

# 2016 Packers Team Report Card

By Bob McGinn JANUARY 7TH, 2018

Here are my team grades for the Green Bay Packers in eight categories. Individual grades will follow this week.

## PASSING OFFENSE (D)

Perhaps the best way to gauge the strength of a passing game is the metric known as “passing average.” It’s the result of net passing yards divided by attempts and sacks. In 2015, with Aaron Rodgers playing every snap, the Packers ranked an unimaginable 31<sup>st</sup> (they ranked first in ’14). This season, with Rodgers taking 39.9% of the snaps compared to Brett Hundley’s 59.4%, the Packers were 31<sup>st</sup> again. Obviously, Mike McCarthy’s passing game isn’t what it used to be. There just weren’t enough big plays. After the wide receivers accounted for 58 passes of 20 yards or more last year (in 19 games), the unit had a mere 22 this year. The Packers ranked 30<sup>th</sup> in average yards per completion (10.03). Randall Cobb (9.9) and Jordy Nelson (9.1) each averaged a career low. Just two wide receivers with 25 or more receptions had lower averages: Dallas’ Cole Beasley (8.7) and Miami’s Jarvis Landry (8.8). In Rodgers’ six full games the Packers averaged 276.2 passing; in Hundley’s 10 (actually 9 7/8) full games that figure was 183.6. Rodgers’ 16 touchdown passes averaged a career-low 12.0; Hundley’s nine averaged 28.2. Not only were big plays scarce, interceptions were plentiful. With Hundley unloading 12 and Rodgers six, the Packers ranked an unsightly 27<sup>th</sup> in interception percentage. Rodgers ranked eighth in passer rating (97.2) and Hundley finished 30<sup>th</sup> (70.6), ahead of only San Francisco’s C.J. Beathard (69.2) and Cleveland’s DeShone Kizer (60.5). For the third time in nine years the Packers allowed a whopping 51 sacks (27<sup>th</sup> in sack percentage). From 1992-’08 the Packers never ranked higher than 18<sup>th</sup> in sack percentage. Justin McCray allowed the most sacks (seven), Jahri Evans the most pressures (28 ½). Davante Adams had eight of the 41 drops. He ranked tied for 19<sup>th</sup> in receptions (74), 23<sup>rd</sup> in yards (885) and tied for second in receiving TDs (10).

## RUSHING OFFENSE (B-)

Mike McCarthy’s run rate of 38.6% was higher than a year ago (35.3%) but still was the second lowest of his 12-year tenure. The ground game certainly was efficient, ranking fifth in yards per rush (4.47) and finishing 17<sup>th</sup> in yards (107.8) despite limited attempts (386). Ty Montgomery didn’t produce (273, 3.8) before bowing out after Game 9. Rookies Jamaal Williams and Aaron Jones proved to be better players, anyway. Williams ranked 36<sup>th</sup> in rushing with 556 yards (3.8); notably, he didn’t fumble in 178 touches. Bedeviled by a pair of knee sprains, Jones came in 43<sup>rd</sup> with 448. Of the top 50 rushers in yards, the only players that topped Jones’ 5.5 average were Seattle QB Russell Wilson (6.2) and New Orleans RB Alvin Kamara (6.1). In just 81 carries Jones gained 20 yards or more six times. Meanwhile, Hundley chipped in with 270 yards in 36 scrambles and designed runs (7.5). His yardage total ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among QBs. The Packers converted 11 times in 16 third-and-1 runs. The only fumbles by RBs on rushes were the two by rookie Devante Mays against Baltimore (one lost). Ninety-two of the rushes were “bad” runs (gains of 1 yard or less excluding successful runs in goal-line or short-yardage situations). Jahri Evans was charged with the most “bad” runs (15 ½) followed by Corey Linsley (15). McCray had only five, David Bakhtiari just six. The Packers pulled a lineman on 82 carries, their exact total in 2015 but 40 more than a year ago. The 82 “gap” plays gained 334 yards (4.07). LG Lane Taylor pulled 41 times on plays gaining 204 (4.98).

## **PASSING DEFENSE (F)**

In Dom Capers' first four seasons as defensive coordinator (2009-'12) the Packers almost always finished in the top-10 in opponents' passer rating. Their yields were 68.8 in 2009, 67.2 in '10, 80.6 in '11 and 76.8 in '12. After allowing foes ratings of 95.9 in 2013, 82.0 in '14, 80.1 in '15 and 95.9 in '16, the dam really broke this year with a club-record yield of 102.0. Only winless Cleveland, at 102.3, was worse. The Packers ranked 23rd in passing yards allowed (236.8). More telling was the 29<sup>th</sup> finish in "passing average," and that followed a 30<sup>th</sup>-place finish in 2016. With Mike McCarthy becoming increasingly involved on defense, the Packers stopped blitzing in the last six games (18.8%) after they pressured 39% on passes in the first 10. In truth, nothing worked. Green Bay ranked 28<sup>th</sup> on third down (42.8%), its worst finish ever. In the red zone, the Packers ranked 31<sup>st</sup>. Foes penetrated the Packers' 20 on 46 occasions and scored every time (30 TDs, 16 field goals). That 100% conversion rate was the first by an NFL defense since Tampa Bay in 2008. Eight receivers had 100-yard games, led by Pittsburgh's Antonio Brown (10-169) and New Orleans' Ted Ginn (7-141). Until the final game in Detroit the defense hadn't given up a TD pass longer than 46 yards. Then Matthew Stafford struck for bombs of 56, 54 and 71 yards, including two TDs. The blown assignment by S Josh Jones on the 56-yard post to Marvin Jones was emblematic of the mental mistakes that infected the defense. Jones led the team in plays allowed of 20 yards or more with nine, followed by Ha Ha Clinton-Dix with seven. The total of 11 interceptions was the Packers' lowest (counting all games) since 2005. Meanwhile, the Packers did rank 10<sup>th</sup> in sack percentage (37). However, they had just 162 pressures, their low since 2008. Clay Matthews, who tied for 36<sup>th</sup> in sacks with a club-leading 7 ½, also led in pressures (30). When the pass rushers didn't get home they weren't waving their arms. After batting down 20 passes in 2016, the Packers knocked down only eight in '17.

## **RUSHING DEFENSE (B)**

The strength of the defense was stopping the run with its four big men up front. Green Bay ranked eighth in yards allowed per rush (3.86), its best finish since Dom Capers' first year (3.59). For the first time in his six-year career Mike Daniels led the defensive line in tackles per snap (one every 8.75). He was followed closely by Kenny Clark (one every 8.82) and Quinton Dial (one every 9.7), and Dean Lowry came in fourth (one every 14.6). Opponents registered 11 games of 100 yards or more but settled for 10 rushing TDs, which tied for ninth fewest in the league. Some of the best work came against Chicago's Jordan Howard, the NFL's sixth-best rusher who had to settle for 107 yards in 33 carries (3.2) in two games. The 100-yard individual games were by Cleveland's Isaiah Crowell (19-121), Dallas' Ezekiel Elliott (29-116), New Orleans' Mark Ingram (22-105) and Tampa Bay's Peyton Barber (23-102). Quarterbacks rushed 50 times for 204 (4.1). In the first half of the season the Packers amassed 41 tackles for loss before coming back to earth with 22 in the second half. The defensive backs had 22 TFLs, 14 more than a year ago. Blake Martinez led in tackles (158, or 69 more than the runner-up, Clinton-Dix) as well as tackles for loss (nine). Actually, Jake Ryan had a higher tackle-per-snap rate (one every 5.7) than Martinez (one every 6.2). Martinez also led in missed tackles with 22, the highest total since LB Nate Wayne missed 24 in 2000. The Packers missed 131 tackles, 28 more than last season. Clinton-Dix, who hardly missed at all (three) in 2016, missed 13 this season to finish second behind Martinez.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (B)**

In a 10-category breakdown of special-teams categories the Packers finished sixth. Two players, rookie Justin Vogel and Trevor Davis, led the way. Vogel's net punting average of 41.6 yards was the best in team history (the NFL began recording the statistic in 1976). He ranked seventh, the second-highest finish by a Packer since David Beverly tied for sixth in 1979 (34.8). Tim Masthay didn't rank higher than 14<sup>th</sup> in net from 2010-'15. Last year, Jacob Schum finished 24<sup>th</sup> (39.1). Vogel, however, ranked just 31<sup>st</sup> in percentage-inside-the-20 (.268). Davis averaged 12.0 on punt returns; his third-place ranking was the best since Desmond Howard led the league in 1996 (15.1). When Jeff Janis was benched as kickoff returner after just three runbacks in 5 ½ games, Davis took over and tied for seventh with a 22.8 mark. He lost a 70-yard return against Tampa Bay when Vince Biegel was penalized for holding. Meanwhile, Mason Crosby battled ineffective snapping and holding at times to post adequate numbers. His 27-yard field goal in overtime beat the Bengals. Crosby also delivered two successful onside kicks that were recovered by Marwin Evans and Jermaine Whitehead. Other big plays were Kyler Fackrell's blocked punt against Tampa Bay and Whitehead's 7-yard run for a first down from punt formation against Cleveland. Fackrell led in snaps with 354 followed by Evans (331), Janis (249), Joe Thomas (212) and Jake Ryan (211). Evans led in tackles with 14, eight more than anyone else, but also had five of the 22 misses. The penalty total of 22 was the second highest in seven years. Josh Jones had three of his five in one game (New Orleans), something no other Packer had done from 1987-'17. His five penalties were the most in a season since Jarrett Bush had six in '12. The long-snapping by Brett Goode, Derek Hart and Taybor Pepper was subpar. The special teams broke even in turnover differential.

## **PERSONNEL MOVES (F)**

GM Ted Thompson didn't go out in a blaze of glory. In fact, it probably was his worst of 13 years calling the shots. Nothing is more important for a GM than knowing his own team. It's Thompson's job to understand what value there was in Micah Hyde (second-team all-pro for Buffalo), Julius Peppers (11 sacks for Carolina) and Jared Cook (54 catches, 688 yards for Oakland). Without them, the safety play was abysmal, the outside pass rush flopped and the Packers had no tight end. After drawing a line in the sand on Cook, Thompson apparently disregarded the plodding style on tape of TE Martellus Bennett, 30, and gave him \$6.3 million guaranteed. Bennett was a disaster on the field and around the team, and ended up quitting on the Packers. Jahri Evans was a stop-gap signing one day before the draft after the Packers elected not to present a serious offer to T.J. Lang, a team leader-enforcer who played a lot better for Detroit than Evans did for Green Bay. "Street" signings Davon House, Lance Kendricks, Ricky Jean-Francois, Ahmad Brooks and Ulrick John made little or no impact. Quinton Dial, the ex-49er, was solid. The best among 25 rookie free-agent signings was Justin Vogel. Thompson drafted damaged goods (shoulder) with his first pick (Kevin King), watched Josh Jones flounder and got nothing from Montravius Adams and Biegel due partially to injury. Despite overwhelming needs on defense, he used his last six picks on offensive players. He hit on RBs Jamaal Williams and Aaron Jones but missed on at least three of the other four. The Packers could have kept impressive Taysom Hill as a No. 3 quarterback but gambled and lost getting him onto the practice squad. Once again, Thompson promoted heavily in-season from the practice squad: Michael Clark, Emanuel Byrd, Adam Pankey, Joe Callahan, Joe Kerridge (twice), Reggie Gilbert, Donatello Brown and Jermaine Whitehead. He was able to pro-rate into 2017 the signing bonuses given to Davante Adams and Corey Linsley on Dec. 30. The decision to jettison NT Letroy Guion on Aug. 8 was long overdue.

## **COACHING (D)**

Many coaches can win with Aaron Rodgers under center. Mike McCarthy had the Packers off to a 4-1 start when his franchise quarterback went down in the middle of the first quarter in Minnesota. With Rodgers deemed able to play for just one more game, McCarthy brought the Packers home with their first losing season (7-9) in nine years. McCarthy and his coaches had 2 ½ years to prepare Brett Hundley, their hand-picked draft choice. Hundley stayed healthy and gave it his best effort, but the blame for the Packers' offensive malaise and 3-7 record in his 10 games of record falls as much if not more on the head coach and staff than it does the player. With an outside shot for the playoffs, McCarthy became the fourth coach since Lombardi's arrival in 1959 to lose his last three games. The Packers' 26<sup>th</sup>-place ranking in total offense was their worst in 40 years; their No. 21 ranking in points was the worst since 2005. McCarthy proved again to be a wizard on the first possession, producing seven touchdowns, two field goals and 51 first downs. The Packers were much less successful closing the first half and opening the second half. The Packers finished minus-3 in turnover difference, joining the 2013 team as the only ones under McCarthy to finish with a deficit. They tied for 20<sup>th</sup> in turnover differential, their worst finish since Mike Sherman bowed out having tied for 31<sup>st</sup> at minus-24 in 2005. Entering the season with merely 10 career games of four-plus giveaways, McCarthy suffered through three more. The Packers did well in penalty avoidance, ranking sixth in fewest penalty yards and eighth in fewest penalties. The offensive line drew just 13 penalties (accepted), its lowest total in at least 28 years. Season-long penalties and wasted timeouts for having too many and too few men on the field reflected poorly on McCarthy's sideline organization/communication. McCarthy defended his misguided decision to attempt a 57-yard field goal at Heinz Field with a 21-14 lead in the third quarter in a game that the Packers lost in overtime.

## **OVERALL (D+)**

Green Bay and Seattle began the season as co-favorites to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl. The Packers became the favorite after opening with a 17-9 victory over Seattle. In some way, it was all downhill after that. Even with Aaron Rodgers, the Packers never again reached that level of emotional and tenacious play. Nineteen teams remained in contention for the 52<sup>nd</sup> Super Bowl with two games to play but the Packers weren't one of them. Their club-record streak of eight playoff appearances died on Geronimo Allison's fumble at the Carolina 28 with 2 minutes left in a seven-point game. Among the highlights were Rodgers' sparkling comeback victories against Cincinnati and Dallas and Brett Hundley's sparkling comeback victories against Tampa Bay and Cleveland. That overtime decision along the shores of Lake Erie was the closest the Browns came to victory all season. As a 14-point underdog in Pittsburgh the Packers had a golden opportunity to present Mike McCarthy with his first victory as a double-digit underdog before throwing it all away at the bitter end. As usual, injuries were a constant thorn in the Packers' side. A total of 16 starters missed 56 games and 16 backups missed another 104 games, just about matching the totals of 15-76 (starters) and 13-76 (backups) a year ago. It was a strange season, however, in many other ways. The Packers were an underdog nine times (seven with Hundley); their status as a 9 ½-point underdog against Minnesota Dec. 23 at Lambeau Field was their highest at home in 29 years. That night an estimated 40% of the crowd was supporting the Vikings, an unprecedented number at Lambeau. Green Bay finished six lengths behind Minnesota, its largest deficit in the NFC North since 2005. Moreover, the Packers were swept by Detroit for the first time since 1991 and by Minnesota for the first time since 2009. Twenty-seven teams had at least one player voted to the Pro Bowl but Green Bay wasn't one of them. The Packers also were outgained, just the third time that's happened since 1993. Their yardage differential of minus-691 was the highest since the 1990 team quarterbacked by Don Majkowski, Anthony Dilweg and Blair Kiel finished minus-767. At least they didn't lose to the Browns.