

Rating the Packers: Week 6 vs 49ers

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 17, 2018

For one, Mike McCarthy could be thrilled about winning a game that for a long time appeared as though it would go down as one of the worst upset defeats in his 13-year administration. For another, the coach now can try to reap the residuals from his team's second stirring come-from-behind victory at Lambeau Field in the first six weeks of the season. But everyone knows what stands nearest and dearest to McCarthy's heart when it comes to his football team. That's turnover differential, of course, the part of the game that more than anything else has enabled McCarthy to win 134 games in 12 ½ years, which ties him with Weeb Ewbank for 25th place on the all-time victory list. His Green Bay Packers entered last week tied for 23rd in turnover differential at minus-2. Not only did the Packers lose to the Detroit Lions a week ago, they left Ford Field with a 3-0 defeat in turnovers. McCarthy must have been extremely pleased with the 3-0 advantage in turnover differential that the Packers held over the San Francisco 49ers on Monday night. Even with that enormous edge, the Packers' inability to put down the 49ers (1-5) until Mason Crosby kicked a 27-yard field goal as time expired spoke to several problem areas that remain. Here is a rating of the Packers against the 49ers in their 33-30 triumph, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses. The three stars of the game were: **1. Davante Adams. 2. Kevin King. 3. Mason Crosby.** As a team, the Packers received 3 ½ footballs.

RECEIVERS (5)

Until Monday, the only game the Packers had three players with at least 100 receiving yards was Oct. 12, 1980 at Tampa: RB Eddie Lee Ivery (11-128), TE Paul Coffman (9-109) and WR Aundra Thompson (7-102). Hall of Famer James Lofton had an off day (2-31). The Packers settled for a 14-14 tie in overtime despite piling up a 569-262 margin in yards when Tom Birney missed three field-goal attempts. In this game, the century receivers were Davante Adams (10-132), Jimmy Graham (5-104) and Marquez Valdes-Scantling (3-103). The unit ran some terrific routes and made some beautiful catches, and there were no drops. Adams (played 63 of the possible 71 snaps on offense) dominated the last three minutes with four receptions for 81 yards. Three of his catches came against overmatched RC Greg Mabin, who replaced tough Jimmie Ward after his hamstring acted up late. With Adams running wild, LC Richard Sherman took matters into his own hands and began covering him from the slot in "trips" formation. From their 19 with 43 seconds left, the Packers would have had to punt after a third-and-15 play ended up in a 4-yard sack. However, Adams slipped past Sherman in the middle and drew an illegal-contact penalty to sustain the drive. The tying touchdown came on a stop-and-go against Mabin in the left corner (16 yards). Minus Randall Cobb and Geronimo Allison for another game because of hamstring injuries, MVS (66), Equanimeous St. Brown (35) and J'Mon Moore (17) filled in admirably. When it appeared Ward blew a coverage on the Packers' first play MVS turned a 25-yard pass into a gain of 60 with his big speed. He ran a poor route in the flat on an incomplection. Later, he made amends by picking up an extra 12 on a 13-yard bubble screen, making nickel back K'Waun Williams miss, and then came back to make a great catch for 30 on an extended sideline route with SS Jaquiski Tartt all over him. St. Brown wasn't targeted until third and 2 with 15 seconds left. Then he made an extraordinary grab on a back shoulder for 19 that was tight to the sideline. Moore's only target came when Sherman ignored him and Rodgers tossed it outside for 10. Graham (56, 16 with his hand down) took advantage of a busted coverage by ILB Fred Warner on an over route for 54 (his longest gain since a 56-yard TD for New Orleans in Game 2 of 2013). On a pair of third and mediums, he neatly used his

big body to shield Tantt for gains of 11 and 21. Graham can't run anymore but he's crafty and can find soft spots. The forward progress rule saved him from a lost fumble. An upright runner, he absorbs punishing shots in the open field. Lance Kendricks (22, including seven with his hand down and five as a fullback) continues making himself useful with two catches for 37. His ill-advised late shift in the final minute was responsible for a delay penalty. The 'Y' tight end, Mercedes Lewis (22, 17 with his hand down), started and played the first five snaps. Basically a sixth offensive lineman, he's the club's best blocking tight end.

OFFENSIVE LINEMEN (3 ½)

Nobody turned in an outstanding performance against a defensive line that included three former first-rounds picks in DeForest Buckner, Solomon Thomas and Arik Armstead. On the other hand, nobody played poorly, either, and defensive coordinator Robert Saleh threw a lot of stunts and pressures at them. RG Byron Bell made his third consecutive start and made it through OK. He seemed to tire down the stretch. Yet, even when Saleh was running his best twists in the final minute, Bell relied on his seven years of seasoning and kept passing them off. He missed four snaps with what appeared to be a shoulder injury and was replaced by Lucas Patrick. When Bell returned, he later had to move to right tackle for 12 plays when Bryan Bulaga departed with a shoulder injury of his own. In all, Bell played 67 snaps, Bulaga played 59 and Patrick played 16. At tackle, Bell's athletic limitations were glaring. He doesn't bend well, but so far it's hurt him more blocking for run than pass. Bulaga allowed the fewest pressures (one-half) of the starters but drew a false-start penalty, his third of the season and his sixth foul overall. With Lewis available to block down and cut the defense, David Bakhtiari was able to pull three times and the net was 25. He might be as fast now at 315 pounds as he was running 5.08 while weighing 299 at the combine in 2013. Lane Taylor had the most difficult matchup in Buckner; he allowed the most pressures (three) and "bad" runs (1 ½). Patrick knocked down Buckner on one screen but then missed in space on another. Corey Linsley sorted out Saleh's 34% blitz rate.

QUARTERBACKS (4)

In the end, Aaron Rodgers helped drive the balky offense 139 yards in 14 plays for 10 points in the final three minutes. That's a remarkable feat, and thus the Packers were able to pull one out. Against a five-man zone blitz, he had to release early to Adams but still found the bull's eye a foot or two over Mabin's outstretched glove for the equalizer. His back-shoulder to St. Brown was stunning, as was that long over route to Graham for 54. The key to that throw was keeping a low trajectory so Graham wouldn't get hung out to dry and take a lick from the safety. After that strike, Graham had the luxury of striding 38 yards after the catch. Yet, Rodgers wasn't near the top of his game for the first 57 minutes. Wearing a knee brace, he still is a little antsy against pressure and missed some receivers that were running free downfield. On the three sacks, all were at least partially his fault for recognition or release issues. He missed some receivers short, drew his third intentional-grounding penalty of the season, squandered a timeout or two and again tried in vain to get the opponent to jump at his hard count. Showing zero impatience in the pocket with :43 seconds showing, he made a great read after scanning the field for six seconds and took off for 21. Unlike the first three games, Rodgers spent a good deal of time (26 of 71 snaps) under center. He also had to throw the ball away seven times, two more than his previous high of five against the Vikings in Game 11 of 2013.

RUNNING BACKS (3 ½)

Green Bay hadn't scored a point in its first five opening possessions. Giving Aaron Jones (19) his first start over Jamaal Williams (27), McCarthy saw the move pay dividends. On a toss sweep, Jones flashed that big burst of his for a 16-yard gain that set up a TD. Jones sells out. With his reckless style, he might not have a lengthy career. For now, he's both productive and exciting. What continues keeping Jones off the field are deficiencies in the passing game. He dropped the only pass of the day. In the third quarter, Jones was pulled after the first play of a series when he appeared to miss an assignment. His blitz pickup is unreliable, too. Williams is the same player each week. Consistency is his watchword. Ty Montgomery (26) was credited with a 2-yard TD run on a pitch from a cool new diamond set. He also started the winning drive by eluding Buckner in the hole and taking the ball outside and then out of bounds for 14.

DEFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

Prospectors coach Kyle Shanahan used an old-fashioned two-back, one-tight end formation a lot. In turn, defensive coordinator Mike Pettine went with a three-defensive linemen front on 39 of the possible 57 snaps. The Packers knew the run was coming but couldn't stop it (174 yards rushing, 5.8 per carry). RBs Matt Breida and Raheem Mostert looked like world-beaters against a front that was torn asunder in the first half before regaining a degree of respect in the second half. The turnaround naturally began with Kenny Clark (52), who has been the team's top defensive player in 2018. On the 49ers' first play of the third quarter Clark shed LG Laken Tomlinson and stopped Breida for a gain of 2. Later, he came off C Weston Richburg on three runs worth a total of 4 yards. Clark also beat RG Mike Person and Richburg for one of the club's two sacks. Mike Daniels wasn't on the injury report but surprisingly had less playing time (39 snaps) than Dean Lowry (49). With the 49ers perched at their 47 and just 1:49 left in a tie game, it was Clark and Lowry in a 4-2 front and not Daniels. Lowry is five inches taller than Daniels, and in today's football maybe the defensive coaches think of batted passes as much as sacks. Lowry's motor might run as high as Daniels'. All three are all-out players all the time. The pressure counts were two for Clark, 1 ½ for Lowry and none for Daniels. The Packers appear to be seeking one-on-one chances for Daniels with all their pre-snap movement, but even when they succeed he hasn't been winning enough. Lowry and Daniels can be stout against the run but they're not in the same category as Clark. The spares, Tyler Lancaster (three) and Montravius Adams (two), got the call in the second quarter before sitting the entire second half.

LINEBACKERS (½)

With the competition soon stiffening it's going to be a long season for the defense if the linebackers can't play better than this. The staff gave rookie Oren Burks the chance to stop the run and the results weren't there. He had a season-high 28 snaps working next to Blake Martinez (57) whereas Antonio Morrison, the designated run stopper for a month, received a season-low three. Burks played like the safety that he was for most of his first three seasons at Vanderbilt. Six times the 49ers ran right at him for a net of 44 yards. He's a chicken fighter who lacks the power to engage and shed blocks. He plays with adequate tempo but has a hard time getting off blocks. Burks appears to be an intense player. He was soft in this game because of his deficiencies in size and strength. When Kyle Juszczyk took a run at Burks and then kept going, he was hopelessly beat for a 21-yard pass behind him. The 49ers' longest rush, 26 yards, ruptured when Martinez guessed on the gap Mostert would hit and then missed an

easy tackle that would have limited the carry to 5 yards. Martinez also can be slow to shed. Martinez' ordinary speed always is a limiting factor on wide runs and any coverage in which he's asked to get depth in the middle. The best part of Martinez' game was pass rush. In eight blitzes, he generated a pair of hurries. Morrison ended up on his back after being destroyed by TE George Kittle, a tenacious blocker, on Mostert's 26-yard burst. One more play and that was the end of Morrison's night from scrimmage. On the outside, the only positive were the three batted balls by Nick Perry (29). They were vital in the outcome. Perry and Clay Matthews (37) didn't set a consistent edge, and the 49ers wore out the flanks. Matthews isn't as reckless against the run as he once was. Kyler Fackrell (29) and Reggie Gilbert (23) also played but, like Perry, failed to generate a pressure. Matthews had two, including his first full sack of the season in 4.6 seconds against rookie RT Mike McGlinchey. When Kittle tried to block Perry one-on-one on the first dropback, he lost him inside. Perry would have crushed C.J. Beathard with a frontal shot if this was 2017 or earlier. In 2018, he played patty-cake and pulled off. Where has this game gone? Matthews' worst moment came on one of his seven pass drops. WR Pierre Garcon circled back behind Beathard before catching a check-down. Matthews was so tight he couldn't break down at all and Garcon zipped by to turn a loss of 3 into a gain of 15. Pettine blitzed a hefty 53.6% of passes because the four-man rush was so tame.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (3)

The day started ominously for Kevin King (57) when he wasn't even in the same zip code as Marquise Goodwin ran a deep sideline against him for 17. King bounced back, offering tight coverage on incompletions to Goodwin and Garcon and making a knifing tackle to halt Kittle on a promising screen. With the game on the line and 1:13 left, Pettine called a "zero" blitz with man coverage and no safety help. Shanahan bemoaned the fact that Beathard didn't exercise a better option on his deep ball to Goodwin against King that was intercepted. If Beathard had thrown the ball to the vacant outside part of the field, Goodwin could have used his blazing speed to run it down. Instead, Beathard threw inside, plus the ball was slightly underthrown. King deserves a world of credit for not looking back for the ball until he was within arm's length of the receiver. When he did peek over his left shoulder, there was the ball for the first pick of his career. The 49ers seemed intent on making Tramon Williams (57) tackle on the right outside, and their plan worked beautifully when he was slow to get off blocks and support. Sitting nine yards off at the snap of the ball, Williams guessed Goodwin was going to the post. Goodwin broke to the corner and Williams had no chance to prevent a 30-yard TD. Without Jaire Alexander (groin), Josh Jackson (21) and Jermaine Whitehead (27) played nickel and dime. Jackson has to stop using his hands so much. On third and 7, he was penalized for holding WR Kendrick Bourne away from the ball. That was his fourth penalty from scrimmage in three games. Kentrell Brice (57) was at least partially responsible for the third long TD pass in the middle of the field in the last five games. When the cornerbacks both blitzed, Brice's primary responsibility was to maintain leverage and not get beat deep. Instead, he gave up the inside and saw Goodwin run by him for a 67-yard score. After Burks bit on the 21-yard pass to Juszczyk, the fullback fumbled on a textbook strip by Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (57); King made a textbook recovery. That was exceptional. On Pettine's seven-man charge on King's interception, the 49ers had no one to block Clinton-Dix and so he knocked down Beathard.

KICKERS (4)

Mason Crosby looked like a new man. One week after his horrendous performance helped lose the Lions game, the old pro came back to hit from 29, 39, 51 and the game-winner from 27. He mis-hit one of his seven kickoffs, hurting his averages. His seven-boot marks were 65.4 yards and 3.68 seconds of hang time. Punting in cold weather (low 30s) for the first time, JK Scott left a lot to be desired with four-punt averages of 38.8 yards (gross), 33.8 (net) and 4.37 (hang time).

SPECIAL TEAMS (2 ½)

Raven Greene, a rookie safety from James Madison, hustled from the side and forced Richie James to fumble on a 30-yard kickoff return. In a scramble, LB James Crawford recovered to set up a field goal. One week after these units had five accepted penalties, they had five more but just two were accepted. Montgomery's 66-yard return of a kickoff was shortened to 22 because Morrison drew a holding penalty. Morrison had the exact same penalty on the second-half kickoff but it was declined. Late in the game, James decided to head out of bounds after a 32-yard kickoff return. Tony Brown shoved James as he left the field and drew an unnecessary roughness penalty. Hunter Bradley snapped much more precisely on placements in Detroit than in this game. Of his seven snaps for Crosby, only one had "perfect laces" for Scott to put down without a spin. Scott performed flawlessly, as did Crosby. The gunners on punts were Brown and Josh Jones; Brown had a chance to down a punt inside the 5 but didn't. The hold-up players on punt return were Brown and King. Tramon Williams ran up nicely to field a short punt. Later, he made three tacklers miss on a 6-yard return.