

# Rating the Packers: Week 7 vs Saints

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 24, 2017

If a team still cares enough to play hard, it isn't difficult to prevent the opponent from running the ball down your throat and killing the clock. That's why the last four to six minutes of semi-close games take forever to complete. The team that's ahead is afraid to throw because of an interception or accusations of running up the score, but generally can't make 10 yards in three carries because the other team understands its predicament and loads the box.

Maybe that's why the inability of the Green Bay Packers to stop the New Orleans Saints from running out the final 4 minutes, 20 seconds Sunday at Lambeau Field left such a disagreeable scent to the proceedings.

Mike McCarthy and Dom Capers massed bodies at the line but, alas, it made not a whit of difference. The Packers' effort and heart were gone by then: four rushes by Mark Ingram for 19 yards together with a neutral-zone penalty on Dean Lowry produced two first downs.

Three subsequent kneel-downs by Drew Brees got everybody to the exits 15 minutes earlier than if the Packers would have had another possession. Still, bowing out without a whimper is never good.

Not since Game 3 of 2014 has the Packers' defense closed a defeat with so little pride. On that afternoon at Ford Field the Lions were able to run the ball 12 times in a row to eat up the final 6:54 in their 19-7 triumph.

Now the Packers get to live with those last few minutes until they play again in two weeks.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 26-17 loss to the Saints, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

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

As a team, the Packers received 2 ½ footballs.

## RECEIVERS (1)

One week after Vikings CB Xavier Rhodes traveled with Davante Adams (played 48 of the possible 55 snaps on offense), Saints defensive coordinator Dennis Allen placed Marshon Lattimore, his prized rookie, on him. Scouts said Lattimore, the 11th pick in April, has been trying to impose his will on wide receivers. Snap after snap, he sat squarely a yard or two across from Adams to see what he had. Evidently not much, because neither of Adams' two receptions (for 12 yards) occurred with Lattimore in coverage. The third-and-1 incompletoion to Adams probably shouldn't have been thrown. The spacing was too tight. Nonetheless, the pass seemed to reach his hands a split-second before Lattimore swooped in and knocked it out. On the other side, Jordy Nelson (51) spun and flailed his arms just so to register a pair of penalties against clingy CB Ken Crawley, a second-year free agent filling in for injured starter Delvin Breaux. Otherwise, Nelson settled for 13 yards on one catch. Randall Cobb (37) was used more in a gadget role off motion and backfield drive-by's. His was a forgettable day as well. His fumble on a hit by DT Sheldon Rankins was his first from scrimmage since Game 9 in 2014. Geronimo Allison (five) caught a ball for 14 yards and dropped another. The play counts at tight end were 49 for Martellus Bennett (21 with his hand down), 14 for Lance Kendricks (nine with his hand down) and six for Richard Rodgers (three with his hand down). Bennett ran a nice slant from the slot against SS Kenny Vaccaro for 12. He drew a 25-yard pass-interference penalty on FS Vonn Bell just because of his sheer size. He outran SLB A.J. Klein on the deep vertical route that was overthrown. His multiple wham blocks were effective, and he blocked down beautifully on DE Cameron Jordan to help spring Aaron Jones for his 46-yard touchdown. Neither Trevor Davis nor Jeff Janis played from scrimmage.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (3)**

For just the second time this season Bryan Bulaga made it through an entire game. Jordan, his opponent, probably ranks as the Saints' best player on defense. In the first half, Bulaga held him without a pressure and generally kept him at bay in the run game. In the second half, Jordan nicked him for two pressures on power rushes just as WLB Craig Robertson slipped by him for two more pressures. Bulaga's false-start penalty helped halt a drive, too. David Bakhtiari appeared more confident in his left hamstring. This week, he was looking to punish and finish rather than just get by. The Saints' lone sack, by DE Alex Okafor, is charged to Bakhtiari even though the ball was held 3.3 seconds. Bakhtiari is paid to be better than that. Jahri Evans looked inspired to go against the team for which he played 11 seasons. On Jones' game-starting 15-yard run, he made a great combo block to eliminate NT Tyeler Davison and Robertson. When Justin McCray pulled three times for 53 yards, Evans used his bulk to angle-block down effectively. He hasn't been nearly as good on the back-side or to the second level, but one cut block of Davison was exquisite. The reason why Cobb's fumble wasn't lost was because Evans outmuscled several players for the recovery. Evans didn't have a "bad" run but allowed two pressures. Corey Linsley went the distance despite a back injury that caused him to miss almost the entire practice week. His one-half hurry came near the end. As a run blocker, he did a lot of good things but was beat on "bad" runs by Davison and DT David Onyemata. McCray got the start ahead of Lucas Patrick in place of LG Lane Taylor (ankle), who coach Mike McCarthy thought early in the week would play. McCray knows how to use his mass to his advantage in close quarters. In space, he struggles. In all, he allowed three pressures and 1 ½ "bad" runs.

## **QUARTERBACKS (1 ½)**

McCarthy used less shotgun, more tight ends and simpler reads for Brett Hundley in his first start. The results could have been better and they could have been worse. Hundley generated 17 points, which wasn't enough this time but might have to be in subsequent weeks. He's not experienced enough to get through his progression. At times, he was one read, maybe two and then get out. "There were opportunities today," said Cobb. "Jordy and Davante got on top all day. There were a few inside as well with myself. We just have to build that chemistry with Brett." On the plus side, Hundley coaxed Klein to jump offsides with his hard count, stood tall in the pocket with rushers around him, was sacked just once and showed solid footwork. On the minus side, he was unable to exploit weaknesses in the Saints' coverage, threw the wrong trajectory on the old standby play-action bomb to Nelson and couldn't get the screen game going. Allen rushed six or more on 13.3% of passes after opponents dared all-out rush Aaron Rodgers only 2.1% in the first five games. The blitz will keep coming until Hundley trusts his arm and delivers throws to beat it. He ran extremely well (3-44), but it's a necessity for him to start sliding. The Packers can ill afford another injury at the position. Klein indicated Allen made no adjustment to dilute coverage and start spying Hundley.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)**

Aaron Jones is more impressive each week. He's seeing daylight, accelerating to daylight and getting just about everything there is on every carry. He has the speed to turn the corner. On the 46-yard TD, Jones was through the middle of the line so quickly that FS Marcus Williams and Vaccaro never had a chance to catch up. When Klein appeared in his face two yards behind the line, Jones made an elusive cut and turned it into a 5-yard gain. Stymied for a moment in the A gap, he bounced wide and froze the faster Lattimore just enough to get outside for 21. "He did a great job on first and second down," McCarthy said. "Aaron needs to be better on third down." He tripped Bakhtiari on one play, causing a flush. He made two poor chip blocks. He ran into one of his blockers on a screen and Hundley had to throw the ball away. Jones isn't the least bit timid in blitz pickup. He's just a novice in that area and the routes emanating off it. Jones had 44 snaps compared to seven for Ty Montgomery, who was indecisive and danced on a failed third and 1. Aaron Ripkowski logged his most snaps (14) since the opener.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (3)**

This wasn't one of Mike Daniels' top games. The Saints threw for 324 yards and rushed for 161, and he deserves his share of the blame with the others. Nevertheless, Daniels (played 53 of a possible 76 snaps on defense) probably edged Kenny Clark (65) as the best player on defense. Massive Andrus Peat and thick-framed Larry Warford form a top-flight guard tandem. They're physical and athletic, too. Daniels, however, is so strong and so determined that he was a consistent thorn in the Saints' interior. On one play, he drove RT Ryan Ramczyk onto his back near a pile. Drew Brees was down only three times all day. Daniels' knockdown came when he gained an edge on C Max Unger and then powered through RB Alvin Kamara as if he was a gnat. Clark tied Daniels for the team lead in pressures with three. The Packers' interior has been late recognizing screens all season but Clark forced a punt chasing down Kamara on third and 5 swing pass. He looked even faster than his 40 time of 5.07 seconds. Clark didn't play the run as well in this game. Dom Capers played 14 snaps in the 3-4 and another eight in his version of a base 4-3. Dean Lowry (27) and Quinton Dial (31) were just kind of out there. There was nothing physical about them against a physical back like Mark Ingram and an offensive line coming off the ball for keeps. Lowry's encroachment penalty was even worse because the play clock was down to :01. The first of Ricky Jean Francois' five snaps didn't arrive until 2:49 remained.

## **LINEBACKERS (1)**

Capers was forced to keep using Josh Jones (52) and the "nitro" package because Jake Ryan (24) was lost in mid-third quarter with an unspecified injury. Despite extensive action, Jones never made a play all day. The Saints were exploiting his lack of size, running in a few almost certain passing situations. If Clark and the others aren't tying up blockers, Jones can't be effective in the box. Jones' speed and athleticism is supposed to make "nitro" tick. On the second play, Kamara flanked wide and Jones went with him. Film study should have told Jones the ball was coming to Kamara, probably quickly. Brees obliged, and if Jones had pulled the trigger it might have been a tackle for loss. But there always has been a degree of hesitancy in Jones' play. When he paused, Peat had time to wipe him out and Kamara was on the loose for 24 yards. Three plays later, Jones went overboard trying to keep Kamara inside on a screen, overran the ball and the gain was 14. Blake Martinez (75) remained productive as ever but not one of his 15 tackles was across the line of scrimmage. He was late pursuing on several successful screens. He was late getting up to deny Brees a TD on one of his well-known QB sneaks/leaps. He was late in his zone drops on some play-action passes. On a team-high seven blitzes, he never threatened Brees. Clay Matthews (57) posted his 1 ½ pressures against Peat. Playing most of the game against the rookie Ramczyk, Matthews was blanked (he was double-teamed a season-high 36% on non-stunt rushes). Matthews made a late call to work inside Ramczyk for a minus-3 and end a drive, and also read a screen perfectly to halt it for 1. At the same time, he was mauled by double teams in the run game. The only sack was made by Nick Perry (54), who bulled right over the top of LT Terron Armstead in 2.9 seconds. Otherwise, Armstead used his athletic gifts to win the matchup. The Packers need Ahmad Brooks back as No. 3. Kyler Fackrell (26) was better than Chris Odom (21) but made minimal contribution. Used extensively for the first time, Odom played too high, did more catching than striking and didn't seem to fight block pressure.

## **SECONDARY (2 ½)**

Designating Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (76) to wear the electronic headset and call the defensive signals was a bad idea. The signs of miscommunication and confusion were all over the field. At times, players looked to Clinton-Dix for direction or a call seconds before Brees had the ball snapped. At least once the defense had 10 men on the field but Clinton-Dix, supposedly the leader and last line of defense, never noticed and thus didn't call a timeout. He made a quick read/tackle on a flat pass early for minus-3. He broke on an end-zone pass to Michael Thomas and helped prevent a TD. Other times, he was just so very average. Hit as he threw, Brees' pass was complete to Thomas for 21 yards when Clinton-Dix didn't even try to attack the ball. Ted Ginn turned a 10-yard hook into a gain of 47 partially because Clinton-Dix was out-flanked. Based on the first seven games, it's remarkable to think he was selected for the Pro Bowl last season. "Well, 42 (Morgan Burnett) was out," WR Brandon Coleman said. "That really hurt them. They had to make adjustments in the secondary." Kentrell Brice (73) played almost every snap for the second week in a row with the highly-organized Burnett (hamstring) sidelined. Other than a horse-collar penalty, Brice had an uneventful day. Marwin Evans (13) also played in goal-line and other packages. The starters were LC Davon House (67), RC Kevin King (50) and nickel back Damarius Randall (48). However, Josh Hawkins (17) played some outside, and at times Randall lined up at safety. Surprisingly, Lenzy Pipkins played special-teams only. House smothered Thomas on a take-off route in the first quarter and Brees threw it right to him for an interception. House also broke up a third-and-10 pass and tackled adequately. After the secondary missed eight tackles in Minnesota, its only miss this time was by House on Ginn's breakout for 47. House waited, guessed and never laid a glove on the speedster. Ginn doesn't want to get hit; being aggressive and taking a shot is the only way. King played cautiously all day as if his main concern was not getting beat over the top. King did, however, when he peered into the backfield, bit on Coleman's slant-and-go and then didn't even try getting back into the play that became a 22-yard TD. "They were late getting set up," said Coleman. "Their eyes were in the backfield and we hit them with a slant-and-go." Randall was giving up seven inches to Coleman on a vertical route from the slot. When Brees inexplicably didn't get the ball up, Randall used his fine hands and instincts to secure the interception. Typically, he offered next to nothing in run support or physical play.

## **KICKERS (3)**

Mason Crosby made a phenomenal extra point when Justin Vogel bobbed Taylor Pepper's wobbly snap and barely got the ball down. Crosby also hit a 46-yard field goal off the wet field and came up short and wide right from 59. His four kickoffs (two touchbacks) averaged 68 yards and 3.9 seconds of hang time. Vogel's five-punt averages were 47.6 yards (gross), 46.2 (net) and 4.45 hang time.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (2)**

In 20 snaps, Josh Jones was guilty of three accepted penalties: fair-catch interference, false start on a punt and illegal motion on a punt. How rare is it for a player to have three penalties on special teams in one game? Since 1987, I've been recording game-by-game accepted penalties. In that 30 ½-year period, Jones is the first to be penalized three times. Pepper had the one lousy snap. He also produced two perfect laces and another requiring minor adjustment. Clark demonstrated just how hard he tries by blocking an extra point. Punt coverage remained exceptional. Trevor Davis' 45-yard kickoff return was brought back by RB Jamaal Williams' holding penalty. That's 14 accepted penalties on special teams in seven games; they had 20 in 19 games last year, 10 in 17 games in 2011. Coordinator Ron Zook should feel some heat to get his area squared away.