

Rating the Packers: Week 9 vs Lions

By Bob McGinn Posted: Nov 8, 2017

Fifteen days earlier, the New Orleans Saints rolled into Lambeau Field and killed the final 4 minutes, 20 seconds of their 26-17 victory. That was cause to question if the Green Bay Packers' defense had lost its pride. When heart and effort slip, there's not much left. They ought to fumigate poor Lambeau Field after what the Detroit Lions did to the defense Monday night. Blitzing just to blitz, or so it seemed, the Packers couldn't even force the Lions, who were averaging five punts a game, to punt at all. Detroit hasn't had that luxury in 46 years.

After a painstaking but impressive first drive, the Packers' momentum went pfffffft. The longer the rout went on, the Lions' margins in intensity and physical play stood out.

Aggressive run blocks by wide receiver Jared Abbrederis. Punishing hits by Miles Killebrew and Jamal Agnew covering kicks. Defensive tackle A'Shawn Robinson hustling from the stack to tackle a wide receiver downfield on a screen. Middle linebacker Jarrad Davis flying head-long into blockers. Little cornerback Nevin Lawson picking up a ballcarrier and depositing him on his back.

That's two games in a row the defense covered itself in shame. Oh, it can get worse, much worse, if the Packers allow it to happen.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 30-17 loss to the Lions, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Corey Linsley. 2. Kevin King. 3. Dean Lowry.

As a team, the Packers received 1 football.

RECEIVERS (1)

Trevor Davis hadn't played a snap from scrimmage in the last three games. Obviously looking for some vertical stretch and big plays, coach Mike McCarthy designed two plays for Davis and got him the ball twice for 14 yards. He gained 9 on an end-around, then 5 on a short pass off motion. Those gainers came on the 14-play series to start the game. It's unclear why McCarthy used Davis on four plays in the first drive and two in the successful two-minute drill to close the half, and then not at all in the second half. Otherwise, it was a pedestrian performance by the unit, as usual. The Lions didn't assign Darius Slay to one receiver. He basically stayed on the left side and shut down whoever drew the short straw and had to line up across from him. Jordy Nelson (played 49 of the possible 59 snaps on offense) tried several times but couldn't separate from Slay. His four receptions were worth 35 yards (10 after the catch). His last catch came on the first play of the third quarter. Until the fourth quarter, when he stayed wide left, Davante Adams (56) played all over the formation. The objective was to find one-on-one coverage against Quandre Diggs, the tough-guy slot who lacks burst. When the matchup happened for Adams in the right slot, he had a step on Diggs for what might have been a 78-yard TD. The ball was well thrown but when Adams reached out with only one arm he couldn't make the one-handed catch. Talk about being too nonchalant. Go get the ball, and if that means laying out, then lay out. Adams' blocking was substandard a few times, too. When he fanned on Diggs, Randall Cobb was spilled for minus-3 on a swing pass. Cobb (43 at WR, six at RB) made the only big play, courageously making a catch between lurking linebackers Tahir Whitehead and Davis 10 yards downfield and sprinting for a 46-yard gain. He also caught a 10-yard slant with Diggs on his back. Geronimo Allison (17) replaced Nelson in the waning minutes. Jeff Janis, a fixture on end-of-game kneel-downs and nothing else from scrimmage, was confined to special teams. Martellus Bennett (shoulder) sat out but his absence wasn't felt. Lance Kendricks (29, including 10 with his hand down) caught two for 32, dropped one and missed two blocks in the first series. Richard Rodgers (33, 11 with his hand down) played 22 more snaps than in any game this season.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Bryan Bulaga suffered a season-ending injury to his right knee early in the fourth quarter as he attempted to bow up against a power rush by DE Anthony Zettel. It was his 42nd snap of the game. Thus, the Packers will close the season having their five preferred starters on the field together for merely 57 snaps. Justin McCray allowed two half pressures in 17 snaps; Bulaga gave up two full pressures against DE Cornelius Washington, the ex-Bear. On the other side, David Bakhtiari looked to be rounding into fine form from his hamstring issues. Operating mostly against Ziggy Ansah, Bakhtiari yielded one knockdown and one-half hurry. Lane Taylor returned after missing 1 ½ games but it was apparent that the ankle limited his movement ability. Three of his four pressures came in the first half before he began to regain his groove. Even at 34, Jahri Evans' effort level doesn't seem to have waned. He likes to play, has an abundance of pride and generally does his job. When the fight is in close quarters, he's able to enact some movement because of his sheer mass. In space, he's far less effective, such as on the 1-yard sweep by Cobb in which Evans was way late getting out on Davis. The only other "bad" run went to Bakhtiari, who earlier wasn't quick enough to get out on Davis. Corey Linsley resembled a stone wall repulsing the hard-charging Davis on the quarterback sneak for a touchdown. Linsley has had to deal with changes all around him but sustains his level of professionalism regardless.

QUARTERBACKS (2)

Brett Hundley's second start was better than his first. That still isn't saying a lot, but incremental improvement is superior to slippage. There are signs that Hundley might have the arm talent the job requires. His arm was strong enough to complete a closely covered sideline route. He deserved a payoff from the well-thrown bomb to Adams. He found Kendricks for 21 in a narrow window inside. He flourished in a pair of two-minute drills, calling the game from behind center. Maybe that's the way McCarthy will have to go. Give him two or three plays and play check-with-me at the line. As expected, Hundley has weaknesses. There's a deer-in-the-headlights look to him that must change. Is he reacting properly when the rush closes in? He ran into one of the three sacks. On another, he should have seen the hesitate-and-charge blitz by SS Tavon Wilson and gotten the ball out to Rodgers in the flat. It's interesting how much Hundley resembles Aaron Rodgers in his ball-handling and faking. Best of all, he didn't fumble or even come close to an interception.

RUNNING BACKS (1 ½)

Aaron Jones was on the field for 12 of the first 13 snaps but just eight of the last 46. He gained 11 yards in seven touches, failing to break a tackle. On the first sack, Jones didn't square up against the blitzing Whitehead, took a bad angle, left his feet with a terrible lunge and was left sprawling as Hundley was wrapped up. Ty Montgomery picked up 51 yards in six touches, didn't break a tackle and also had an unsightly pickup against Diggs. An 8-yard run would have been a 21-yard TD but he couldn't get by FS Glover Quin. In a similar vein, he had a great chance to turn a screen pass into a 53-yard score but was too slow to exploit the opening downfield. Cobb's six snaps from the backfield were twice as many as he had in his first six games. His versatility when joined by four other wide receivers in a formation will give defensive coordinators pause. After not taking a snap in Games 6-7, Jamaal Williams made the most of his nine snaps in possibly his most impressive moment since being drafted. Garbage time or not, he made a tackler miss on a screen and a check-down that totaled 31 yards. What also stood out was his reckless play as a blocker on the kickoff team. He's not afraid, and it looks like he really wants to play.

DEFENSIVE LINE (1)

Inactive for six of the first seven games, rookie DT Montravius Adams (played 18 of the possible 68 snaps on defense) started next to Mike Daniels in long-yardage passing situations ahead of Kenny Clark. As far as results go, the pass rush needs a whole lot more. Adams showed an adequate get-off once or twice but never got near Matthew Stafford. He took himself out of some rushes by keeping his face down or losing his balance. The third-round draft choice looked a little lost. Probably the best of the bunch was Dean Lowry (29). The Packers had a season-high nine tackles for loss (sacks not included), and on Lowry's he beat the back-side cut-off block of RT Ricky Wagner. The only sack went partially to Lowry for bulling through TE Darren Fells on a flea-flicker. Lowry isn't as strong as Daniels or Clark but is OK at the point, and his hustle is their equal. Guards T.J. Lang and Graham Glasgow weren't giving up much ground in pass protection, attempting to keep a firm pocket for Stafford. Lang didn't allow a pressure; McCarthy called him the best short-setting inside pass blocker that he's coached. Clark (51) was as quiet as he has been all season as C Travis Swanson held up surprisingly well. The level of respect between Daniels (52) and Lang was obvious. They battled hard, and Lang earned the decision, but there was nothing even close to extra shoves. Daniels' night will be remembered for his unnecessary roughness penalty on a third-and-14 incompleting in a 0-0 game. After slipping past Swanson and taking a swat at Stafford on the way by, Daniels had about five seconds before deciding he would head-butt Swanson. It brought back memories of the NFC Championship Game in Seattle when Daniels lost complete control, ran down the sidelines and drilled Seahawks guard J.R. Sweezy for some previous slight. This was an indefensible play by Daniels.

LINEBACKERS (1 ½)

Vince Biegel (19) made his debut at the 7:45 mark of the second quarter. He played eight snaps on the left, 10 on the right and one as a rover on a third-and-5. As it turned out, Biegel didn't have many chances to rush. The Lions ran a lot when Biegel was in, and with shoulders square to the line and an aggressive approach he more than held his own. On the goal-line, he made first contact on the play when Ameer Abdullah later fumbled when stripped by Blake Martinez (68). On the next snap, he shed Fells and helped tackle Theo Riddick. Kyler Fackrell (27) played before Biegel and more than Biegel but that's likely to change soon. Fackrell was blanked as a rusher and lost leverage on some runs. He's doing a lot of chasing instead of playing across the line of scrimmage. With Ahmad Brooks (back) missing a third straight game, Chris Odom (11) chipped in with a pressure and tackle for loss. When Clay Matthews (42) and Nick Perry (38) were unable to solve Brian Mihalik, the No. 3 left tackle, and Wagner, Dom Capers didn't wait to start blitzing. In all, he rushed five or more on 55.9% of dropbacks, his highest rate since Game 9 of 2015. Coincidentally, that also was against Stafford at Lambeau Field when the Lions won in the state for the first time since 1991. Little things add up. One time, Matthews stunted inside and was stopped dead in his tracks by Riddick (5-10, 201). Perry recorded half of the sack against Wagner, a hurry on a stunt and that was it. Morgan Burnett (43) returned from a month-long hamstring injury and started next to Blake Martinez (68) before leaving with a groin injury as he worked a rush move against Mihalik. He has been ruled out of the Chicago game. Burnett reacted beautifully to tackle Riddick in the flat twice for losses. Later, his average speed was exploited across the field by TE Eric Ebron. Burnett's departure made way for Jake Ryan (18), who forced Abdullah to fumble. Martinez had to transmit the calls from Capers after Burnett went down. Aside from durability and production, what's noteworthy about Martinez is he never draws attention to himself. He makes a great read on a screen, tackles Ebron for a 1-yard gain and huddles up immediately. He also made a huge fill to stop Stafford's goal-line sneak and slipped a block by Mihalik to force a fumble. At the same time, his mistake led to Riddick's 63-yard screen pass, he went under a block and missed Riddick on a 14-yard burst and was exposed by Ebron in man coverage for 15. Martinez is also a very marginal pass rusher.

SECONDARY (1)

With Kentrell Brice now on injured reserve, SS Josh Jones (68) started alongside Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (68). His uneven performance mirrored the first half of his season. At times, Jones rotated into the box, slashed into the backfield and caused disruption. He covered considerable ground to help break up a pass at the boundary. He came from across the field to tackle Marvin Jones on a bubble screen. At the same time, the only two missed tackles by a defensive back were by Jones. When Stafford overthrew Ebron in the deep middle, Jones ran up and crunched the tight end in the back instead of hanging back for what might well have been an interception. Because Jones waited too long on his disguise, he arrived a step too late on a blitz so Stafford had an easy completion. The contrast between Clinton-Dix and Quin was stark, to say the least. Quin might have been as impressive as any player on the field. Clinton-Dix, regardless if he's in the role of "lurk" or another assignment, seldom is in the right spot to affect a game. His instincts just seem off. On the outside, RC Kevin King (63) outperformed slot Damarious Randall (52) and LC Davon House (68). Bad back and all, King bounced back from an awful outing against the Saints. House just got worked play after play. When he peeked in the backfield, Jones took a 50-50 ball from him for a 25-yard TD. There's a degree of hesitation or perhaps lack of confidence in House that limits his effectiveness. King competed, breaking up two passes and tackling pretty well. Randall had 1 ½ tackles for loss and recovered a fumble. Every team would want a more hard-nosed player in the box than Randall to attack the run and blitz. He was more physical than normal. In coverage, he got beat for an 11-yard TD and a 17-yard sideline pass because he's not violent enough at the ball. Josh Hawkins (two) actually contributed a sharp open-field tackle of Abdullah. Lenzy Pipkins (one) also played.

KICKERS (2)

A bad snap doomed Mason Crosby on the 38-yard attempt that was blocked by A'Shawn Robinson. He came back with a make from 35 as the final seconds of the half wound down. Kicking off only twice, he averaged 62.5 yards and 3.79 seconds of hang time. Punter Justin Vogel's three punts had averages of 42.7 yards (gross), 39.7 (net) and 4.37 hang time.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1 ½)

After emphasizing penalty avoidance for two weeks, there were none. Davis, who had returned just four kickoffs all season, brought back seven for a 20.0 average. He's a threat because of 4.41 speed and doesn't go down easily. The blocking by his teammates just wasn't very good. Derek Hart, the new long snapper, had a forgettable night. His first field-goal snap was short, and then he got jacked onto his back by Robinson to set up the block. Hart's other placement snaps were fine but two of his three punt snaps were wobbly and slow. Coordinator Ron Zook and all the players involved are to be commended for lining up hurriedly in about 10 seconds and making the field goal at the end of the half.