

# 2017 Packers Defensive Report Card

By Bob McGinn JANUARY 15th, 2018

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This is a nine-part position-by-position series in which the 67 players on the Green Bay Packers' 53-man roster and injured-reserve lists at the end of the season are graded. Playing-time percentages are from offense and defense only.

## DEFENSIVE LINEMEN (5)

**MONTRAVIUS ADAMS (6.2%):** The rookie fractured the fifth metatarsal bone in his left foot in the first practice of training camp and didn't make it back until Game 3. Third-round draft choice could hardly have made less of an impact. In terms of talent, Adams might rank second on the unit to Kenny Clark. Yet he also appears to be lazy, as was evident at Auburn in his first two seasons as a starter. He went from underachiever to achiever as a senior, and the Packers can only hope the same pattern unfolds for them. At least half of Adams' 65 snaps were inside on third-and-long situations. He finished with one pressure. He has movement and can get off the ball, but little worked in his first go-round against NFL interior linemen. It became clear that the staff didn't trust Adams against the run. He appeared to react late and at times was displaced by double teams. Adams needs to redefine his body, get in better shape and grow up fast in 2018. **Grade: D-**

**KENNY CLARK (65.2%):** Made enormous strides in his second season to become the best player on defense if not the entire team. Served as the fulcrum of a solid run defense but also improved significantly as a pass rusher. The Packers saw Clark blossom in his second season in much the same fashion as B.J. Raji, their last first-round nose tackle, did in 2010. Clark might be even stouter than Raji was at the point of attack at his finest but Raji, despite being 20-25 pounds heavier, might have been slightly quicker and a notch better as a pass rusher. Raji had 4 ½ tackles for loss and 33 pressures in 1,070 snaps in 2010 compared to five TFLs and 18 pressures in 688 snaps for Clark. He's a natural holding double-teams, sees the ball well and disengages quickly from blocks. He led the defense in forced fumbles with two and ranked second to Mike Daniels in tackles per snap (one every 8.82) among D-linemen. Played through a high-ankle sprain in mid-November, missing just one game. Team player. The NFC North also can boast NTs Linval Joseph of Minnesota, Eddie Goldman of Chicago and A'Shawn Robinson of Detroit, a murderer's row which should serve to keep Clark motivated. **Grade: A-**

**MIKE DANIELS (59.7%):** Any defense would love to have 10 Mike Daniels'. Down in, down out, he gives phenomenal effort. Exerts leadership with words and actions. Every offense takes measures to prevent Daniels from making five or six plays and wrecking their attack. Started out like a whirlwind in the opener against Seattle but, like the defense, seldom got back to that level. Led the D-line for the first time in tackles per snap (one every 8.75) and tied Clark for the lead in TFLs (five). Missed three tackles, half of Clark's total. Wasn't responsible for any runs of 20 yards or more after allowing six in 2015-'16. Double teams or not, Daniels was somewhat disappointing as a pass rusher. Settled for 19 ½ pressures, his low since 2012 and well off his marks of 31 ½ in 2016 and 32 in '15. **Grade: B.**

**QUINTON DIAL (29.3%):** Ex-49er starter was signed off the street Sept. 5 when the Packers cut DT Christian Ringo, who ended up playing 131 snaps late for Detroit. Ringo was much quicker but Dial was more heavy-handed. Dial became a consistent, capable contributor over his 13 games. Cuts an imposing figure at 6-5 ½, 318, and has 34 ½-inch arms. Massive block-eater. Hard to budge. Can't run at all (5.31), offering next to nothing out of the stack against screens. Little slow to shed blocks and recognize blocking combinations. Very limited pass rusher. Thrashes against double teams, even some single blocks. Just two pressures but a competitive third on the unit in tackles per snap (one every 9.7). Only one-half tackle for loss. Will be 28 in June but figures to be back battling for a berth in 2018. **Grade: C-.**

**DEAN LOWRY (47%):** Started all season at 5-technique in the 3-4 base defense and filled in everywhere. Extremely intelligent (Wonderlic of 31). Able to play any position in any front from an assignment standpoint. Showed overall improvement in his second season. Stopped lining up so far off the ball and began getting to the blocker's edge on occasion. Finished with 11 pressures, up from 8 ½ as a rookie. Works hard to compensate for short arms (31). Has ideal height (6-5 ½) for the position, gives high effort and has some big-play knack. **Grade: C.**

## **LINEBACKERS (11)**

**VINCE BIEGEL (11.6%):** Career got off to a rotten start in mid-May when he broke the fifth metatarsal bone in his foot and underwent surgery. Returned to play in the final nine games as the fifth outside linebacker when the others were healthy. Biegel was the 13th OLB selected; the 14th, Auburn's Carl Lawson, had 8 ½ sacks in 41.9% playing time for the Bengals. Biegel missed valuable practice time but had the advantage of playing the same position in a similar 3-4 defense at Wisconsin. Biegel did some good things on special teams but had just one pressure in 122 snaps. He plays extremely low and tries to dip under tackles, but with marginal quickness was just steered or shoved down or away from the passer. Probably the best looks for Biegel came in short-yardage/goal-line when he sat square and took on blocks or lunged into gaps. He's gung-ho. He made plays in the Big Ten. The question is, does he have the quickness, change of direction and speed to make them in the NFL? **Grade: D.**

**AHMAD BROOKS (32.8%):** In terms of sheer violence, Brooks was almost a breed apart on the roster. Ask some tight ends, even tackles. He's physical as all get-out. All those seasons (12) playing that hard, however, can wear a man out. In Brooks' case it's a chronic back issue that sidelined him for three games at mid-season. He'll be 34 in March so there's no reason for the Packers to try with him again. Brooks played 79.8% of the 49ers' snaps in 2016 as a 16-game starter. With depth in short supply the Packers' decision to pay the veteran campaigner \$3.5 million for one year made sense. Brooks had his moments, too, with 14 ½ pressures, 3 ½ tackles for loss and not a single 20-plus play or TD pass allowed. He also tied for the team lead in penalties with four. He batted down just two passes but that still was one more than anyone else. **Grade: C-.**

**KYLER FACKRELL (42.4%):** At least he played every game. Fackrell was the only one of the top four OLBs who could say that. Otherwise, it was another pedestrian season for this third-round draft choice. He's smart, athletic, fast and fairly quick. He was active enough to post 12 ½ pressures, six more than as a rookie, and average one tackle every 13.2 snaps, far better than Brooks' one every 19.2, for example. Nevertheless, Fackrell remains a disappointment because he isn't physical enough. Despite playing more snaps (354) than anyone on the team on special teams he made a measly three tackles. He lacks innate body strength, doesn't play with leverage and gets pushed around too much. He has no power rush. He wins rushing the passer more with his hands than his feet. **Grade: D+.**

**REGGIE GILBERT (8.1%):** In effect, the Packers regarded Chris Odom as a better player than Gilbert until Dec. 22 when at long last they activated him from the practice squad. Based on his 86 snaps in the last two games, Gilbert probably should have been playing ahead of Fackrell and Biegel, too. In two games Gilbert exerted considerable heat on the passer, finishing with six pressures. Gilbert lacks speed (4.88) but he's bigger (6-3, 261) than Fackrell or Biegel and plays as hard if not harder. He might not be the answer, either, but the Packers should have started finding out before the last two games of his second season. **Grade: D+.**

**BLAKE MARTINEZ (93%):** He played much better than as a rookie, passing up Jake Ryan and Joe Thomas during training camp and never looking back as the every-down linebacker. He played almost every snap for a defense that was beset by injury and was grasping for every element of consistency that it could. Martinez stood tall and was accountable on a poor defense. You look at Martinez' tackling production (team-high 158, team-high nine for loss) and you think he had an outstanding season. But those tackles must be measured against his glaring deficiencies in coverage. Time and again Martinez bit on play-action fakes, took imprecise zone drops, blew assignments or wasn't athletic enough in man coverage. He became a safe haven for opponents looking for an easy completion. As much as Martinez improved against the run he basically stayed the same against the pass. He led LBs in 20-plus plays allowed with 3 ½ and in TD passes with 3 ½. He led the team in missed tackles with 22 (he had seven in 2016), which was the Packers' highest total since LB Nate Wayne missed 24 in 2000. Martinez is tough, competitive and durable. For now, at least, he's also too one-dimensional. **Grade: B-.**

**CLAY MATTHEWS (62.4%):** Injuries continue to pile up, limiting Matthews' contributions. From 2009-'11, his playing time always was right around 85%. Since then, it was 69.3% in 2012, 50.2% in '13, 82.2% in '14, 96.9% in '15, 51.4% in '16 and 62.4% in '17. He's still a solid player but his number of big plays has declined almost every year. He posted a career-low two turnover-producing plays (interceptions, fumbles forced, fumbles recovered) this season, after having three each year from 2012-'16, six in '11, five in '10 and six in '09. Nine seasons of challenging 315-pound tackles with his 255 ppounds have taken their toll. He's still quick, agile and flexible, but just not to the level he once was. From 2009-'12 Matthews led the team in pressures with anywhere from 45 ½ to 55. This season was just the second time in the last five years he finished No. 1 in pressures, but his total was just 30. He was double-teamed on 28.5% of his individual rushes, an increase from 22.6% in 2016, 24% in '15 and 23% in '14 but down from 36.2% in '13, 37.8% in '11 and 35.2% in '10. Matthews batted down one pass, a far cry from his career-best six in 2014. He'll always take chances, which sometimes pays off and sometimes doesn't. **Grade: B-.**

**CHRIS ODOM (5.6%):** The Packers claimed Odom off waivers from Atlanta at the last cut, a move that seemed strange at the time and even more strange now. The rookie free agent played DE in the Falcons' 4-3 all spring and summer, registering two sacks and one QB hit in 161 exhibition snaps. In Green Bay, Odom began the conversion to 3-4 OLB and, in limited playing time, never looked comfortable standing up. The Packers apparently didn't like what they saw, either, as his snap count dipped from 49 in the first eight games to 10 in the last eight games. Odom has average-to-below arm length (32 5/8) and tiny hands (8 ¼). He had merely one pressure but showed good hustle and participated in nine tackles. **Grade: D-.**

**NICK PERRY (51.6%):** Has any player in club history ever suffered more hand and wrist injuries? Perry underwent another hand surgery in September, meaning he has now lost games in four of his six seasons to hand/wrist injuries. He sat out four more games this season, increasing his missed-game total to 26. He has never played all 16 games. Fortunately for Perry, he was able to post a career-best totals of 11 sacks and 57.1% playing time in 2016. That, in turn, led to a five-year extension in March worth \$18.5 million guaranteed. He wasn't bad in 2017, leading OLBs in tackles per snap (one every 12.4) and finishing second on the team in pressures with 26 ½ (he had 36 last year). His tackle-for-loss total of one was way off last year's 5 ½. Perry is a power player who two or three times almost every game mounts a strong rush. He's OK. He just can't stay on the field and, at his age (28 in April), probably won't ever be able to do so. **Grade: C+.**

**JAKE RYAN (48%):** Has just three turnover-producing plays in 1,525 snaps from scrimmage. Overachieving tough guy with a quick trigger to the ball. Had 69 fewer tackles than Blake Martinez but actually made more tackles per snap (one every 5.7; Martinez made one every 6.2). Ryan is a two-down run player who is more effective moving forward than laterally. He's a step slow. Missed nine tackles, three more than last season. Liability in coverage. Bites too much on play-action, lacks precision and depth in zone drops and can get exposed one-on-one. Often injured, has yet to play a 16-game season. **Grade: C.**

**DAVID TALLEY (0.0%):** Rookie free agent from Grand Valley State signed April 8 after mini-camp cattle call. Played in all four exhibition games (56 snaps) before landing on injured reserve. No reason to bring him back. **Grade: Incomplete.**

**JOE THOMAS (10.1%):** Missed 4 ½ games with a high-ankle sprain. Upon return near mid-season he had lost his job as dime LB to the safeties. With Ryan nursing a knee injury Thomas played 59 of his 107 snaps against Carolina. He made several solid tackles against the run but didn't come through in coverage. He'll deliver a blow for his size. His ordinary speed (4.71), however, can't quite compensate for his lack of size. **Grade: D.**

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS (15)**

**KENTRELL BRICE (27.4%):** When healthy, he was the No. 3 safety ahead of Josh Jones. Groin and ankle injuries, however, cost him 10 games. Played more middle-of-the-field safety than as a rookie and struggled with route recognition and attacking the ball. Probably a better athlete than player after two seasons. Despite his speed (4.43). still has problems matching up with wide receivers and faster tight ends. Explosive, violent hitter exhibits some concentration lapses. Missed six tackles, twice as many as last year. Game hasn't slowed down for him. Athletic gifts and striking ability give him a chance to play at a higher level. Led safeties with passes defended per snap with one every 72.3. **Grade: D+.**

**DONATELLO BROWN (0.1%):** Green as grass but probably should have played some late in the season given as bad as the team was at cornerback. Undrafted rookie from Valdosta State (Ga.) spent the first seven weeks on the practice squad and the last 10 on the 53. Showed a play-making knack in the second half of training camp. Started college late, will be 26 in May. Nice size (5-11 ½, 190), adequate speed (4.50) and prefers press coverage. **Grade: Incomplete.**

**MORGAN BURNETT (69%):** Veteran approaching ninth season seeking a rare third contract from the Packers. Hamstring and groin injuries cost him four full games and portions of two others. Injuries have increasingly cropped up in the last few years. Runs the show from the back end. Understated leader. Unselfish, team player. Demonstrated tremendous versatility in 2017, easily playing more snaps as a nickel back in the slot and as a full-fledged ILB than he did as a strong safety. Shouldn't be able to hold up covering down inside but did. Declining athlete has distinct problems in space. Better against tight ends than wide receivers. Lacks ideal range as an over-the-top safety but maximizes the range he has left. Probably not as physical in the box as he once was but more than willing to stick his nose in there. Missed just three tackles, a career low and representative of vast improvement from 2013 (17 misses) and 2014 (14). Had worst season as a blitzer with just one pressure every 16.7 blitzes. **Grade: B-.**

**HA HA CLINTON-DIX (99.2%):** Completely fell apart in his fourth season. Other than showing up to practice every day and playing every game, his contributions were minimal. Appallingly bad for much of the second half, especially the finale in Detroit when he just went through the motions. Probably just isn't that good of a player. Straight-line athlete with average change of direction and agility. Lacks the speed to match with top wide receivers deep and the quickness to cover from the slot. Blew way too many assignments for someone with more than 3,500 career snaps. Couldn't handle the responsibility of wearing the helmet headset and communicating the call to teammates in Game 7. Little or no urgency as a tackler. Second on the team in missed tackles with 13, 10 more than a year ago. Ranked merely fifth among the six safeties in tackles per snap (one every 12.2). Seems almost delusional regarding his value and role on the team. He'll get one more season to prove worthy of receiving another contract. **Grade: D.**

**MARWIN EVANS (13.9%):** If he wasn't the top player on special teams he certainly ranked among the top three or four. Registered 14 tackles, eight more anyone else. Played substantially from scrimmage for an injured Morgan Burnett at mid-year, failed to impress and got just eight snaps in the last six games. Late reactor. Speed (4.48) and athletic ability are good but he has to get with the speed of the game. Jarring, tenacious tackler. **Grade: D+.**

**DEMETRI GOODSON (0.0%):** Never played a down, leaving him with just 219 snaps from scrimmage in four-year career as a sixth-round draft choice. Returned Dec. 6 from reconstructive knee surgery in November 2016. At some point Goodson must have pulled a hamstring in practice because after two games on the 53 he was placed on injured reserve. Performed competently in two of his three starts in mid-2016 before his career was dead-ended by knee surgery. Will be a UFA. **Grade: Incomplete.**

**JOSH HAWKINS (38.5%):** Played 30 or more snaps in six games, more than enough exposure to know if he can play or not. Based on talent alone, he should be able to. He can run (4.39). He has the skill and technique to play press. He's not afraid. One admires his feistiness. He gives effort. His low level of performance, then, doesn't quite compute. He allowed more touchdown passes (four) than anyone on the roster. Part of the problem is he's small (5-10 ½, 189). He also doesn't appear to think well on his feet (his score on the Wonderlic intelligence test was 7). He plays the ball OK. Hawkins is an underachiever. Not yet 25, he's worth one more chance. **Grade: D.**

**DAVON HOUSE (62.4%):** House's return to his original team began going south when he suffered a hamstring injury Aug. 5 that cost him all but three snaps of the exhibition season. Later would come the thigh, shoulder and back injuries that, in effect, prevented him from being in form all season. Still, at 28, no team would count on House again. Despite playing less than two-thirds of the snaps he allowed 5 ½ plays of 20 yards or more and three TD passes. House has lost considerable speed over his seven seasons. He's a big press corner who has lost his legs, at least this season, and it's anyone's guess if he could ever get them back. At times he came across as almost too casual at the top of routes and at the ball. Among the six CBs, he ranked fifth in passes defended per snap (one every 73.2) and sixth in tackles per snap (one every 13.5). The Packers need to rebuild this position and re-signing House, who is a good team guy, shouldn't be part of the equation. **Grade: D.**

**JOSH JONES (69.6%):** The Packers asked Jones to play deep safety, in-the-box safety, inside linebacker and dime plus a heavy load of special teams. He short-circuited, due in part to assignment overload, and turned in an abysmal rookie season. Time after time he was out of position because he couldn't or wouldn't follow directions. Probably the majority of his team-high total of nine plays allowed of 20 yards or more were the result of missed assignments. He screwed up constantly, repeatedly undermining the defense. On special teams, Jones was so unreliable that he was benched not long after drawing an unprecedented three penalties against New Orleans. Just 31 of his 155 snaps on special teams came after the Saints debacle. Jones has physical traits or the Packers wouldn't have drafted him in the second round. He's big (6-1 ½, 220) and fast (4.40), and he loves to hit. Jones is an impulsive player who wants to run through everything that he sees. He missed seven tackles. His speed, however, is straight-line speed. At this point he can't drop his hips, change direction and actually cover someone. He's deficient in space. Maybe he could play in the box and cover a predetermined man without having to process things. At this stage, he's wholly undependable. **Grade: F.**

**KEVIN KING (36.2%):** Drafted as damaged goods atop the second round. Reported for rookie orientation with a left shoulder problem and eventually had labrum surgery Dec. 12. Despite playing one-armed in his nine games King looked like the team's best corner. Allowed 6 ½ plays of 20 yards or more and a pair of TDs. Flashed feet, burst and change of direction. Went after receivers across the middle and showed toughness coming up to tackle. Labors just a little coming out of his backpedal, which is the downside playing the position at 6-3. If his second surgery really is a panacea for the shoulder, King should use that height to win 50-50 balls and defend passes. His future is tied to the medical. **Grade: C-.**

**LENZY PIPKINS (11.6%):** Played the second half of a game at Louisiana State in 2013 after suffering a broken forearm in the first half. That type of resolve was noticeable during a rookie season in which he played 98 of his 122 snaps in two games (Minnesota on Oct. 15, Detroit on Dec. 31). Played with tremendous heart as an undrafted rookie from Oklahoma State (and Louisiana-Monroe before that). Has the temperament, size (6-0, 200) and speed (4.46) to play press. Demonstrative, fiery player given to on-field antics at times. Should be well above Hawkins on the pecking order for 2018. **Grade: D.**

**DAMARIOUS RANDALL (68.3%):** Bounced back from a terrible season and poor first month to perform respectably. Moves easily from outside to the slot. Used terrific ball skills for a team-high four interceptions; finished second to Kevin King among CBs in passes defended per snap (one every 55.5). Led DBs in tackles for loss (five). His five turnover-producing plays led the team. Missed nine tackles, third highest on the team and the same number as last season. Has the speed, feet and nerve to challenge and/or match top receivers. Just can't rely on him. Takes himself out of games at the slightest indication of injury, and sat out Games 15-16 after being listed as questionable (knee). Banished to the locker room by Mike McCarthy in the first Bears game after his response to a halftime benching. High-strung, emotional player seems more wrapped up with himself than the team. Allowed six plays of 20 yards or more and 3 ½ TD passes. Was beat several times because he wasn't violent at the ball. Wildly inconsistent tackler. **Grade: C+.**

**QUINTEN ROLLINS (13.2%):** Third season ended in Game 6 with a torn Achilles' tendon. He's just too slow to play outside. Might have been finding a home in the slot when injured. Was the most successful pressure player off the edge among the corners. Willing to strike a blow but doesn't break down well and missed a career-high eight tackles. Second-round draft choice was struggling to overcome his speed shortcomings even before the injury. Even with a speedy, complication-free recovery, Rollins might have played his last regular-season down. **Grade: D-.**

**HERB WATERS (0.0%):** Was opening some eyes in the spring when he suffered a shoulder injury that ended his season. Projected to make the team and possibly a significant contribution. Shifted from WR to CB upon being cut in September 2016 and seemed to be a natural on defense. Has adequate size (5-11 ½, 188) and speed (4.50) to go with a 38 ½-inch vertical jump. Mystery man deserves a long look in 2018. **Grade: Incomplete.**

**JERMAINE WHITEHEAD (11.6%):** One of many free agents promoted from the practice squad during the Ted Thompson years. Injuries thinned the depth in the secondary and Whitehead actually served as the dime back for the last five games. Has been hard to coach dating to his years at Auburn (2011-'14). Little bit of a tweener, Not really fast enough (4.53) for corner and not really big enough (5-11, 195) for safety. Primary attribute might be intelligence (Wonderlic of 27). Marginal in coverage. Worth bringing to camp. **Grade: D.**