain, meeting TE Zach Miller on a wham block and turning the play inside, and generally taking efficient angles to the ball. The snap counts were 45 for Martinez, 42 for Ryan and five for Joe Thomas, who departed with a left ankle injury. Ryan had two partial pressures on five cross blitzes inside. Thomas was 43 yards deep in Cover 2 when he dug the ball away from WR Josh Bellamy at the 1.

## **SECONDARY (4)**

When the two teams last met in December at Soldier Field, Damarious Randall was benched for poor play after 42 snaps. This time, he was yanked at halftime after starting and playing 29 of 32 snaps. Actually, Randall was tackling and covering effectively until his last play. On third and goal from the 5, he was covering Kendall Wright, the innermost of three receivers on his side of the field. For some reason Randall jumped inside to his left at the snap of the ball. Thus, he was a step behind when Wright broke the other way on a corner route. Wright can run, and after taking himself out of position initially Randall was unable to come close to catching up. Then, as the outside defender on the extra-point block team, Randall barely bothered getting out of his stance as the ball was kicked. He removed his helmet and began a slow walk off the field. Whatever Randall said or how he acted in the locker room at halftime obviously wasn't to the liking of McCarthy, who pulled him for Josh Hawkins. Randall was in the bench area for a portion of the second half. At some point, McCarthy said Friday that he sent Randall to the locker room. "When we come back Tuesday, Damarious will be ready to roll with the rest," he said. Playing left cornerback, Hawkins (40) broke up two passes in his first series. Later, he made a nice open-field tackle of Cohen, missed another and gave up two completions for 24 yards. On the other side, Kevin King (61) was OK. Davon House (quadriceps) missed another game. Quinten Rollins played one snap. Morgan Burnett (65) manned the slot as nickel back and was a constant thorn in the side of the Bears' ground game. Twice he anticipated run, beat blocks by wide receiver Deonte Thompson and made contact in the backfield. Returning from a groin injury, Kentrell Brice (45) was back playing alongside Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (60) at safety. When Capers blitzed six, Brice remained too deep and Miller was able to catch a pass in front of him. When Brice missed the tackle, the gain ruptured into 26. Brice fielded a pass thrown to him for an interception in the third quarter just as Clinton-Dix did in the second quarter. Clinton-Dix hasn't been maximizing his chances as a tackler or in the freed-up "lurk" role. Playing inside linebacker and safety, Josh Jones (51) was more effective covering in the flats and meeting the run inside than he was covering in the slot or middle of the field.

## **KICKERS (4)**

Punting five times, Justin Vogel limited the dangerous Cohen to seven return yards. He was effective both directionally and with hang time. His averages were 47.6 yards (gross), 46.2 (net) and 4.54 seconds (hang time). Mason Crosby's six kickoffs averaged 68.5 and 4.07. Four were touchbacks.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)**

Long snapper Taybor Pepper made his regular-season debut, replacing injured Brett Goode. His punt snaps were adequate. On five snaps for extra points, Vogel had to spin the ball three times so the laces were in proper position for Crosby. Hawkins was penalized for an illegal block and the kickoff team was penalized for illegal formation after Brice went in motion right before the boot. Davis secured the ball on punts but made one fair catch at the 5.