

Rating the Packers: Week 17 at Lions

By Bob McGinn Posted: Jan 2, 2017

Seldom, if ever, in my 39 seasons covering the Green Bay Packers has a player been more deserving of being taken off the field and wasn't than Ha Ha Clinton-Dix Sunday against the Detroit Lions at Ford Field.

Clinton-Dix, the fourth-year safety, played as though he didn't want to be in uniform. By conservative count there are half a dozen plays in which he either tried to avoid contact entirely or did everything in his power to minimize it.

Coach Mike McCarthy and safeties coach Darren Perry, and to a lesser extent defensive coordinator Dom Capers in the coaches box, should have recognized this early and refused to tolerate it. Clinton-Dix should have been on the bench and in his place should have been Marwin Evans, a second-year safety that was used only on special teams.

Instead, Clinton-Dix made a mockery of McCarthy's pre-game speech that the team would "play for the commitment we've made to each other ... and for the 'G' on our helmet."

As usual, Clinton-Dix was permitted to play every defensive snap from scrimmage as though his level of effort was worthy. He then spoke to reporters afterward.

"We took an L," he said. "We didn't come out to play today, and that's the end of it."

Clinton-Dix should have spoken for himself. Many players did play hard in the 35-11 defeat. He didn't.

When asked what areas of his game he'd earmark for improvement in the off-season, Clinton-Dix said, "I'm not going to worry about working or nothing. I'm chilling ... football is my job. I love it ... it's been a long season so I'm looking forward to just kicking back and chilling."

In reality, Clinton-Dix began his vacation a week early. His objective, to avoid getting hurt, was a success.

Many saw his horrible play on the 54-yard touchdown pass to Kenny Golladay. After being lined up wide, he took a bad angle to intercept Golladay in the deep middle of the field. He tried to take Golladay up high but brought such minimal force that Golladay stiff-armed him.

At that point, 25 yards from the end zone, any safety worth his salary would chase even harder and, at the very least, dive in an attempt to clip the wide receiver's heels. What Clinton-Dix did was gear down and stride with beautiful form 10 yards behind Golladay.

Ameer Abdullah caught a short pass in the flat. When Abdullah turned up field, there was about seven yards between him and Clinton-Dix, who was standing unblocked near the boundary. Abdullah was able to run forward and make it an 11-yard gain before meeting Clinton-Dix because the safety never moved up to meet him head-on.

On the 71-yard TD pass to Golden Tate, Clinton-Dix might have made the tackle inside the 10 if he had discarded Marvin Jones in the middle of the field and hustled over at top speed. Instead, he shut it down as if being blocked by Jones and let Davon House, who was playing with a broken transverse process bone in his back, hustle over and hurt himself on a diving attempt.

When Abdullah swept left end for a 7-yard TD other defenders did all they could to knock off blockers or get him down. As the unblocked man, it was Clinton-Dix's tackle to make. Instead, he turned down contact, running over to the pylon and almost as an after-thought sticking out his elbow at Abdullah near the 1. He was in position to deliver a devastating hit from the side. He didn't.

When right guard T.J. Lang pulled left, Clinton-Dix wanted no part of him and jumped several yards outside as the running lane widened.

Golladay appeared to brush-block him on a fourth-quarter run. Paying more attention to the progress of Golladay to his left than the ball carrier to his right, Clinton-Dix stayed back away from contact and leaned into Golladay.

Clinton-Dix was credited with one solo tackle, a season-low. He couldn't have turned in a more ignominious final chapter in his dreadful season.

When McCarthy, who saw it all unfold in front of him, was asked Sunday about his team's effort, he replied, "I thought our energy was really good to start. It wasn't quite what it needed to be in the second half."

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

The three stars of the game were: 1. Randall Cobb. 2. Trevor Davis. 3. Aaron Ripkowski.

As a team, the Packers received one football.

RECEIVERS (1 ½)

Minus Davante Adams (concussion) and Jordy Nelson (shoulder), Trevor Davis played a career-high 39 snaps (of the possible 68 on offense) and Jeff Janis played 30, 10 more than he had all season. Davis made the best play all day on offense, beating elite CB Darius Slay on a clever double move and then making a great adjustment to make the 29-yard catch. On a block-block-screen he made two tacklers miss on a 21-yard completion. Davis was far from perfect. He was late off the ball on a missed assignment that messed up a screen to Janis. But at least he can run, and the Packers didn't have nearly enough speed this season. Janis made a better effort than Davis did against the Vikings, leaving his feet for what would have been a 23-yard touchdown. Score it as a drop. If Janis makes that play, he would have some non-special teams tape to show future employers. Randall Cobb (52) scored eight points, beating MLB Jarrad Davis out of the backfield on an option route (17-yard TD) and to the flat (two-point conversion). Cobb drew a holding penalty on Slay with a sharp cut and used his old Kentucky quarterback's left arm to complete a 10-yard throwback. He was smashed after the ball arrived but should have completed a catch for 33 yards. In his second game, rookie Michael Clark (47) failed to impress. He's gigantic and has up side, but remains a project. Geronimo Allison (22) battled through a hand injury and caught two short passes. TE Lance Kendricks played 58 snaps, including 17 with his hand down, but remarkably didn't have a single ball thrown to him. The debut of rookie TE Emanuel Byrd (11, five with his hand down) included a 3-yard pass in the flat that ruptured into 29 when the Lions didn't cover him.

OFFENSIVE LINE (1)

This wasn't a good way to go out. Three of the four sacks came on stunts; the Lions ran a bunch knowing the right side of G Lucas Patrick and T Justin McCray was new. There wasn't enough sustaining in the run game. Guys were standing around too much rather than hustling downfield like this unit had developed a reputation for doing over the past several years. Patrick finished on a down note after being impressive the week before against a better front in Minnesota's. The Packers pulled a lineman on nine runs for 25 yards, and Patrick had the most with four for 8 yards. He didn't show balance or agility on pulls. On one pull he overran WLB Tahir Whitehead, who made the tackle for no gain. In protection, he was partially responsible for two sacks and was charged with a team-high four pressures. He was on the ground too much, and he drew a false start. It's hard to evaluate Patrick, however, because of the big club protecting his damaged right hand. DE Ziggy Ansah, normally a right-side player, played the majority of his 40 snaps against McCray on the other side. Ansah's three sacks included 1 ½ against McCray, one against David Bakhtiari and one-half against Patrick. In all, McCray allowed 2 ½ pressures and was the only lineman not charged with a "bad" run. One play illustrated why Mike McCarthy and others have praised McCray. Initially missing DT Akeem Spence on the back side, McCray took about four steps before, as the dutiful player that he is, doubling back and ear-holing the unsuspecting Spence. Operating mainly against DE Anthony Zettel and ancient warrior Dwight Freeney, Bakhtiari had a disappointing day with 3 ½ pressures and one-half "bad" run. Asked to pull on one play, he flashed his ability on the move by eliminating nickel back Jamal Agnew and MLB Jarrad Davis. Lane Taylor and Corey Linsley were pushed to the max trying to prevent DT A'Shawn Robinson from powering through them. Taylor was charged with two pressures and 1 ½ "bad" runs; Linsley had one pressure and one "bad" run.

QUARTERBACKS (1)

The Packers were in position for a 17-3 lead late in the first quarter if not for two plays. On the opening drive, Brett Hundley's third-and-6 pass to Jamaal Williams at the 12 not only wasn't caught, it was intercepted by Jarrad Davis off the running back's hands. The Packers were on the threshold of another TD when Hundley committed the unpardonable sin of fumbling in the red zone (Detroit 16). Hundley was just about ready to bring his second arm to cover the ball when FS Glover Quin poked it out. Given Adams' absence and inferior play by the offensive line, it wasn't in the cards for this offense to recover. Hundley needed someone to make a great play, and other than Davis on the 29-yarder no one did. There were five drops. For a change, none of the sacks were charged to Hundley. In his 29 dropbacks, he was down 11 times. Hundley's last play of the season was a terrible interception as he was being knocked down by DT Christian Ringo on a pressure against Patrick. Joe Callahan debuted with 7 snaps in the final 2:10. His only snap of interest was an incompleting to Clark on a throw from the right hash to the left sideline. Callahan wound up to generate velocity, and although Clark was open coming back for the ball the throw was late and CB DJ Hayden knocked it away. Arm strength, height and athleticism are the question marks regarding Callahan's future.

RUNNING BACKS (3)

As usual, FB Aaron Ripkowski (10) didn't play much. He averaged 11.3 snaps in 2017, down from 19.1 a year ago. He had a solid day blocking, however, which was in keeping with his improved play over the second half of the season. On a lead draw for 14 yards, the team's longest rush, Ripkowski delivered a powerful block on MLB Jarrad Davis, the rookie who was extremely physical all afternoon. Later, he came through with effective lead blocks on Tahir Whitehead and Davis again. Randall Cobb's three snaps included the aforementioned scoring plays and a 4-yard rush wide to the left in which he had a lane but uncharacteristically danced and didn't take it. The gap runs weren't productive for Jamaal Williams (56) but the zone reads certainly were. He finished with 22 for 82 (3.7), pounded by Davis throughout but always coming back for more until leaving for concussion evaluation near the end. He broke just one tackle (by Quin). He dropped the inside-breaking route as a split receiver and a third-and-5 screen; pass protection is another area in which he needs work. Devante Mays (nine) left with a shoulder injury early before returning to join Callahan. He served as little more than a punching bag for Davis and LB Jalen Reeves-Maybin on his three receptions for no yards. He enters the off-season as a mystery man.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2)

On the 56-yard bomb to Marvin Jones the Lions double-teamed three of the four rushers and let RG T.J. Lang go it alone against Mike Daniels (played 31 of the possible 58 snaps on defense). Matthew Stafford faked to the running back and on a reverse to Kenny Golladay, slowing the rush, before taking an even deeper drop, waiting and finally delivering the ball in 3.5 seconds. Daniels tried an ineffective spin move but went nowhere against his former teammate. The coverage people take the blame for long plays downfield but when a rusher as good as Daniels is one-on-one he deserves blame for not getting the quarterback off the spot. Daniels never did make much headway against Lang but beat LT Taylor Decker for a sack on a stunt, a cut block by Decker on a tackle for no gain and the Lions' scheme aborting a screen pass. The only other pressure by the unit and the only tackle for loss went to Dean Lowry (26). Kenny Clark (41) couldn't get his rush going but was rugged against the run. Quinton Dial (18) and Montravius Adams (nine) also played. Adams has some ability but will have to redefine his body and improve his conditioning in order to become a legitimate contributor in his second season.

LINEBACKERS (1 ½)

It was obvious that Dom Capers and the defensive staff thought more highly of free agent Reggie Gilbert (40) than rookie Vince Biegel (11), a fourth-round draft choice, at year's end. For the second game in a row Gilbert made several nice plays. In what might have been the Packers' poorest rushing game of the season, Gilbert and Clay Matthews (23) each had two of the club's six total pressures. Gilbert set up Matthews' sack (and probably should have been credited for half of it) on a stunt against LG Joe Dahl in which he grabbed Stafford's ankle a split-second before Matthews arrived. Gilbert also drew a holding penalty with an up-field charge against Decker, gained an edge on Lang and made a tackle for no gain and made a tremendous play reacting instantly to a bubble screen over his head and tackling Golden Tate for no gain. Matthews started alongside Ahmad Brooks (19) but was restricted because of a tight hamstring. His sack came on a stunt against C Graham Glasgow; his knockdown came on a bull rush against RT Rick Wagner. Biegel plays in a crouch so low to the ground that he ends up on his knees or crawling around. He has a long way to go. Brooks jumped offsides but caught a break when Glasgow was negligent snapping the ball; later, he was nabbed for the third time in four games. Kyler Fackrell (23) was a nonfactor. On the inside, Blake Martinez (58) had one of his worst games. On the 54-yard post to Golladay, it's his responsibility to get more depth and cover that route. He also drew a holding penalty on a screen to Theo Riddick, couldn't cover TE Eric Ebron in general and was saved a 10-yard TD to Ebron when the ball was underthrown. Jake Ryan (48) was OK.

SECONDARY (½)

The Packers would have been better off with Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (58) in street clothes. From his body language and level of performance it should have been obvious he didn't want to play. Clinton-Dix and Davon House (28) each missed two tackles, but the difference was that House has been trying to play hurt almost all season. When House couldn't go any longer and Damarius Randall (knee) missed another game, Lenzy Pipkins (52) and Josh Hawkins (33) rotated inside and outside. Pipkins was better than Hawkins but not by much. Pipkins has done some good things in run support but isn't ready for prime time in coverage. Josh Jones (52) played more deep hash than normal with Clinton-Dix often near the line of scrimmage. It took the Lions just four plays to exploit Jones. After two play fakes, Jones vacated the middle of the field to jump an underneath route and saw the ball sail over his head for 56 yards. That was just par for the course. Morgan Burnett (58) continued to be somewhat miscast as the nickel whereas Jermaine Whitehead (10) played his fifth straight game as the dime. On Golden Tate's 71-yard TD Burnett has to get greater depth in his zone drop. Rather than attempt a wrap-tackle of Ebron on third and 7, Whitehead went low and suffered the embarrassment of being hurdled on a 9-yard gain.

KICKERS (2)

Justin Vogel's six-punt averages – 44.8 yards (gross), 36.3 (net) and 4.22 seconds (hang time) – made for one of his poorest games. His worst boot, a 48-yard liner with 3.28 hang in the middle of the field, was returned 20 yards (it had been 39 before an illegal-block penalty cut the runback almost in half). Other than a 55-yard boomer with 5.14 hang and one other, four of his six punts were substandard. Vogel looked bad missing the tackle of Jamal Agnew on his long return, too. Poker-faced Mason Crosby surprised just about everyone with his opening onside kick. He bounced it perfectly. His one kickoff for distance carried 64 yards with 4.1 hang.

SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)

On the onside kick, Jeff Janis got a piece of Jamal Agnew just before Marwin Evans blocked LB Steve Longa. The catcher, Jermaine Whitehead, deftly moved into position and timed his leap well for the recovery. Trevor Davis must take most of the responsibility for the towering punt that turned into a lost fumble. It struck the unsuspecting Donatello Brown in the arm. If Davis did give the "Peter" call to tell Brown to evacuate the area, it wasn't loud enough for the rookie to hear. The Lions were all over the recovery. Conversely, neither Janis nor Davis showed any extra intensity so they weren't able to recover Agnew's muffed punt. Davis did have two solid punt returns but was smeared by the swarming Lions on three kickoff runbacks. After not having a penalty for three games the Packers closed with two equally foolish fouls: Evans for hitting Golden Tate in the head, Mike Daniels for an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for vaulting on the backs of blockers trying to block an extra point.