

# Rating the Packers: Week 3 at Redskins

*By Bob McGinn Posted: Sept 23, 2018*

Washington 31, Green Bay 17.

As loyal members, you already have seen my thoughts regarding the defeat that were available on the website Monday. Frankly, I have nothing more to add about the loss in general terms.

For a change, let's turn over the remainder of the introduction to Brad Hermes, a subscriber and long-time reader who had some compelling thoughts on the Packers' disappointing performance Sunday at FedEx Field in Landover, Md.

Skimming our Comments section, it was obvious many of you now foresee a long season ahead for the Packers. Brad doesn't, and here's why.

"I had to (write) because everybody will overreact to today's Packer game," Hermes wrote in an email less than an hour after it ended. "I was calling it all week that this was an L.

"While I'm not a gambler I pay attention to point spreads and what the professional gamblers look at when projecting games. The Packers were in a bad, bad, bad spot with pretty much everything going against them that these guys look at.

"Letdown spot for the Pack after playing two division rivals. Played a long overtime game last week. Playing an opponent with a veteran quarterback that got embarrassed at home the previous week.

"It uncanny how often these types of things come to fruition. It's the reason the point spread was so low all week even though your son (Charlie) on your site and everybody else I know assumed a Packers' rout. If you look, the final line moved even further toward Washington right before the game (it closed Green Bay -2 1/2), telling you all the smart late money went to the 'Skins.

"If you doubt that last week's game had an effect, take a look at how the Vikings looked today against the Bills. Same type of letdown spot for the Vikings ...

"So facing a desperate team on the road and losing is nothing to overreact to. The Packers are a solid team and will be fine. Taking care of business the next three weeks will be key."

Thank you, Mr. Hermes. Never done something like this before but I'm glad I did.

Here's the rating of the Packers against Washington, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

The three stars of the game were: **1. Aaron Jones. 2. Kenny Clark. 3. David Bakhtiari.**

As a team, the Packers received 1 ½ footballs.

## RECEIVERS ( ½ )

Randall Cobb had opened his eighth season with somewhat unexpected vigor. Then came Sunday when he dropped three passes and was stripped of the ball and lost a fumble. In Cobb's 110-game career, including playoffs, he had dropped three passes in only two other games: Game 12 against New England in 2014, Game 18 at Carolina in '15. In 563 touches from scrimmage (492 receptions, 71 rushes) entering the game, he had fumbled merely three times. His only previous lost fumble came late in the first half against the Bears at Lambeau Field in November 2014. As Cobb fought for the end zone on a short pass inside the 5, he fumbled when gang-tackled by CB Kyle Fuller, LB Lance Briggs and DE Shea McClellin, and S Ryan Mundy recovered for a touchback. The Packers rolled, 55-14. Almost no one in recent Packers' annals has been more ball-secure than Cobb. Then he dropped the first third-down pass, what would have been a 17-yard touchdown from a scrambling Aaron Rodgers and a fourth-and-2. The fumble occurred on a bubble screen on a strip by nickel back Fabian Moreau, a rookie speedster who played Cobb tough all afternoon (4-23). Rodgers kept going to Cobb (played 65 of a possible 69 offensive snaps) even though his hands were betraying him and he wasn't getting much separation. Davante Adams (68) didn't look like a premier player against CBs Josh Norman and Quinton Dunbar. He has replaced Jordy Nelson as Rodgers' prime target inside the 15. His three TDs, which have measured 12, 9 and 2 yards Sunday, all emanated with Adams flanked wide left. Rodgers has to appreciate how hard Geronimo Allison (52) runs every route. They all look the same, too. When FS D.J. Swearinger got nosy, Allison blew past him on a beautiful slant-and-go that he caught 33 yards downfield and turned into a 64-yard TD. Allison tried too hard sustaining one block and picked up a holding penalty. With J'Mon Moore and Equanimeous St. Brown inactive, Marquez Valdez-Scantling played most of his 12 snaps near the right sideline. At this stage Jimmy Graham (64, including 15 with his hand down) is a very big body/target who lacks any suddenness off the line and at the break point. An upright runner, he made SS Montae Nicholson miss in the flat on an 18-yard gain (Nicholson would have fit right into the Packers' defense; he missed five tackles just as the Packers were missing 15). Lance Kendricks (10, five with his hand down) has been the move tight end but the Packers need to get athletic Robert Tonyan on the field sooner than later. Kendricks' horrendous drop 31 yards down the sideline behind ILB Mason Foster after a four-drop first season in Green Bay should tell the coaches his hands can't be trusted. Mercedes Lewis (seven, all with his hand down) looked terrible on his first play when he let OLB Preston Smith beat him inside. The only reason Lewis wasn't charged with a sack was another rusher got to Rodgers a split-second before Smith did. If the Packers plan to run the ball, they'll need Lewis. As a deep reserve-blocker only in the twilight of his career, the coaches might be asking themselves if he really has much interest filling that role.

## **OFFENSIVE LINE (1 ½ )**

Pressure-oriented coordinator Greg Manusky was able to sit on his hands and not blitz much (25%) because his four-man rush was stellar. The Redskins' defensive linemen had four sacks, with DT Jonathan Allen victimizing Lane Taylor twice, NT Daron Payne beating Justin McCray up the field and DE Matt Ioannidis bull-rushing Bryan Bulaga. That's three sacks allowed in two games for Taylor, who allowed only three last season in 15 games. Taylor's athletic limitations are more glaring when he isn't able to short set. Allen's sack, in 3.3 seconds, came when Taylor backed up and then failed with his hands. Other than the sack and a poor pull that led to a "bad" run, McCray played adequately before leaving with a shoulder injury after 56 snaps. Lucas Patrick lasted six snaps at RG but was pulled after a holding penalty, and Byron Bell (seven) finished up. Bulaga was hanging in there when, on his 28<sup>th</sup> snap, he suffered a back injury trying to anchor in a double team with McCray against Ioannidis, an underrated power rusher. He injured his back and didn't return, giving Jason Spriggs the last 41 snaps. Well, Spriggs can say he didn't allow any sacks or knockdowns. There was, however, the matter of four hurries, including three at the hands of OLB Ryan Kerrigan. At times, Spriggs is trying to stab rushers with one arm. When he gets high is when he gets in trouble. David Bakhtiari wasn't perfect. He overran a linebacker on an outside zone for a "bad" run and got beat inside by Kerrigan for a hurry. Otherwise, he was outstanding. Matched against Payne, the Alabama rookie drafted 13<sup>th</sup> overall, Corey Linsley used his savvy and his strength to keep running lanes open inside.

## **QUARTERBACKS (3)**

It must have been a long, sobering day for Aaron Rodgers. Other than his gorgeous bomb to Allison for the TD, there was nothing caught downfield. That was the only gain of 20 yards or more. In the last three-plus seasons the Packers also had just one 20-plus gain at Denver in November 2015 (29-10 loss) and at Minnesota in October 2017 (23-10 loss). The game-long rain didn't help. Five dropped passes no doubt irritated him to no end. Rodgers hurt himself by throwing behind Adams on a routine third-and-3 slant and firing low to an open Allison in the end-zone corner for what should have been a 15-yard TD. Wearing a left knee brace for the second straight game, he was grabbing at his hamstring a few times, too. He was fast enough to bolt 10 yards on third and 3 and then gobble up 11 more on a play that was called back. The no-huddle attack for the entire second half was nonproductive. He wasted another timeout, and fruitlessly spent a lot of time with hard counts trying to get five yards and, more importantly, a free play shot deep. Just one of his 69 snaps came from under center (a third-and-1 naked pitch to Aaron Jones). All the shotgun (65 snaps) and pistol (three) sets handicap the offense to an extent.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

Mike McCarthy sat Aaron Jones for 2 ½ series before inserting him in the final minute of the first quarter. He was coming off a two-game suspension. At that point, Jamaal Williams had played eight snaps and Ty Montgomery had played three. From then on, Williams had 22 snaps whereas both Montgomery and Jones played 17. Jones broke two tackles on his first carry; Williams had broken one in the first nine quarters. What Jones showed as a rookie he showed anew here. Burst into and through the hole, shiftiness and speed. He's a courageous runner, too. He'll be an early-down back, however, until the coaches decide they can trust him in pass protection. Williams is the team's best pass-blocking back but Montgomery appears to be approaching an acceptable level. Williams is that fiery, rugged plugger whose role should increase as the temperature drops. Montgomery is the top receiver. It's an attractive mix of talent.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (1)**

With old foe Adrian Peterson carrying 19 times for 120 yards (6.3), the Redskins gained 166 in all on the ground. The toll would have been considerably higher if not for Kenny Clark (played 56 of the 61 defensive snaps). I had him as the primary stopper on eight carries in which the gain was 3 yards or less. He came off backup C Tony Bergstrom four times for a net of 10. He came off guards Brandon Scherff, a Pro Bowl pick in 2017, and first-year starter Chase Roullier each twice for a net of 4. It was a clinic how to anchor against a power-running team and a great running back. On Peterson's 41-yard carry, Clark penetrated the A gap but wasn't quite able to wrap up "AP." When Dean Lowry (24) and Kentrell Brice missed the tackle, he was off to the races. Clark, however, had his poorest pass-rushing game of the season. Mike Daniels (49) posted two first-half hurries against Roullier but ran out of gas in the second half. As strong as Daniels is, he's not in Clark's league as a point-of-attack stuffer. Clark and Daniels will have to play even more now because Muhammad Wilkerson (23) figures to be lost for the season after having emergency ankle surgery in Washington. In some ways, Wilkerson aided the run defense with his tremendous size. In other ways, he was just a punching bag offering almost nothing as a pass rusher. Lowry has got to do a better job occupying two blockers than he did on a 13-yard run by Peterson. Otherwise, the inside linebackers will have no chance. On his first play, Montravius Adams (five) wound up on his back courtesy of Scherff and "AP" scored standing up where he was supposed to be. Until Adams can stay off the ground he won't be able to contribute. He also wound up on the deck when Peterson slammed 17 yards through his gap to help kill the clock.

## **LINEBACKERS ( ½ )**

The Packers decreased the playing time of Clay Matthews (39) and Nick Perry (38) for the first time this season. Tyler Fackrell (23) was the beneficiary, and along with Reggie Gilbert (24) took regular turns as early as the fourth snap. Perry's huge game against LT Trent Williams in the 2015 playoffs contributed mightily to his lucrative contract. This time, Perry didn't get close to Alex Smith. In fact, the only one of the outside linebackers to register a pressure was Matthews. His two knockdowns were a stunt against Scherff and an inside move against backup RT Ty Nsekhe that drew a flag for roughing the passer. Perry was quiet against the run other than a pair of second-half plays against TE Vernon Davis. Neither Fackrell nor Gilbert set the edge well. Davis, 34, blocked Fackrell one-on-one in the hole through which Peterson shot for 41. He also missed the tackle on Peterson's 17-yard run. Gilbert was taken off at one point, presumably because of the run game. On the inside, Blake Martinez (61), Antonio Morrison (23) and Oren Burks (eight) each missed a tackle. Martinez was too up and down on the goal-line, in coverage and as a spy. Morrison is so focused on taking on linemen that at times he forgets what shoulder he's supposed to use and that the object is to find the ball. You admire his fiery physicality but too many times he gets stuck on blocks demonstrating how rugged he is. Burks returned after missing more than a month. He needs to play.

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS ( ½ )**

Communication breakdowns, a void in leadership and awful tackling (eight misses) made for a ruinous blend. The Packers must be considering changes at safety where Kentrell Brice (61) and Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (61) aren't measuring up. Brice played like the free agent he was coming out of Louisiana Tech. For the second straight week he got beat deep for a TD. In this instance, he opened his hips prematurely, seemed to panic with the ball in the air and overran the 46-yard catch point. On Peterson's long run, he hesitated before missing the tackle. All four of his misses came in the first half. In the red zone, he was late reacting to an 18-yard completion inside to Jamison Crowder that was far too easy. On the third play of the game, a third and 1, the Redskins inserted Davis at fullback even though he isn't a lead blocker. Instead, Davis zipped into the right flat and caught a 20-yard pass when Clinton-Dix didn't recognize what was happening and then was slow getting through the trash. He had a chance to dislodge a 9-yard TD to Crowder but didn't go for the ball and then dramatically held his hands to his head. Clinton-Dix's interception should have been an illegal-contact penalty because he ran into TE Jordan Reed 15 yards downfield. After the sideline gift pick, he offered and received a high-five from Swearinger in Washington's bench area. That was as strange as strange can get. Clinton-Dix also missed two tackles. His movements are just so tight. If Josh Jones can return from his month-long ankle injury he'd be an option along with Jermaine Whitehead (15) and even rookie Raven Greene, a big hitter. Whitehead had one knockdown in four pressures and took a bad angle on Alex Smith's third-and-7 scramble for 7. He was in position to ring him up. The biggest gain involving cornerbacks was the pick play to Davis for 50. On that, Josh Jackson (37) and Davon House (six) must communicate better. Making his first start, Jaire Alexander (57) showed his youth. He needs a ton of work. At least he tries hard. Aggressive in the opener, Tramon Williams (59) was rather passive here.

## **KICKERS (3 ½)**

Despite three off-center snaps from rookie Hunter Bradley, JK Scott still punted well. His five-punt averages were 46.4 yards (gross), 44.6 (net) and 4.46 seconds of hang time. Mason Crosby made his lone field-goal attempt (41 yards) and had averages of 64.8 and 3.78 on four kickoffs.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS (1 ½)**

Bradley, the seventh-round pick from Mississippi State, is fooling with fire. Yes, the ground was wet and the rain was constant, but that's nothing compared to what he'll face in six to eight weeks. Besides his wild punt snaps, he snapped low to Scott on a 61-yard attempt. Scott could have made a better hold, but the snap started it. Scott's incomplete pass to Crosby turned out OK but it wasn't far removed from being a 55-yard interception return for a TD. Whitehead and House were penalized on punt returns. Cobb fielded five punts securely and was decisive if not dynamic on four returns (7.3). As a gunner on the punt team, Valdez-Scantling zoomed past the Redskins' hold-up players as if they were in quicksand. He made two tackles, downed a punt at the 2 and was first down every time. House, the other gunner, was shaky.