

# Rating the Packers: Week 4 vs Bills

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 2, 2018

Was this the easiest game the Green Bay Packers will play all season?

If Arizona's Josh Rosen still is starting by the Cardinals' Dec. 2 visit to Lambeau Field, that game could be. At least by then, however, Rosen would have about 10 starts under his belt whereas Buffalo's rookie quarterback, Josh Allen, was making only his third Sunday.

In any case, don't even ask the Minnesota Vikings. They made Allen look like the second coming one week earlier, and on their home turf no less.

The Packers probably should thank the Vikings for setting their wakeup call. It's the NFL. Without the Bills' 27-6 ambush at U.S. Bank Stadium, the Packers could have been on the receiving end of a horrendous upset just like the one that befell the Vikings.

Here is a rating of the Packers' in their 22-0 victory over the Bills, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses.

The three stars of the game were: **1. David Bakhtiari. 2. Aaron Jones. 3. Blake Martinez.** As a team, the Packers received 3 ½ footballs.

## RECEIVERS (1 ½)

When Aaron Rodgers practiced Thursday for the first time since suffering a knee injury Sept. 9, the coaches must have determined he could operate under center. He had taken just six snaps directly from Corey Linsley in the first three games. On Sunday, he was under center 36 percent of the time (27 of 76). As a result, it opened up a two-back offense and made TE Lance Kendricks a fairly important part of the offense for a change. Of his 35 snaps, 12 came at fullback in the role once held by people like Aaron Ripkowski and John Kuhn. On Aaron Jones' 30-yard run, Kendricks led him through the hole and helped spring him with a solid block on WLB Ramon Humber. He made a nice double-team block on DT Kyle Williams on a rush for 11. On third and 1, Kendricks worked from the backfield as a receiver into the flat. Covered closely by FS Rafael Bush, he adjusted the route nicely and got open for a 5-yard reception. He also recovered Ty Montgomery's fumble. One week after his brutal drop in Washington, Kendricks managed to put it behind him and had a sound game. Kendricks had his hand down seven times as a tight end compared to 20 for Jimmy Graham (54 snaps) and 16 for Mercedes Lewis (17 snaps). Graham's first TD (3 yards) was easy behind a block/pick from Geronimo Allison. He also beat speedy ILB Tremaine Edmunds across the middle for 13 and drew a holding penalty on nickel back Taron Johnson deep on a wheel route. He struggled to get the feisty Johnson blocked in the run game and dropped a pass in the red zone after failing to get much separation. The Packers believe in Lewis' blocking to the extent they ask him to block the point of attack one-on-one a time or two each week. What's strange about Lewis, a 13-year veteran, is that he appeared unsure who to block two or three times and the results were "bad" runs. Minus Randall Cobb, who sat out after suffering a hamstring injury in practice, the Packers played Davante Adams too much (all 76 snaps), Allison almost every snap (56) before he left with a concussion and Marquez Valdes-Scantling (season-high 54). Shadowed by Tre'Davious White, Adams had more success than the Vikings' Stefon Diggs did the week before. His

best play came off motion when he toasted White inside for 25 against a blitz. Not counting the injury, Allison had a forgettable performance with three drops and a fumble that trickled out of bounds. He was trying to stiff-arm CB Ryan Lewis when the strip occurred. In the 1980s, James Lofton made a living catching 22-yard turn-in's from Lynn Dickey. It's too hard to protect that long nowadays but, when Rodgers tried one off play-action, Allison made the reception across the middle for 27. Valdes-Scantling drew a glare from Rodgers when he didn't come back for a fourth-and-3 sideline pass on which Lewis probably had a 70-yard interception return for a TD if his hands hadn't betrayed him. Lewis, who ran 4.33, got beat by MVS on a takeoff for 38. J'Mon Moore (11) was in uniform for the first time and demonstrated his blocking needs work.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (4 ½)**

No matchup was more fraught with peril for Green Bay's offensive brain trust than blocking DE Jerry Hughes. He ate up Minnesota LT Riley Reiff, and in the process messed up its entire offense. The Vikings haven't had a left tackle like Bakhtiari since Ron Yary and Gary Zimmerman many moons ago. Hughes tried everything in his arsenal but had to be content with one lone pressure midway through the fourth quarter. After his speed-to-power, power-to-speed and spin stuff all was turned aside, Hughes resorted to mugging for the officials trying to gain a holding call. Bakhtiari showed his range and mobility springing Adams on a 12-yard bubble screen and on his only pull that was worth 9 yards. He also had the presence of mind to shove Jamaal Williams forward or else his third-and-1 carry would have been short. On the other side, Bryan Bulaga allayed worries about a back injury that knocked him out of the Redskins game shortly before halftime by going the distance. Trent Murphy is an experienced, relentless rusher but had to settle for just one pressure against Bulaga. He also was the only offensive lineman not charged with a "bad" run. Corey Linsley and the guards had difficult matchups against DTs Kyle Williams and Star Lotulelei. Linsley stood out in protection (no pressures) but gave up two "bad" runs. Lane Taylor bounced back from an off showing with a solid effort. On the four runs in which Taylor pulled the gain was 26 yards. On the right side, the Packers went with veteran Byron Bell over pugnacious Lucas Patrick for the injured Justin McCray (shoulder). Bell doesn't have nearly McCray's horsepower but he knows how to play and got by on this day. His protection was surprisingly good but he just kind of leaned on people in the run game and offered little in space.

### **QUARTERBACKS (2 ½)**

Maybe the knee injury is behind Aaron Rodgers. He scrambled four times for 34 yards, including three for first downs. His gait was fluid and he ran fast. He also was deemed healthy enough to take 27 snaps from under center after taking just six there in the first three games. His other rush went for minus-3; he stumbled to the turf pulling away from Linsley. He almost compounded the situation by risking an awkward handoff to Jamaal Williams. In the air, Rodgers didn't get much done from the pocket. Three or four completions on extended plays were all that were needed to repulse Buffalo. Once again, there was another wasted timeout. After three fruitless weeks of trying to draw the opponent offside with a hard count Rodgers didn't bother with it much this time. Defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier was reluctant to blitz, sending five or more on just 19.6% of dropbacks. Yet, both of the Bills' sacks came on five-man pressures when Rodgers either didn't see or reacted poorly to defensive backs as free runners. On Taron Johnson's sack, Rodgers fumbled and the Bills recovered. His 55% completion mark included two or three easy tosses that he just missed. After staring daggers at some receivers, Rodgers used his post-game press briefing to deliver some thinly-veiled complaints at Mike McCarthy in the areas of play-calling and offensive design.

### **RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)**

Jamaal Williams (28) started his fourth straight game before giving way to Ty Montgomery (20). Aaron Jones (29), who didn't take the field until the third series, started the second half. In just 12 touches, Jones broke nine tackles. By comparison, Williams and Montgomery each broke one. Jones shows outstanding acceleration and balance to go with an effective stiff-arm. On a 3-yard TD, he was dipping into a clogged hole before a subtle cut gave him daylight outside. On third and 1, Lotulelei was too much for Linsley to handle but Jones made it work by keeping his eyes up and finding a different track for a 3-yard gain. He smelled the end zone from 3 yards out, running through a tackler at the 1. When defenders draw near, Jones attacks them. Williams is Williams, a heavy-duty back best suited for inclement weather. The longest play of the day (43 yards) was made by Montgomery. Working off motion, he beat LB Matt Milano down the sideline after he made the mistake of trying to go underneath a pick. Montgomery is natural as a receiver but not as a rusher. When two defensive backs sandwiched him in close quarters, the ball went flying out. He isn't reliable.

### **DEFENSIVE LINE (3 ½)**

If the Packers will miss Muhammad Wilkerson with a season-ending ankle injury, you wouldn't know it from this game. Dean Lowry probably is about 15 pounds lighter but at 6-5 ½ he's taller and at 24 he's almost five years younger. Plus, for 3 ½ seasons Lowry has been one of the most high-energy members of the defense. Replacing Wilkerson, Lowry didn't play any of his 36 snaps in the middle of a three-man front. He played end, created some push with arms-to-the-chest power rushes and smelled out a quarterback draw. The problem is what happens if one of the big three goes down. The Packers think so little of Montravius Adams that even in a rout they didn't feel comfortable sticking him in there until 1 minute, 55 seconds remained. In his five snaps, all pass rushes, Adams never really got off the line of scrimmage. They need another 300-pounder they can depend on. Kenny Clark (played 47 of a possible 58 defensive snaps) remains a consistent force. Playing against a tough guy in C Russell Bodine and wide-body guards, Clark demanded double teams. He didn't make as many plays as usual but didn't budge much, either. Clark had 2 ½ of the unit's 4 ½ pressures. Also, he not only forced but also recovered the fumble by scrambling Josh Allen. Mike Daniels (36) was adequate.

## **LINEBACKERS (4 ½)**

Until the last three snaps, defensive coordinator Mike Pettine had rushed more than five only once all day. Pettine's rationale to send six on the last three plays must have been to preserve the shutout. Two resulted in sacks. Don't for a minute think that the Bills coaching staff will forget it. Right or wrong, that type of go-for-the-jugular coaching usually isn't seen in the NFL. The last two sacks were by Kyle Fackrell (26), whose three sacks all came in the fourth quarter and sent his confidence level "through the ceiling," Mike McCarthy said Monday. Also, Fackrell ran 40 yards deep covering speedy RB Taiwan Jones on a sideline takeoff and alertly redirected from a rush to halt Josh Allen's promising scramble. Reggie Gilbert (25) generated 2 ½ pressures largely because he goes all-out so often. Clay Matthews (37) and Nick Perry (33) shared one sack but didn't get much else done in the rush. Perry has been largely invisible this season for too long stretches. This was the best game of the season for Blake Martinez (58). First play of the game he broke down in space and got cat-quick LeSean McCoy down. On the second snap, he hit McCoy hard for a 2-yard gain. Martinez isn't a great take-on guy but when RG John Miller appeared in his face he shed him fast and made a strong form tackle. On his sack, he timed Allen's snap count perfectly and blew right by Miller. Why Martinez would remove his helmet after the second-quarter scuffle is unclear. What is clear is it cost the Packers 15 yards. Oren Burks (20) and Antonio Morrison (18) switched off. Burks showed burst limiting Allen to a gain of 6 on a read option. Morrison missed two tackles. James Crawford debuted from scrimmage with one snap.

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS (4 ½)**

With Kevin King (groin) out, the Bills went after Josh Jackson (49) because he's a rookie and this was his first start. As a fledgling quarterback, Josh Allen's half-field reads usually meant Kelvin Benjamin on the right side against Jackson. He made a beautiful sideline breakup of an 8-yard stop route. Later, he attacked Zay Jones across the middle and broke up a deep route. With the issue decided, Jackson drew a pair of 15-yard penalties for tackling and face-mask infractions. He does tend to get grabby. Jaire Alexander (37), the slot nickel, set the tone on Allen's first throw downfield by tipping away a slant to Benjamin. Just before the half, he ran deep with Jones and intercepted the underthrown ball in the end zone. Six plays before that, Alexander had Allen dead-to-rights for a sack but didn't run through him and missed. After the scramble by Allen, Alexander pushed his way into a fracas and shoved the quarterback to the ground. Fortunately for the Packers, he wasn't penalized. Alexander has been an agitator and trash talker since his arrival. On the right outside, Tramon Williams (58) gave up a couple insignificant completions but nothing over the top. He's solid. Newcomer Tony Brown played three snaps late. The interception by Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (58) possibly was as impressive as any play he has made in five seasons. From a two-deep shell he saw the ball and Benjamin, an imposing figure at 6-5 and 245, coming directly at him. Without regard for his safety Clinton-Dix attacked the ball with supreme focus. He secured the catch a split-second before Benjamin crashed into him. Benjamin left with a head injury as HHCD departed with his third pick in three games. Kentrell Brice (58) was OK. Jermaine Whitehead (39) showed good disguise and acceleration on his sack.

## **KICKERS (4)**

On a 49-degree day, Mason Crosby hit a pair of field goals from 52 yards and another from 36. He pushed his first of two extra points no good off the right upright. His five kickoffs averaged 70.6 yards and 3.9 seconds of hang time (three touchbacks). JK Scott punted five times, averaging 42.8 (gross), 38 (net) and 4.65 (hang time).

### **SPECIAL TEAMS (3 ½)**

Instead of bringing back CB Demetri Goodson to cover kicks, the Packers added free-agent rookie CB Tony Brown. In his first appearance, Brown joined Josh Jones as the gunners on the punt team and Marquez Valdes-Scantling as the holdup men on the punt-return team. Oren Burks and Jones set the tone with a lusty hit on the opening kickoff. Tramon Williams, who had returned just two punts and made four fair catches from 2011-'17, demonstrated just how useful he is filling in for Randall Cobb on punt returns. Old No. 38 wasn't back there just to catch it. He returned five of seven punts, often with defenders buzzing around him. His average was trifling (4.0) but his spirit was willing and his hands were secure. Jones drew one penalty (offsides) and came close to another (fair-catch interference). Hunter Bradley didn't help Crosby on the missed extra point with a flutterball that was well off-center. He did snap perfect laces on two field goals.

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