

Rating the Packers: Week 6 at Vikings

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 17, 2017

Put aside the sidelined Aaron Rodgers for a moment. If the Green Bay Packers don't play harder than they did Sunday at U.S. Bank Stadium their hopes of making the playoffs really are as dim as some have posited in the last 36 hours. On defense, the Packers missed 15 tackles. In 23 rushing attempts, their running backs broke one tackle. Consider the fight-for-every-inch running style of the Minnesota Vikings' twin tailbacks. Jerick McKinnon and Latavius Murray were bringing it. It would be incorrect to say that about Aaron Jones and Ty Montgomery. Consider the performance of the respective receiving corps. The Vikings were selling out whereas the Packers at times appeared to be looking for safe landings. Consider the edge rushers. Minnesota's flew off the ball for 60 minutes. Green Bay's were almost absent without leave. Consider the Packers' rash of six penalties on defense. No Green Bay defense has had more than six in a game since the middle of coach Mike McCarthy's third season (2008). Even the intensity and inspirational level of the backup quarterbacks tipped heavily toward Minnesota's Case Keenum. You have to go back 33 regular-season games (October 2001, 35-13) to find one in which the Vikings defeated the Packers by more than the 13-point margin (23-10) Sunday. McCarthy's six previous defeats in the border rivalry were by one, seven, 12, three, seven and three points.

To win without Rodgers will require the Packers' best work week after week. They ought to mail in the rest of the season if this represents their best work.

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

The three stars of the game were: 1. Kenny Clark; 2. Mike Daniels; 3. Lenzy Pipkins.

RECEIVERS (1)

In past meetings coach Mike Zimmer assigned Xavier Rhodes, his physical press cornerback, to Jordy Nelson (played 61 of the possible 66 snaps on offense). Other than in the red zone, Nelson isn't quite what he used to be. Of course, Zimmer could see that so he put Rhodes on Davante Adams (65) and let Trae Waynes try to get by against Nelson. Adams' first target, and catch, with Rhodes in coverage came early in the fourth quarter. In the first half, Adams made a nifty cut to score a 14-yard touchdown but that came within a zone. Three of his five receptions came in garbage time when Zimmer told everybody just don't get beat deep. Very few cornerbacks can play bump against Adams because his feet are too fast. Rhodes did it. On the other side, Nelson's solid day (6-60) against Waynes undoubtedly would have been bigger with Rodgers playing 60 minutes. He worked free when needed. Randall Cobb (53) must not have been much of the game plan because his first target didn't come until the 8-minute mark of the third quarter. Veteran Terence Newman is vulnerable to quickness and Mackenzie Alexander, the other slot, isn't overly fast. Cobb's crisp production in the second half (3-28) suggested underuse. Normally a reliable blocker, Cobb didn't get the job done on cutoff's against MLB Eric Kendricks and Newman from the right wing. Geronimo Allison (seven) was reduced to a snap here or there subbing for a fatigued teammate. Jeff Janis was used to block a linebacker on his one snap; Trevor Davis didn't take a snap for the third time in four games. Old stone hands, Martellus Bennett (50, 14 with his hand down), managed to drop his sixth pass in six games. It couldn't have been an easier chance, either. Where is he? Bennett couldn't have looked worse when DE Brian Robison beat him off the edge in 2.9 seconds for a sack. He can do it. On the Packers' longest rush (9 yards), he sustained his block back-side on DE Everson Griffen for 2.5 seconds. Most times, Bennett will make contact with his man. That seems to satisfy him because he almost never tries to finish. This was the first game in which Richard Rodgers (11, two with hand down) played more than Lance Kendricks (six, two with hand down). When Kendricks failed to handle Griffen on the back side he was charged with his first "bad" run.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1 ½)

It's reasonable to assume that David Bakhtiari probably picked up on the whispers that arise whenever a player sits out a month with a hamstring. Giving it a go, he pass-protected effectively but wasn't playing with much strength in the run game. He and the doctors called it a day when the left hamstring tightened up after three quarters and 34 snaps. If the leg becomes a season-long issue he'll rue the day of his premature return. Lane Taylor was throwing people around like Charles Atlas. At one point he had back-to-back pancake blocks. He was screwing guys into the ground. Other than partial fault on a draw play that went nowhere, Taylor was off to a great start against a formidable front. On his 15th snap, his right leg was rolled up on and his day was done. The other competitive performer was Corey Linsley, who along with Jahri Evans were the only starters to play all 66 snaps. Even with that, Linsley allowed 1 ½ "bad" runs and one-half knockdown. Evans, in his 12th year, renewed what appeared to be an established rivalry with NT Linval Joseph, who's in his eighth. Almost the exact height and weight, they know what it's like to play at an elite level. Like two old rams they went at each other, playing to the whistle but with body language that indicated mutual respect. Evans, with 2 ½ "bad" run and 1 ½ pressures, had a rough day. Bryan Bulaga (28) departed at halftime for concussion testing after allowing three pressures, including a pair to LE Danielle Hunter. Fortunately for the Packers, they kept eight blockers active, one more than normal. Thus, in the interminably drawn-out fourth quarter (32 snaps), the patchwork lineup included LT Justin McCray (51), LG Lucas Patrick (38) and RT Ulrick John (32). Patrick (two knockdowns) might have been passable; McCray and John were awful. McCray's 32-play stint at left tackle was his first. For the Packers' sake, it'll be his last. In a mismatch, Griffen whipped around McCray for a sack and two flushes. In all, he yielded 5 ½ pressures and one "bad" run. Making his Green Bay debut after arriving Sept. 26, John looked worse the more he played. In another mismatch, John gave up three of his four pressures to DE Brian Robison. John isn't a bad athlete but his strength limitations were evident. It was almost as if Griffen, Robison, Hunter, DT Tom Johnson and others were on a turkey shoot trying their best moves hunting sacks and knockdowns from four-man rushes on the Packers' 15-play possession in garbage time.

QUARTERBACKS (1)

The entire team probably was shell-shocked when Rodgers was knocked from the game on his eighth play with a broken right collarbone. Rodgers dipped under Hunter's rush and looked for Bennett to clear as he left the protection. Serving as a spy, OLB Anthony Barr accelerated from 10 yards away and ended up falling on Rodgers after a form tackle. According to one source, Rodgers was livid as he walked off after one of the Vikings called him soft. That he isn't. In came Brett Hundley, who needs to learn and improve quickly from his unimpressive 58 snaps. Of course, it wasn't ideal, given the caliber of defense and a rivalry game on the road. What was there to like? His longest completion, 26 yards, was hummed to Nelson on a perfect back shoulder. Despite being sacked four times and knocked down another seven, he emulated Rodgers' ball-security prowess in the pocket and didn't give it up. On a red-zone scramble, he kept his eyes downfield instead of taking off and located Adams for the TD. His confidence didn't seem to waver. On the other hand, all three interceptions were poor throws. The receiver wasn't open. The speed of his release was average. His timing on screens couldn't have been worse. He blew a timeout, fumbled an exchange and didn't pick up some of Zimmer's exotic pressures. Now that's ancient history. Now comes practice and preparation as the guy.

RUNNING BACKS (1)

Ty Montgomery returned as the starter wearing special padding to protect the broken ribs that caused him to miss all but five snaps of Games 4-5. He played 20 snaps but, in the end, took a back seat as rookie Aaron Jones played 43. Montgomery made a nice cut on his longest gain of 7 yards, picking up six after contact. Before the half, he dropped an 8-yard TD pass on a check-down against Kendricks. On his second-to-last snap, Montgomery lost his footing getting out on a screen and, in the process, almost gave FS Harrison Smith a 35-yard interception return for a TD. The only broken tackle was by Jones against Newman. There was nothing exciting about either back. The best part of Jones' effort was a nice chip on Hunter to save a beaten Bakhtiari and a blitz pickup of Smith. In short-yardage, Aaron Ripkowski (13) isn't at all the kind of fullback you can run behind on an isolation block.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Two of Kenny Clark's better games as a rookie came against the Vikings. He was back at it again, making plays for the first time against backup LG Jeremiah Sirles and rookie C Pat Elflein. In all, Clark had two hurries, one against Sirles and another against veteran RG Joe Berger. He also was partially responsible for three tackles for loss, including two against Sirles. It was simple for Clark to out-leverage Sirles, who at 6-6 ½ is four inches taller. The best play by a Packers defender was Clark's strip of McKinnon. He split a double-team by Sirles and Elflein, kept his head up and lodged an arm on the ball. Surprisingly light on his feet, Clark (played 55 of the 77 possible defensive snaps) made another outstanding play chasing down McKinnon from behind on a 4-yard carry. He doesn't stay blocked for long. Mike Daniels (53) wasn't effective early as a bull rusher or point-of-attack run player. However, Daniels came on to nick Sirles and Elflein for his 3 ½ pressures. On two occasions it appeared as if Daniels actually had his hand either on the ball or the quarterback's arm. Each time, the composed, fundamentally-sound Keenum maintained possession and delivered downfield. With Dom Capers using the 3-4 base 11 times and a 4-3 four times, the increased snap counts showed 34 for Dean Lowry, 21 for Quinton Dial and seven for Ricky Jean Francois. Lowry read bootleg action fast and had 2 ½ pressures.

LINEBACKERS (1 ½)

Clay Matthews (65) finished with three pressures but none came against RT Mike Remmers, who had problems against better rushers in the first month. Remmers had double-team help on about 30% of Matthews' rushes. When Matthews couldn't solve the former Panther, he moved to the other side and did manage a knockdown on an inside charge against LT Riley Reiff, an old foe from Detroit. Matthews had some poor plays. He blew contain on Keenum's 16-yard scramble. He failed to recognize in time the 27-yard screen to McKinnon for a TD even though he was just semi-rushing and it was to his side of the field. Although Matthews did make a textbook scoop-and-recovery of McKinnon's recovery, he should have scored on the long return. Despite a convoy of blockers, he slowed down instead of speeding up and had the ball punched from under his arm (it went out of bounds). Meanwhile, Nick Perry (57) was shut out in a forgettable showing against Reiff, who like Remmers had been vulnerable to capable rushers. With Ahmad Brooks (back) sorely missed, Kyler Fackrell (31) was OK. He shed Remmers to make a tackle for loss. Sometimes Fackrell exhibits too much restraint. He often gets close to quarterbacks but might be pulling off prematurely in fear of being penalized and/or fined for roughing the passer. On the inside, Blake Martinez (76) was more effective than Jake Ryan (48) or Josh Jones (30) but it wasn't his best performance. He made a great play tipping a pass in the throwing lane to Damarious Randall for an interception. At the same time, he dropped another interception. The Vikings attacked Martinez with TE Kyle Rudolph and play-action passes. He held his water and stopped the clever McKinnon in the flat on third down, but also was a step late and missed three tackles. Ryan shed some blockers to find the ball. He also wasn't always properly aligned, played too high on the goal-line and was run through by McKinnon and drew a horse-collar penalty. Jones, who replaced Morgan Burnett (hamstring) at inside linebacker in nickel, held Rudolph on a third-and-8 pass.

SECONDARY (2)

When Kevin King (concussion) and Davon House (quadriceps) sat out, RC Josh Hawkins received his first start. After demonstrating improvement almost weekly, Hawkins regressed here. Even without top WR Stefon Diggs (groin), Hawkins didn't come close to covering Adam Thielen or Laquon Treadwell. He kept getting turned and having to spin around in coverage, a sign that he's guessing rather than reading his keys. There was no need for Hawkins to interfere with Thielen deep because Kentrell Brice (75) was waiting deep to help. Instead, he panicked and was tagged with a 42-yard penalty. On the third play, Hawkins jumped up after being the third man in on a tackle and pointed at himself for the crowd to see. Later, he missed back-to-back tackles on McKinnon right in front of the Packers' bench that might have warranted the hook but there was no one left to insert. On the other side, Randall (59) was his usual erratic self. For the second straight game he collected a tipped pass in zone for an interception. However, he turned down contact opportunities early and permitted himself to be blocked for 5.7 seconds by WR Michael Floyd on the long screen pass for a TD. Sometimes the easy way out is to just stay engaged. Quinten Rollins (22), the nickel back, dropped an interception before limping off with an ankle injury that landed him on injured reserve Monday. Rookie Lenzy Pipkins, a free agent from Oklahoma State, was the only corner left and made his debut from scrimmage in the slot. He's green as grass but, in 46 snaps, there was much to like. He was aggressive, beating blockers to a screen for minus-6 and notching several other hard-nosed tackles. He made the team because of his height (6-0), speed (4.46) and potential. His time might come sooner than expected. On the same field and against reserve quarterbacks, the difference between an elite safety in Harrison Smith and Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (77) was apparent. While Smith was all over the field making plays Clinton-Dix was missing two more tackles and not finding the ball. After six games Clinton-Dix has made almost no game-changing plays. Brice replaced Burnett deep but remains inconsistent. Marvin Evans (15) also played.

KICKERS (3)

Mason Crosby kicked a field goal from 26 and averaged 69.3 yards and 3.64 seconds of hang time on three kickoffs (two touchbacks). Despite ideal conditions Justin Vogel's hang time was sub-4.2 on four of six punts. Thanks to a 14-yard roll on a poor kick, another punt that shanked out of bounds and exceptional coverage by Jeff Janis, dangerous Marcus Sherels was stifled. His six-punt averages were 43.8 (gross), 44.7 (net) and 4.10 hang time. Four stopped inside the 20.

SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)

Janis was unblockable as the gunner on punts. Three times he beat blockers to force Sherels to fair catch. When Janis bungled a squib kickoff and returned it just 11 yards to the 17, he was benched in favor of Davis. The second-year speedster looked to be a threat on kickoffs and punts. On Taybor Pepper's two placement snaps, one appeared to be perfect laces and the other required minimal adjustment.