

Rating the Packers: Week 13 vs Buccaneers

By Bob McGinn Posted: Dec 5, 2017

Two losing teams and old NFC Central Division foes now seeking respectability played Sunday at Lambeau Field in one of those easy to forget games on every team's schedule.

This installment of "The Bay of Pigs" went to the Green Bay Packers, 26-20, in overtime even though the Tampa Bay Buccaneers maintained almost an 11-minute advantage in time of possession despite not touching the ball in the extra session. As the second half droned on, an increasing number of fans in the crowd of 77,684 began to boo the offensive ineptitude of the Packers. The discontent reached a crescendo in the final minute of regulation time when a batted pass, a screen for minus-2 and a ball thrown away under pressure ended the Packers' possession.

The boos quickly changed to appreciative roars when, after winning the coin toss, the Packers gained 60 of their 72 yards on the ground to walk off a winner on Aaron Jones' 20-yard touchdown run. Realistic fans will know that the Packers (6-6) will need to play considerably better in order to finish with a .500 record, let alone 9-7 or even 10-6. The Bucs (4-8) were left to play out their disappointing season.

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

The three stars of the game were: 1. Jamaal Williams. 2. Lane Taylor. 3. Davon House.

As a team, the Packers received 3 footballs.

RECEIVERS (1)

At least Jordy Nelson (played 50 of the possible 55 snaps on offense) and Randall Cobb (37) didn't drop a pass. Otherwise, they couldn't have played much worse. It appeared as if the game plan might have been to feature Nelson. Atlanta's Julio Jones had trashed the Bucs' depleted secondary for 253 yards the week before. Maybe Mike McCarthy or his coaches envisioned Nelson running Jones' deep over routes or 20-yard digs that he once could approximate doing. The Packers came out of halftime with a run-pass option behind the line and a 3-yard stop route looking to see if veteran Brent Grimes, the undersized cornerback, could get Nelson on the ground. These days, everyone gets Nelson on the ground, provided he doesn't fall first. Nelson tried his old stiffarm on Grimes but that didn't work, either. Those two catches gained 6 yards, a nice third-and-4 slant was worth 5 and a screen picked up 6. He failed to separate on a take-off that was intercepted and a take-off that was smothered. His biggest moment came on third and 1 at the 5 when the Bucs called one of their rare blitzes (just two of 29 dropbacks) and the ball came out fast to him in the left flat. If Cobb had blocked nickel back Robert McClain, Nelson had a shot to convert. Instead, the 5-9 McClain shoved Cobb out of the way and helped FS Justin Evans stop the play for no gain. Watching Nelson maneuver is like seeing a Great Lakes freighter entering port. Everything is labored. There isn't any suddenness. On five occasions Nelson was lined up inside in a "trips" formation. More than once the Bucs just sent out a linebacker to cover him. He's a strapping man but with decreasing speed and change of direction defenders are unloading on him after the catch. Unlike Cobb, Nelson did a fine job blocking. So did Geronimo Allison (nine), who despite limited exposure showed immense pride and improved strength as a blocker on four occasions. On the first ball thrown his way since Game 7, Allison left the speedy Evans in the dust on a 19-yard corner from the slot. He ran the route to the best of his ability and stretched out at the rear pylon but the ball was overthrown. Actually, Cobb couldn't have dropped anything because nothing was thrown to him. Besides the missed block in the red zone, Cobb also had an offensive pass-interference penalty against him nullified. For possibly the first time Davante Adams (49) looked frustrated by the goings on. He made three catches for 28 (two against Grimes) in the opening series and then caught one of just three targets after that. He was open inside and deep but for one reason or another wasn't a factor. Trevor Davis increased his 12-game snap count to 44 with one play in a seldom-seen five-WR set. He blocked his man, too, on an 11-yard screen to Adams. Tight ends Lance Kendricks (30, 19 with his hand down) and Richard Rodgers (29, 18 with his hand down) performed creditably as blockers.

OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

Every opponent tries to keep two big bodies on 3-technique Gerald McCoy. He's tremendous, and with DE Robert Ayers (concussion) out the Bucs don't have another capable pass rusher. On Sunday, defensive coordinator Mike Smith did the exact opposite of his blitzkrieg in Atlanta and pressured on merely 6.9% of passes. That meant this unit could double McCoy on virtually every pass (he played all 55 snaps) and hope to get by with three single-teams elsewhere. Of DE Will Clarke's two sacks, one was charged to Brett Hundley as he attempted to run without pressure and the other was charged to Jahri Evans for allowing a flush to McCoy. His only other pressure was a stunt against the vulnerable right side of Jason Spriggs and Evans. The best player was guard Lane Taylor. He has become a smooth customer passing off stunts with David Bakhtiari. He also pulled four times on power plays worth 36 yards besides using his massive frame to create movement for the zone runs. Bakhtiari didn't suffer much stress against three rotating and pedestrian ends but did take down Clarke for a holding penalty. Corey Linsley delivered at least two textbook reach blocks on which old pro Chris Baker was pancaked. He failed to reach backup NT Sealver Siliga on one of the team's two runs for minus yardage and drew a ticky-tack holding penalty that was nullified. Evans usually holds his own on inside-zone runs. McCoy beat Evans across his face for one "bad" run, and Evans yielded three pressures. Spriggs has played considerably better the past two weeks than he did in relief against Baltimore. He's not afraid. He can move. Of his two pressures and one "bad" run, the run stood out. Everyone basically got their guy on second and goal from the 1 except Spriggs. DE Ryan Russell got the jump inside on Spriggs, caving him backward and into Jamaal Williams for no gain.

QUARTERBACKS (2)

Brett Hundley helped win the game with his legs. In the 70-yard drive to force overtime and the 72-yard TD drive in overtime, he kept twice off read-option action for 32 yards. "They did a good job setting it up," Bucs coach Dirk Koetter said Monday. "At the end of the game we were committed to stopping the halfback and the quarterback pulled it ... and we let him out. I think that's probably what Hundley does best." On the third play in overtime, the Packers faced third and 4. Hundley looked right where Adams flashed open before the safety came down hard for what would have been an interception. He looked left. At the 4.2-second mark Hundley ran out to his right barely ahead of Clarke, who ran a 4.75 40 in 2014, and gained 7. Pass rushers can be bearing down on Hundley but he gets to top speed quickly. Hundley is faster than Aaron Rodgers; he ran 4.63 in 2015 whereas Rodgers ran 4.75 a decade earlier. Not unlike Colin Kaepernick, Hundley's ability to run as well as scramble makes him hard to defend. On the other hand, Hundley looked like a novice in the passing game. With Nelson blanketed on the play-action deep shot, he didn't look Justin Evans off and gave up an easy interception. His missed TD to Allison was brutal. He's not adept in the screen game. He sailed the ball high on a 20-yard sideline throw to Adams. Perhaps his only rhythmic throw all day was the 13-yard slant to Adams on third and 2. The Packers had 77 net passing yards, the fewest yielded by Tampa Bay since 2009. The education of a young quarterback continues.

RUNNING BACKS (4 ½)

Jamaal Williams (48) broke just two tackles. Both were against SLB Kentrell Beckwith. His modus operandi is to make one decisive cut toward daylight and dip the shoulder when the first defender arrives. Boom! Almost every time he falls forward for an extra two yards because the tackler usually ends up getting the worst of it. With Hundley and the passing game in the deep freeze, Williams controlled the tempo for McCarthy's offense by gaining 85 yards on 12 first-down carries (7.1). Without it, Smith might have teed off on third and long with blitzes by his speedy linebackers and created all kinds of mischief. His 1-yard TD was blocked horribly almost across the board. Amid all kinds of penetration, Williams had to make an uncharacteristic and undesirable move laterally. When he stuck his foot in the ground just inside the 4, FS Chris Conte was making contact with Williams and FB Aaron Ripkowski. Other Bucs kept arriving, too, but Williams simply would not be denied. He doesn't run into piles. He doesn't go down easily. Returning to active duty after injuries limited him to six snaps in the last three games, Aaron Jones received one snap in each half. That's a measure of how well Williams performed. From the 20, Jones showed remarkable patience, vision and confidence. Rather than accept a gain of a yard or two in a plugged-up middle, Jones saw Justin Evans charging up from safety rather than playing his responsibility outside. He made Evans miss and Clarke, too, and a few seconds later the Packers were at .500 in a game they were fortunate to win.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Peyton Barber, a free-agent power back in his second season from Auburn, slapped the front for 102 yards in 23 carries (4.4). This came behind a revamped offensive line with new starters at center and right tackle. Neither of the replacements fared well, either. The Bucs, who came in ranked 28th in rushing, exploded for 165. There was almost no deception. They ran their zone stuff with the 225-pound Barber and the Packers increasingly gave way as the game wore on. There was almost no penetration. For the first time all season Green Bay didn't have a tackle for loss. Just two weeks removed from a high-ankle sprain, Kenny Clark (played 38 of a possible 76 defensive snaps) wasn't himself at the point of attack. That hurt, and so did the inability of Mike Daniels (58) to disengage from blocks as often as usual. Quinton Dial (26) seldom gets off blocks. He's a classic space-eater. Dean Lowry (38) wasn't all that good on a down-in, down-out basis. He made the play of the game, however, catching a strip-sack fumble forced by Clark and returning it 62 yards for the Packers' longest regular-season fumble return for a TD since DE Keith McKenzie went 88 with Mike Tomczak's giveaway at Pittsburgh in November 1998. Rookie Montravius Adams was inactive again. The pass rush, however, was a different story. Clark fought his way through congestion for two sacks to go with a pair of hurries. Lowry enjoyed the gift of an unblocked sack and two hurries against RT Caleb Benenoch. Daniels had a half-sack plus a knockdown. However, he also had two off-sides penalties.

LINEBACKERS (2)

This unit has been besieged by screen passes most of the season. Jameis Winston completed an assortment of seven screens for 80 yards and had a 20-yarder brought back by penalty. With the Packers playing mainly two-deep coverages to help against WRs Mike Evans and DeSean Jackson, Koetter indicated that rather than challenge tighter windows down the field the Bucs threw underneath. Many of the screens went over the head of outside Nick Perry (56), who seems almost oblivious to that important part of the game. One screen never got started when Clay Matthews (56) pulled off his rush and hugged Barber, the intended receiver. Of Matthews' 2 ½ sacks, 1 ½ came against Benenoch. Matthews had 3 ½ pressures in all despite encountering his highest rate of double-team blocking (43.5%) this season. Perry was up and down against the run and had 1 ½ pressures. Rookie Vince Biegel wasn't injured but, after playing 56 snaps in the last four games, he was benched and relegated to special teams only. Kyler Fackrell (31) didn't have much luck rushing but did display good feel in coverage and spying after pulling off several rushes. Both Ahmad Brooks (29) and Fackrell joined Matthews and Perry in the so-called NASCAR package on third downs. Brooks had two pressures in an assertive rush. Probably the best play made against a screen was by Blake Martinez (76) late in the first half. The Bucs had two blockers available and what looked like a possible 19-yard TD when Martinez breezed through and spilled RB Charles Sims for a 1-yard gain. However, Martinez' ordinary speed was evident on a 34-yard screen to Barber when he missed the tackle after a fruitless chase. Playing zone against TE Cameron Brate, Winston's favorite red-zone target, Martinez must stay so close that there's no room for the 11-yard TD pass. Martinez always gets in on a flock of tackles but he also missed three more. Jake Ryan (43) made two nice plays on screens but came up short on others. He rushed well, filled fast for a no-gainer on the goal-line and made tackles on two other runs for short gains. On a 19-yard run, he was mauled by RG J.R. Sweezy. When Ryan appeared to be shaken up Joe Thomas played 10 snaps. It was his first action from scrimmage since Game 4.

SECONDARY (3)

Matching up on the basis of size, the Packers assigned Davon House (74) to Mike Evans and Damarious Randall (52) to DeSean Jackson. Their main coverages were Cover 2 with a four-man rush (Capers blitzed on only 23.3% of passes) and Cover 2 man-under-zone. Taking advantage of safety help, House was able to stand in across from Evans in press and limit him to 33 yards in two catches. Playing with a bum shoulder, he also broke up two passes in possibly his best performance of the season. Randall, who sat out about 20 plays before returning after evaluation for a concussion, stood out on a deflection of a pass inside the 5 to Brate. Jackson was wide open against Randall several times but the ball wasn't thrown. With Kevin King (shoulder) sidelined indefinitely, the Packers moved Randall outside and put Morgan Burnett (76) back in the slot. Josh Hawkins, the No. 3 corner, isn't suited for the slot so he was limited to 14 snaps as Randall's replacement. Hawkins had one of the two or three most blatant drops by a defensive back in 12 games. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (76) didn't miss a tackle although half a dozen times he was one-on-one with a ball carrier and much open space behind. Josh Jones (60) was OK as the starter alongside Clinton-Dix. Jermaine Whitehead (23) got the nod as the dime back over Marwin Evans, who was withheld from scrimmage for the first time since Game 2. Whitehead had Brate in man coverage down the middle of a two-deep shell but went for a jab step and got gouged for a 28-yard TD pass.

KICKERS (3 ½)

Mason Crosby made field goals from 37 and 22 yards. His five kickoffs averaged 67.8 yards and 3.90 seconds of hang time. Justin Vogel boomed a 57-yard punt with 4.93 hang time from his end zone to flip field position in the third quarter. His four-punt averages were 45.3 (gross), 42.3 (net) and 3.89 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (4)

The day got off to an abysmal start when Trevor Davis' 70-yard kickoff return was wiped out by Vince Biegel's holding penalty against WR Freddie Martino. Actually, it appeared Biegel held Martino once, let him go for a second or two and then held him again. The other penalty was offsides against Lowry on the extra-point block team. Undaunted, Davis came back to average 30.3 in four returns. He has speed, vision and more than enough courage. Later, he downed the ball on kickoffs 3 and 4 yards deep with average or below hang time. He's dangerous enough to be bringing those out, especially given the lack of a passing game. Kyler Fackrell and Joe Thomas ran a beautiful twist inside, with Fackrell sweeping past LS Garrison Sanborn and using his 33-inch arms to block Bryan Anger's punt. In a boneheaded move, Whitehead risked a fumble by fielding the block in traffic. DE Will Clarke of Tampa Bay came close to blocking one of Vogel's punts after beating protection by LS Brett Goode and one of his low, slow snaps. Goode had just one "perfect laces" in four placement snaps. Three required adjustment/spin by Vogel, the holder; one extra point was on the ground and another was high.