

Rating the Packers: Week 5 at Lions

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 8, 2018

Several times already this season the betting line on the Green Bay Packers has moved toward their opponent in the 12 hours or so before kickoff.

That's referred to as the "smart money," wagers made by professionals who bet pro football for a living.

As late as Saturday, the Packers were favored by one to 1 ½ points. When the "smart money" came in the line shifted toward the Detroit Lions, who ultimately went off at noon Sunday as a one-point favorite.

In this case, the wise guys knew their stuff. The Lions bolted to a 24-0 lead in the first half before the customary NFL scenario unfolded with the losing team making it mildly interesting in the second half. The 31-23 defeat left the Packers at 2-2-1 for the season and 2-3 against the spread. Over the 25-year period from 1992-'16, the Packers owned a 39-13 record (75%) against the Lions. Even with running back Barry Sanders on the roster for 16 of those games (1992-'98), the Lions still were just 5-11.

Suddenly, the Packers have lost three in a row to the Lions. The last time that happened, Wayne Fontes was coaching Detroit and Lindy Infante was coaching Green Bay. In 1990, the Lions won at Green Bay, 24-17, before sweeping the series in 1991, 23-14 and 21-17.

On Monday, coach Mike McCarthy's mind appeared to be on turnover differential. The Packers were minus-3 Sunday, leaving them tied for 23rd in the NFL at minus-2.

"As a football team that's just not part of our DNA," said McCarthy. "It's too hard to win games that way ... the common thread that I'm focused on is taking care of the football."

"Whether it's a slow start, fast start, loose in the middle, it's all irrelevant. Because if you don't take care of the football there's going to be other negative statistics that come off that."

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

The three stars of the game were: **1. Davante Adams. 2. Dean Lowry. 3. Mike Daniels.** As a team, the Packers received 2 footballs.

RECEIVERS (2 ½)

At mid-week, Lions CB Darius Slay compared Davante Adams' shoulder shake to former NBA star Allen Iverson. "He's a basketball guy off the line of scrimmage," Slay told the Detroit News. "I think him and (the Chargers') Keenan Allen are the two best guys releasing off the line of scrimmage, in my eyes. He will make you look crazy. I just know whoever is on him better be ready for all of that." Adams, who was questionable with a calf injury, played 71 of the possible 81 snaps on offense, catching nine of 13 targets for 140 yards (36 after the catch). Slay, ranked No. 9 among cornerbacks by Pro Football Weekly entering the season, had one of the poorest games in some time. With Slay in coverage, Adams beat him on an over route for 30, an in-breaking route for 23, an out route on fourth and 11 for 17, a slant for eight and another out for 12 and a touchdown. Adams started slowly, appearing to line up on the wrong side and costing the team a timeout and not making a catch until midway through the second quarter. Adams had a chance to make it a one-possession game with 4 minutes left. Despite a superb effort in which he stretched out behind nickel Jamal Agnew, Adams was charged with a 32-yard drop at the 1. Minus Randall Cobb (hamstring) and Geronimo Allison (concussion-hamstring), Marquez Valdes-Scantling (77) and J'Mon Moore (14) posted their highest snap counts whereas Equanimeous St. Brown (60) was making his debut. Also, Ty Montgomery took three snaps as a receiver. Valdes-Scantling (MVS for short) was penalized for a basic alignment mistake, was the likely culprit on an illegal-shift penalty and failed to drag his feet for a sideline incompleteness. Yet, his day was anything but a bust. He displayed soft hands catching seven of 10 targets and gained 68 yards. He's really raw but really fast. He was effective streaking through zones clearing space for underneath receivers. Maybe his best moment was a 7-yard out against Slay. St. Brown saw the ball just four times. He turned a 19-yard seamer into 54, weaving around and through three defensive backs. He drew a 21-yard penalty for pass interference on CB Teez Tabor. He extended nicely in the end zone trying to snag an overthrown pass. He would have had a 77-yard TD as time expired but was caught from behind by FS Tracy Walker, who ran 4.53 last spring. Moore still hasn't been targeted in 25 snaps. He lined up wrong initially on a two-point conversion. Much like the Bears on opening night, the Lions went way out of their way in an attempt to impede the releases of Jimmy Graham (66). There probably were 20 instances where a defensive end delayed his rush significantly just to chuck the tight end. Graham's best moment was a 24-yard seamer with undersized SS Quandre Diggs all over him. He also dropped a pass in the end zone over CB Nevin Lawson. Lance Kendricks (14 at TE, including seven with his hand down, and four at FB) made a nice hands catch for a 1-yard TD coming out of the backfield. Mercedes Lewis (12, nine with his hand down) blocked effectively but still hasn't had a pass thrown his way. Robert Tonyan (three, hand down once) debuted from scrimmage.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Justin McCray, questionable with a shoulder injury, practiced on a limited basis all week and was in uniform but didn't get in. Byron Bell made his second start at right guard, leaving open the possibility he might have moved ahead of McCray. Bell doesn't have nearly the thrust that McCray does as a run blocker or helping teammates in pass protection. Bell, however, has had fewer whiffs as a pass blocker. Neither man offers much athletically, and it shows on pulls and screens. Coach Matt Patricia and coordinator Paul Pasqualoni decided to play coverage. Their blitz rate was merely 13.1%, and on 16 of 61 dropbacks they rushed three or less. The afternoon also was made easier by the absence of DE Ziggy Ansah (shoulder). Considering how few rushers were involved, the total of 8 ½ pressures shared almost evenly by the five starters wasn't stellar. Perhaps the worst moment came in the second quarter when Corey Linsley prematurely left his double-team with Lane Taylor against rookie DE Da'Shawn Hand. With Taylor in an awkward position, Hand poured through to sack/strip Aaron Rodgers, which led to a touchdown. Of the four "bad" runs, two were charged to Taylor. Linsley's cat-and-mouse battle with Jarrad Davis, the active middle linebacker, probably was a draw. Veteran acquisitions Romeo Okwara and Devon Kennard were surprisingly effective rushing against David Bakhtiari and Bryan Bulaga.

QUARTERBACKS (1)

Aaron Rodgers chose the adjective "terrible" to describe the offense against Buffalo. On Sunday, his performance was terrible, at least until early in the third quarter. Losing two fumbles (Rodgers had done that just twice before in his 14-year career) that were routinely controllable was brutal enough. He knows bad things happen when you hold the ball for 5.5 seconds on a slow scramble. He saw Okwara turn the corner against Bakhtiari. Then the lights went out, the ball went flying into a pack of Lions and Detroit got a three-point freebie. Later, he tried to escape Hand after the Linsley-Taylor botch job but was unable to secure the ball. The Lions turned that into seven points. Rodgers also deserved partial blame on the other two sacks for holding the ball too long. With NFL completion percentages off to a record start, Rodgers is mired at a mere 63% after another off day (32 of 52, 61.5%). The boot pass to Graham that went over his head because it had no touch. Not even getting the ball close to the uncovered Adams on what probably would have been a 23-yard TD. Overthrowing MVS in the end-zone corner. Underthrowing MVS on what might have been a 42-yard TD. Firing too high and too hard to Graham at the front pylon. Skipping a crosser to MVS. Missing Adams badly on a slant and go with Slay in desperate catchup mode. The Packers have little chance unless the Bills are at Lambeau Field if Rodgers keeps playing like this. They need him energized, focused and prepared to win. They don't need someone who is more concerned about who isn't on the field than who is. His 301-yard second half basically was standard operating procedure. It's how NFL games go. The team that's ahead plays soft defense, quarterbacks throw every down, chains move, yardage mounts, every rule favors the offense and the clock never seems to run out. Ever notice how Rodgers and McCarthy are masters at getting such drives started? No one's better at rolling up fourth-quarter production in near-hopeless situations.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

The rotation was unchanged. Jamaal Williams started and played 33 snaps, Ty Montgomery (29) usually was the hurry-up back and Aaron Jones (22) was the leader in rushing (40 yards) and yards from scrimmage (59). Montgomery is getting better in pass protection, even against much bigger people. He blocked the 256-pound Kennard on one play. On another, he filtered through the line and stopped 270-pound Kerry Hyder dead in his tracks with a violent chip. Surprisingly, Montgomery wasn't as sound as a receiver. He collided with Adams on a check-down, eliminating both as targets on Rodgers' first fumble, and dropped a screen pass. You've got to admire Williams for bringing it at tacklers on every single one of his touches. If only his sublime effort were contagious. A lot of people have beat MLB Jarrad Davis in the passing game this season, and Williams made a nice fake to become the latest on a conversion pass. Jones doesn't play more because he's lacking as a pass blocker and McCarthy wants him fresh for later in the season.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

Something's got to give here. When Muhammad Wilkerson's season ended after 2 ½ games, the Packers elevated Dean Lowry to replace him. What they didn't do was start playing Montravius Adams, the third-round draft choice from Auburn in 2017 who was supposed to have pass-rushing quickness and run-stopping strength. In fact, Adams has played even less (five snaps against Buffalo, one Sunday) post-Wilkerson. You can understand why the staff is reluctant to play him. His only snap was on the goal-line defense, and LeGarrette Blount ran at him for a 1-yard TD. He hasn't shown the ability to hold the point. The problem is, Kenny Clark (played 57 of the 62 possible snaps on defense), Mike Daniels (49) and Lowry (42) have been on the field too much. If this keeps on, they'll be ready for the season to end by Thanksgiving. All three, however, were effective Sunday. There were six running plays for a net of seven yards in which Lowry either shed a block and made the tackle or held his ground so others could make the stop. The Packers are better off with Lowry than Wilkerson, who basically had it on cruise control. Daniels had his best pass-rushing day of the season with a team-leading four pressures. Both Lowry and Daniels had their most success against RT Ricky Wagner. On the other hand, Wagner worked over Daniels four or five times in the run game. Sometimes Daniels takes himself out of plays because of the line call. Other times, he gets engulfed and/or moved. Clark accounted for 1 ½ of the team's three tackles for loss and posted two pressures, as did Lowry. NT Tyler Lancaster, the rookie free agent who came off the practice squad Saturday, debuted on the Lions' kneel-down play with 1 second left. He'll have to start playing soon.

LINEBACKERS (2)

With Jermaine Whitehead (back) down, Oren Burks had a critical assignment as the inside linebacker opposite Blake Martinez (62) on passing downs. Whitehead had covered Minnesota's Dalvin Cook and Buffalo's LeSean McCoy. The Packers probably felt confident he could match up satisfactorily on Theo Riddick, one of the game's more dangerous receiving backs. In a season-high 25 snaps, Burks deserved considerable credit for why Riddick wasn't a factor (2-20). The Lions went after Burks on the first series. WR Marvin Jones cracked Burks, and when the Vanderbilt rookie didn't get rid of the block RB Kerryon Johnson was around the corner for 16. A few plays later, Burks walked out in the slot to cover Riddick, who took him deep down the sideline. Burks had solid position and the ball fell incomplete. Later, he tackled Riddick in space after a gain of eight on third and 13. The knock on Burks is an inability to take on blocks. He shed 330-pound RG Kenny Wiggins quickly and made a strong tackle of Johnson. On a screen for 12, Burks took a poor angle. It was interesting to see a true sideline-to-sideline middle linebacker like Jarrad Davis, who is faster than Martinez. Don't be surprised if Martinez wins one of those weekly awards for his two sacks. What those corporate selectors probably won't know is that he didn't even rush on the plays. He joined the rush to fall on Matthew Stafford for the first and tackles him for the second after teammates flushed him from the pocket. It's why pressure totals, not sack totals, are more meaningful in assessing pass rushers. Antonio Morrison (18) is OK between the tackles but his shortage of speed shows up beyond. The four outside linebackers – Clay Matthews (44), Nick Perry (35), Reggie Gilbert (31) and Kyler Fackrell (25) – had days to forget. Matthews and Fackrell were shut out; Perry and Gilbert each settled for one pressure. With the Packers down by 11 and trying to get the ball back in the fourth quarter, neither Matthews nor Perry was on the field for the first three snaps of the Lions' next two possessions. Instead, the coaches felt fine sending out Gilbert and Fackrell. How the mighty have fallen. Matthews is a step or two late these days trying to catch the running back as he flattens from the back side. When the Lions drove for a clinching TD in the fourth quarter, Perry got mashed by TE Levine Toilolo at the point on Blount's 6-yard burst by him on third and 1. One play later, Perry was influenced by misdirection, didn't get up the field, lost leverage and saw Johnson turn his edge for 24.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (3)

The learning continues for Josh Jackson (47). With Jaire Alexander (groin) out, Jackson was the nickel. It was rather a passive day for the unit playing the ball, which is why Jackson's two breakups stood out. He also gave up the 60-yard bomb to Kenny Golladay, which was 42 yards longer than Matthew Stafford's next longest completion. Jackson's mistake was leaving his feet before he was in position. Golladay looked like a man against a boy seizing the ball overhead leaving Jackson in the dust, and then shrugged aside a feeble attempted tackle by Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (62). Jackson also drew his third major penalty (grabbing the facemask) on defense in two games. On the left outside, Kevin King (51) returned after a 2 ½-game absence and was OK before leaving with a facial laceration. He tackled aggressively, and at times his press coverage caused Stafford to look elsewhere. But King remains rough around the edges in coverage. On the right outside, Tramon Williams (61) didn't play up to his first-month standard. He was somewhat slow to react in run support and in coverage. Marvin Jones's 46-yard TD behind him was brought back by penalty. Jones ran by him again on a free play but couldn't quite hang on to what would have been a 42-yard score. Rookie Tony Brown (seven) took the field when King departed and showed promise as a bump-and-run defender. He threw away a favorable impression by standing over Golladay and taunting him after a third-and-8 incompleteness that he probably should have intercepted. His penalty didn't cost the Packers any points but the Lions kept the ball for three more minutes. Minus Whitehead, his favorite pressure player in the secondary, coordinator Mike Pettine used Clinton-Dix on six blitzes, or twice as many as he received in Games 1-4. He came off Kerryon Johnson for a sack that Lowry flushed to him. What Clinton-Dix must cut out is gambling in the red zone and focus on playing his keys. Kentrell Brice (61) played OK although he had two of the unit's five missed tackles. Josh Jones (four) made his return to the defense in a long-yardage package.

KICKERS (one-half)

It was the nightmare to end all nightmares for Mason Crosby, a portrait of professionalism since 2007. In a dome, for Pete's sake, Crosby missed from 41 (wide left by a yard or two, from the left hashmark), 42 (wide left off the upright, left hash), 38 (wide right by a foot or two, right hash) and 56 (wide right by two or three yards, left hash). He also missed an extra point (33 yards) off the left upright. He did make a 41-yard kick from the left hash with 2 seconds left. The snaps and holds were good. His four kickoffs averaged 71.8 yards and 3.91 seconds of hang time. Three were touchbacks. JK Scott didn't have to punt.

SPECIAL TEAMS (one-half)

The game tilted toward Detroit on the second special-teams play when a punt skimmed off Kevin King and the Lions gained possession at the 1. Making a judgment call, Tramon Williams decided not to run up and make a fair catch of the 39-yard Aussie punt by Sam Martin even though it came down on the numbers at the 13. King was in the role as a holdup man because Marquez Valdes-Scantling had an increased role on offense. With King in front of Williams, Lions S Charles Washington pushed him toward the bouncing ball. On the ensuing kickoff, Josh Jones drew his third penalty in two games for what looked to be a blatant hold. As a result, Ty Montgomery's 64-yard kickoff return in which he broke three tackles was reduced to 21. The Packers' special teams had five accepted penalties, the first time they've had that many since Game 11 of 2010. Not having Jermaine Whitehead, regarded as the key player on the four core units, didn't help. Holder Hunter Bradley snapped perfect laces on Crosby's five misses. His worst snap came on the field goal that Crosby made.