

# Rating the Packers: Week 16 vs Vikings

*By Bob McGinn Posted: Dec 25, 2017*

Mike McCarthy won a ton of football games with three and sometimes as many as four tight ends on his game-day roster.

On Saturday night the Green Bay Packers were down to one after the second series when Richard Rodgers suffered a shoulder injury. Many factors contributed to the Packers' 16-0 loss to the Minnesota Vikings at Lambeau Field but few were easier to fix than making sure the team's roster was adequately staffed at tight end.

At various points in the first half the Packers also lost Jason Spriggs, Aaron Jones and Jordy Nelson for the entire game. Afterward, McCarthy said the loss of Rodgers, which left Lance Kendricks as the remaining tight end, was the most costly.

"We were out of our two-tight end offense," McCarthy said. "That was a much tougher injury as far as things on the call sheet and taking you out of your game plan, particularly the run and the run-action stuff we weren't able to get to."

Starter Martellus Bennett was the third tight end until the Packers jettisoned him after seven games. Fortunately for McCarthy, it hadn't been an issue because Kendricks and Rodgers never got hurt.

Added to the practice squad were tight ends Emanuel Byrd, who was in training camp for a month, on Nov. 3, and Robert Tonyan on Dec. 5. One of them might have been promoted, or the Packers could have signed one of the veterans from their emergency list.

With so much dead weight and several injured players on the roster, the Packers easily could have cleared space for a third tight end.

Here's a look at the snap counts for tight ends in Game 15 only for the last eight seasons:

2009 – Donald Lee, 39; Jermichael Finley, 36; Spencer Havner, 14.

2010 – Andrew Quarless, 37; Tom Crabtree, 33; Lee, 18.

2011 – Finley, 40; Crabtree, 26; Ryan Taylor, eight; D.J. Williams, eight.

2012 – Finley, 46; Williams, 42; Taylor, eight; C-G Greg Van Roten, eight.

2013 – Quarless, 60; Taylor, 48; T Marshall Newhouse, two; Jake Stoneburner, one.

2014 – Quarless, 41; Rodgers, 35; C JC Tretter, five; Brandon Bostick, three.

2015 – Rodgers, 48; Quarless, 25.

2016 – Jared Cook, 35; Rodgers, 29; T Jason Spriggs, four.

Considering how little attention the Vikings paid Kendricks as a receiver, it's possible a double tight end formation might have been highly effective. It also would have helped control the late shifts of safety Harrison Smith into the box.

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. Jake Ryan; 3. Lucas Patrick.

As a team, the Packers received two footballs.

## RECEIVERS ( ½ )

Jordy Nelson played one of the worst games of his career. His diminished production as a receiver over the last two months has stood out. In this game, he blocked poorly as well. On one “bad” run, he couldn’t prevent Terence Newman, the 39-year-old cornerback, from blowing it up off the slot. On another, he failed to cut off SS Andrew Sendejo on the back side. He failed to get Smith blocked on a 2-yard run, too. Last year, the Vikings still thought enough of Nelson to match Xavier Rhodes on him. In October, Rhodes was assigned Davante Adams. On Saturday night, Rhodes didn’t really travel with anyone. When Nelson caught quick outs of 4 and 5 yards in front of him before falling down, Rhodes looked at him as if to say, “Is that all you’ve got?” With Newman in coverage, Nelson dropped a routine 7-yard slant as he was falling. On a free play, Nelson caught Rhodes off balance and beat him on a 25-yard post. The old Jordy Nelson would have made that catch in his sleep. Replay review showed that the 32-year-old Nelson had it jarred loose by Rhodes. Finally, after playing 27 of the possible 67 snaps on offense, Nelson left with a shoulder injury. More than anything, the whole thing was just sad. Maybe the grand old campaigner has just hit the wall. Adams (concussion) was on the sidelines in sweats when he ended up about four yards onto the field complaining about a non-interference call. That got him an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Mike McCarthy wasn’t seen admonishing Adams to get off the field. It shows a lack of class on Adams’ part. I’ve often wondered if two prominent fixtures in the forefront of the Packers’ bench area every Sunday, director of security Doug Collins and football administration coordinator Matt Klein, are at risk of being assessed a 15-yard penalty. They’re often demonstrative and seemingly loud when calls go against Green Bay. The long gain of 10 yards by Randall Cobb (60) came courtesy of a blatant pick by Geronimo Allison (53). With injuries to Adams and Nelson, Cobb ran more deep routes in one night than he might have in a month. He made a great effort on a bomb that skipped off his outstretched fingers. If Trevor Davis (16) had done the same he might have had a 51-yard touchdown. Allison’s drop on a curl happened when he didn’t come back for the ball. Jeff Janis’ 12 snaps were four more than in the first 14 games. He separated from Newman on a crossing route for 12. It was the debut for Michael Clark (28), the towering rookie free agent who demonstrated equal parts potential and inexperience. He dropped a 25-yard take-off against Trae Waynes on the opening third down. At the end, he failed to extend his arms that enabled Rhodes to jar the ball loose in the end-zone corner. In between, Clark beat Waynes twice for 29. Richard Rodgers lasted two snaps from scrimmage (and three on special teams) before departing with the shoulder. Kendricks played a season-high 58 snaps and dropped passes at the Minnesota 6 and 26. Those catches will be hard to forget.

## OFFENSIVE LINE (4)

RT Jason Spriggs was carted off with an apparent serious left knee injury on the first play. It couldn’t be considered much of a loss because his play has been so marginal. The problem was that Justin McCray, who spent all week practicing for RG Jahri Evans (knee), shifted immediately to replace Spriggs and Lucas Patrick, with a huge club protecting his damaged left hand, stepped in for the inactive Evans. McCray, who hadn’t played since Game 10, did serviceable work against talented DE Danielle Hunter. He and Patrick, who hadn’t played since Game 6, provided a more stout run-blocking side than Spriggs-Evans. McCray is more than just massive. He knows his limitations and works smartly to compensate for them. He allowed 2 ½ pressures. One hand or not, Patrick is a finisher who goes for the throat. He hunts work in pass protection and can get movement for the run. He gores defenders if he can. The only “bad” runs for a starter were 1 ½ for Corey Linsley. Still, that wasn’t really a negative because few people have been able to block NT Linval Joseph. The left side of Lane Taylor and David Bakhtiari was solid: Taylor gave up one pressure whereas Bakhtiari allowed 2 ½. “Bakhtiari is one of the best tackles I face,” said DE Everson Griffen, who beat Bakhtiari for one knockdown. “He should be in the Pro Bowl this year. I respect him.” On Sunday, coach Mike Zimmer said Brett Hundley’s ability to scramble, not the slippery field, was the main reason the Vikings’ rush was so ordinary. “We had to change during the game and say keep him in the pocket and don’t worry about getting a sack,” he said. Griffen referred to that conservative tactic as “cage” rushing.

## **QUARTERBACKS (1 ½ )**

His receivers dropped a total of 11 passes in Brett Hundley's first six starts. In this game they dropped seven. Five would have been for first-down yardage. The total of the catch points was 75 yards. In addition, the 25-yard "free play" to Nelson and the 13-yard TD pass to Clark were catchable but shouldn't be categorized as drops. Hundley isn't good enough to play above that type of non-support. The loss of Davante Adams, easily his go-to man, was enormous as well. Those trying to pin the lion's share of the defeat on Hundley are way off base. Facing a premier, savvy, well-coached defense, Hundley kept battling and hurt the Vikings with his legs. His scrambles of 24 and 22 yards represented two of the three longest gains made by both teams. He's so dangerous afoot that Mike Zimmer had to change his entire rush strategy. He finished one long jaunt by lowering his shoulder and trying to run through Smith. That can't continue. It's too risky. He also made a terrible mistake on Smith's red-zone interception. If he had looked Sendejo off there would have been a larger window for Kendricks. Instead, he locked on all the way and the center fielder never had to move. The better play would have been zipping it to Kendricks a count earlier. His deep-ball accuracy was woeful, but playing for the first time in arctic weather would account for some of that. Hundley spun some gorgeous, tight spirals that were on the money and just weren't caught. He showed maturity beyond his years by not erupting at the guilty parties.

## **RUNNING BACKS (3)**

Jamaal Williams (62) performed well in his first brutally cold game. The Californian pounded 15 times at the Vikings between the tackles and gouged out 58 yards (3.9). He didn't break any tackles. His long gain was just 9 yards. He did, however, make Zimmer respect the run, and that in turn opened up the throwing lanes in which receivers dropped the ball. Williams holds the football high and tight. Couple that with his conscientiousness and strength and it's why he has yet to fumble in 153 touches (he had five fumbles in 786 touches at Brigham Young). Williams appears to have an excellent attitude, and he is much improved in pass protection. Fellow rookie Aaron Jones (four) is fragile. He was knocked out of Game 9 with a sprained left knee and exited early here with a sprained right knee. Devante Mays, the third rookie draft choice, was active for a 10th game but for the ninth time didn't play from scrimmage. The coaches played Williams almost every snap essentially because they don't trust Mays on assignments or ball security. Those pre-draft knocks apparently haven't been dismissed. Don't expect to see Mays or other deep reserves Sunday for the finale in Detroit. "I'm focused on winning the game," McCarthy said Sunday. "Preseason is long gone. I have zero interest in trying to throw a guy a bone and get him a couple reps because it's the end of the year. That's not how you coach a team." The role for Aaron Ripkowski (12) was limited, as usual.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Undoubtedly there was hard coaching going on here last week. Quarterbacks had gained too many rushing yards (108 in 24 carries) in the last four games. Running backs had been slipping out too easily on screen passes and killing the defense. Front-seven players were jumping off-sides too much. In all three areas, major improvement was evident. Case Keenum, with 162 yards on the ground, was penned in and had to settle for three kneel-downs and a sneak for 2. Keenum also failed to complete a screen when Kenny Clark (played 46 of the possible 65 snaps on defense) and Dean Lowry (33) each diagnosed one and wrecked it. On his, Clark proceeded to chase Keenum out of bounds in 6.2 seconds. It qualified as a garbage sack but no one will remember that when the final stats are in. Clark rushed well all day. His three-pressure night included a second sack on a stunt against LG Nick Easton. Clark also was 25 yards downfield assisting on a tackle. The double teams have been coming increasingly toward Clark. Mike Daniels (42) had quite a few one-on-one rushes against RG Joe Berger but was unable to solve the 13-year pro. Lowry came off blocks twice to make stops on runs netting 3 yards. Quinton Dial (19) was on the field for most of the 18 snaps in base. He missed two tackles in the first quarter but bounced back to shock Berger with his hands, disengage and swallow up the ball carrier for 1. In a rare sighting, rookie Montravius Adams was on the field for nine snaps (three were kneel-downs). His first snap illustrated why the coaches won't play him more. Working one-on-one, Easton came off against Adams at the point of attack and, when the whistle blew, the Vikings had an 8-yard gain and the rookie was underneath Easton near the pile.

## **LINEBACKERS (4)**

Recovered from a knee injury that kept him from playing a down from scrimmage last week in Carolina, Jake Ryan (55) started opposite Blake Martinez (65) and Joe Thomas was relegated to special teams only. It was one of Ryan's best games. He made seven tackles after disengaging from blocks. The gains on those seven carries were 1, 2, 2, 1, 2, 3 and 1 yard. LT Riley Reiff and Jeremiah Sirles, who replaced the injured Easton (broken ankle, out for the year) after 12 snaps, each were victimized three times by Ryan. He wasn't nearly as sharp in coverage. On another play, Ryan was so out of sorts that he actually was gesturing toward Ha Ha Clinton-Dix behind him even though the ball already had been snapped. When Ryan turned back to the business at hand, Diggs was on him for an easy crack-back block and the rush was for 11. Martinez was adequate. With Clay Matthews (hamstring) and Nick Perry (ankle-shoulder) sidelined, Ahmad Brooks (19) and Kyler Fackrell (39) got the starts. Other than jumping off-sides for the third time in seven games, Brooks had a quiet day. Fackrell, with three pressures, played off TE Kyle Rudolph and Sirles to sack Keenum on a bootleg. Using persistence and his unorthodox style, Fackrell also registered two pressures against Reiff. Other snaps counts outside were 46 for Reggie Gilbert, 16 for Vince Biegel and 10 for Chris Odom. Paired with Biegel and playing before Odom, Gilbert was effective enough to almost triple Biegel's playing time. Gilbert, a free agent who generally played from a three-point stance in a 3-3-5 defense at Arizona, had been on the practice squad for almost two full seasons before making his debut here. His three pressures included 1 ½ knockdowns against RT Mike Remmers. Odom started slowly but showed good pursuit. Biegel was a non-factor again.

## **SECONDARY (3 ½)**

The impression left by the Packers is they were surprised Damarious Randall didn't play. He was added to the injury report Friday as questionable with a knee injury. Taking one for the team, Davon House (49) played as long as he could with shoulder and back injuries. He broke up a third-and-7 pass to Adam Thielen and made sure a long "free play" to Diggs wasn't completed. Josh Hawkins (53) also started before Lenzy Pipkins (19) played in the second half. The plan was to have nickel back Morgan Burnett (65) cover Thielen underneath with help over the top. No way the Packers wanted a repeat of Thielen's 9-96 exploits Oct. 15 in Minneapolis. That half of it worked; Thielen finished 2-24. Diggs, however, lit up Hawkins. If Hawkins had used his timed speed (4.39) to get close to Diggs he then could have looked back for the ball and defended it. When Hawkins never looked back the pass-interference penalty (39 yards) was simple. Hawkins' second P.I. was declined because Diggs caught the sideline pass over him for 20. Pipkins had been on the bench since the first Vikings game. He shows a nice, low backpedal and toughness as a tackler. He caught a break when the pass was overthrown after he peeked on a long slant-and-go to Thielen. Josh Jones (30) basically was benched after he kept being late to the flats and had to be told where to line up and when to get off the field. His rookie season has been a terrible disappointment. Jones had started alongside Clinton-Dix (65), who had a chance to make the play of the game but dropped a pick that he would have returned for a 29-yard TD. Clinton-Dix made another nice break on a pass to McKinnon, who had beat Martinez inside from the slot. However, he didn't get there to break up the 9-yard gain because he was too deep in his disguise. The Vikings' longest gain was a 23-yard dump to TE David Morgan, who leaked out from the protection on third and 13. Charging up, Clinton-Dix had a chance to stop Morgan a yard or two short of the first down but ducked his head again and the tight end chugged by. Instead of punting, the Vikings shortly had another field goal. Assuming snaps from Jones were the dime back, Jermaine Whitehead (31), and even Marwin Evans (three).

## **KICKERS (1 ½)**

Justin Vogel, from sunny Tampa, perhaps understandably didn't fare well in his first exposure to single-digit temperatures. His first punt, a 23-yarder was parked out of bounds and set up the Vikings' opening field goal. Three of his six punts went out of bounds, and just one ended inside the 20. His averages were 38.5 yards (gross), 36.7 (net) and 4.03 seconds of hang time. Mason Crosby had a rather uneventful night. His one kickoff carried 64 yards with 3.91 hang time.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (2)**

Minnesota LS Kevin McDermott suffered a left shoulder injury on a punt snap with 27 seconds left in the first half. On Tuesday, the Vikings plan to audition snappers. David Morgan replaced him and was shaky on his first couple attempts, but to their discredit the Packers couldn't take advantage by making a game-turning play. On one of his seven punts Ryan Quigley hitched. Still, the onrushing Whitehead could only come close to the block. Trevor Davis is a big-time threat in need of a crease. In a disappointing day when a big return was critical, his long in six runbacks was 34 yards. His decision-making was iffy as well. He made a fair catch of a punt that hung just 2.76 seconds and another at the 5. Coverage work against tough little Marcus Sherels was solid.