

# Rating the Packers: Week 7 vs Rams

By Bob McGinn Posted: Oct 30, 2018

Drained. Heartbroken. Crushed.

That's how the Green Bay Packers felt Sunday night on the flight back from Los Angeles just as the Chicago Bears and San Francisco 49ers did earlier this season on their returns from Green bay.

For the Packers, the 29-27 defeat at the hands of the Rams represented what they called their best game in an uneven season. The Bears also tried to stay upbeat after their 24-23 loss on Sept. 9 at Lambeau Field just as the 49ers did following their 33-30 setback on Oct. 15 in Green Bay.

In some ways, Rams coach Sean McVay spoke for Mike McCarthy on Monday in assessing the well-played battle.

"Unbelievable, competitive game back and forth," said McVay. "I thought the Packers did a great job. Really, it was a great demonstration. I thought it was just a high-caliber game."

Speaking at about the same time half a continent away, McCarthy went so far as to call it probably his favorite road game in 13 seasons with the Packers.

"It probably was my top away game ever," he said. "We've had some special moments in visiting stadiums but that was extraordinary. Our fans were incredible. It was a great atmosphere.

"You want to know if it was emotional in that locker room? You're damn right it was. And it should have been and I want it to be because that's a reflection of how much these guys care.

"The game came down to the big turnover at the end. That's the fine line between winning and losing in this game."

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

The three stars of the game were: **1. Jaire Alexander. 2. Corey Linsley. 3. Mike Daniels.**

## RECEIVERS (4 ½)

Before Randall Cobb suffered a hamstring injury he was considered indispensable by the coaching staff. His playing time was 91.3% in the first three games. That certainly changed Sunday when Cobb played 24 of the possible 52 snaps on offense, or 46.2%. Maybe the staff wanted to bring him back slowly. In a game of this magnitude, however, the best players were going to play. Geronimo Allison was back after missing two games (concussion, hamstring) and played 30 snaps. Making the start opposite Davante Adams (40) was Marquez Valdes-Scantling (31). "I can't say enough about what he's done with his opportunities," Mike McCarthy said Monday. What made MVS' first two snaps interesting was the fact they were scripted runs. The staff must think highly of his run blocking. Equanimeous St. Brown (six) played whereas J'Mon Moore didn't. Everyone played well. No one on the team dropped a pass. Adams was static most of the first half, lining up wide to a side 19 times. Covered by Marcus Peters, Adams was targeted just twice. For an opener in the third quarter, Aaron Rodgers jammed a sideline pass to him for 9 yards. Later, when the Packers began moving him inside, Adams set up touchdowns with a 41-yard post behind Peters and two other receptions for 35. He ran an exquisite double move to beat Peters deep for 48 in the first half. The No. 1 priority for this offense has to be getting the ball in Adams' hands. Given a chance to beat CB Troy Hill, MVS eluded his jam and it was bye-bye for a 40-yard TD. St. Brown caught his two targets, including an over route for 23 against Peters in which the pass was thrown behind him. Jimmy Graham (46, including 15 with his hand down) used his wide catch radius stretching for a 21-yard seam shot but then failed to separate on two bang-bang incompletions. Lance Kendricks (17, including 10 at FB and five with his hand down) looked comfortable on two iso blocks against ILB Cory Littleton that gained 12. Mercedes Lewis (12, all with his hand down) made a fine adjustment on the first play, coming off a double team to pancake Littleton in the hole and spring Aaron Jones for 13. Lewis' streak of not being targeted all season (91 snaps) continued.

### **OFFENSIVE LINE (3)**

The Rams' front three of Aaron Donald, Ndamukong Suh and Michael Brockers is tremendous. The Packers could have performed better; they also could have been a whole lot worse. Donald finished with two sacks, 1 ½ knockdowns and 1 ½ hurries. Of his 48 snaps, the breakdown was 32 against Lane Taylor, 12 against Byron Bell, three against Bryan Bulaga and one against Corey Linsley. Taylor's double-team rate of 31.3% included 38.9% on passes and 21.4% on runs. Often in the run game, Donald would explode into the B gap and Taylor would shove him up the field and there would be a good gain. Of the five "bad" runs charged to O-linemen, Taylor was the only one without any. By and large, he wasn't bad in protection, either. His 4 ½ pressures included Donald's two sacks and 2 ½ knockdowns by others. When Rodgers held the ball for 2.6 seconds before tossing the 48-yarder to Adams, Taylor was handling Donald without help. Bell received double-team help against Donald on 41.7% of the snaps. He allowed three pressures and 1 ½ "bad" runs. Bell is able to use his mass to cover people up but he's often late to the second level because he's so ponderous. On the safety that turned the game around, Bell was displaced by Suh. Besides allowing nary a pressure, Linsley's lone "bad" run came when he overran Littleton. Linsley played a smart, strong game keeping Suh at bay. Bulaga was money in protection operating mainly against Brockers and OLB Matt Longacre but less effective blocking for the run. On the safety, he was late getting back to pick up ILB Mark Barron. Earlier, he got waxed by Donald on a "bad" run. The only lineman that pulled was Bakhtiari on a 5-yard carry. He got beat inside by Brockers for a "bad" run and allowed a late pressure to DE John Franklin-Myers.

### **QUARTERBACKS (3 ½)**

Two statistics jump out regarding Aaron Rodgers' season. He has only one interception, and that came on a tipped ball that was only partially his fault. In just one other season (2014) has he had just one pick through seven games. At the same time, Rodgers' completion percentage is merely 61.3% after a 60% showing against the Rams. After seven weeks he ranked 28<sup>th</sup>. His career low for a full season was 60.7% in 2015; he entered 2018 at 65.1%. Rodgers continues to pass up chain-moving short passes searching for intermediate-to-deep throws. His accuracy, so precise for so many years, is off. His receivers have done their fair share with a manageable 16 drops, down from 18 at this point a year ago. Rodgers goes along not playing up to his elite standards but every week there are moments of excellence. Trailing by 10 points late in the third quarter and facing third and 9, Rodgers exhibited remarkable pocket poise when Franklin-Myers beat Bakhtiari and pounded him in the back as he was ridden by. Nevertheless, Rodgers kept his eyes downfield, stepped up every so slightly to avoid the sack and threw a high, safe ball that Adams high-pointed for 41. The Packers continued to squander timeouts, and Rodgers' hard count is fooling no one. It was surprising to see Rodgers get dragged down by LBs Cory Littleton and Samsom Ekubam in the open field. Late in the first quarter, Rodgers probably should have checked to a different play on third and 5 at the Rams 25 than exercise the run off the left side in which Aaron Jones had basically two unblocked defenders waiting to stop him. The drive-killing gain was 2.

## **RUNNING BACKS (4)**

On the safety, Mike McCarthy said Jones had a chance to “crease it and be one-on-one with the safety.” Instead, he plowed straight-ahead into Mark Barron, who slipped through the B gap to bow up and make the tackle. A better ball carrier from the 1 probably would have been Jamaal Williams, who showed surge smelling the end zone on his 1-yard scoring smash. Jones made his second start and finished with 32 snaps compared to 13 for Williams and just six for Ty Montgomery. The only two tackles broken belonged to Jones. One was on his 33-yard TD run between the hash marks when SS John Johnson missed at the 24. As good as Jones is almost every time he runs the ball, he remains wildly inconsistent in the passing game. Almost every screen pass and check-down is an adventure. The staff must see improvement in his weak areas because that’s the only advantage Montgomery has on Jones and for the first time there was vast disparity in their playing time. Montgomery’s six snaps included a three-and-out in the second quarter, a 5-yard carry on the final play of the half and two plays in the final series. After Montgomery appeared to run a lazy route in the flat on a ball that fell incomplete, the coaches sent in Jones to carry off tackle for 4 before Montgomery came back to pass block on third and 6. Montgomery actually fumbled on his rush with :03 left before halftime (Bulaga recovered) but he was ruled down by contact.

## **DEFENSIVE LINE (4)**

Kenny Clark (played 63 of the possible 78 defensive snaps) remains semi-unblockable. Week after week he hunkers down as a 1- or 3-technique and works through double teams with very little budging. In this game he shed LG Rodger Saffold, a player the Rams say is having a great season, on two runs for a net of 3. He knocked back C John Sullivan on a rush for no gain. Jared Goff gave Clark one of his two sacks by running to him but the other was the result of a power push against Sullivan. In all, Clark had five pressures, or one-half more than Mike Daniels (49). Daniels never laid a glove on Goff but had 4 ½ pressures, including two against Saffold and 1 ½ against Sullivan. Against the run, Daniels stuffed RG Austin Blythe twice and both RT Rob Havenstein and Sullivan once on four runs totaling 5 yards. Daniels always give top effort, but as the game worn on his tempo was rather amazing. He was hustling like a man possessed. Dean Lowry (38) was up and down. He was responsible for stopping Todd Gurley’s two-point run by stacking up Havenstein at the point of attack. Lowry can be rolled out for a gain of 8 on one play and then disengage from Blythe to stop the runner for no gain on the next. Despite temperatures in the mid-80’s, the coaches still gave just minimal time to Tyler Lancaster (eight) and Montravius Adams (five). Lancaster, the rookie free agent from Northwestern, appeared to stun Saffold by wheeling around him to pressure Goff. It should have been a knockdown but Lancaster thought the better of it and pulled off to avoid a penalty/fine. A move that good should have ended with a booming hit. On Lancaster’s first snap of the second half, he tripped on a pass rush giving Goff a window through which he gunned a 19-yard completion. Adams got high and looked like he was on roller skates. The Packers aren’t able to find out if the third-round draft choice has any rush because opponents are going to exploit his missing anchor every time they see No. 90 run on the field.

### **LINEBACKERS (3)**

Clay Matthews (53) made up for a nearly invisible first half with a big second half. His seven tackles might not be a lot for most linebackers but for Matthews they marked his single-game high since the 2015 divisional playoffs in Arizona. He pushed through TE Tyler Higbee at the point to help ruin a third-and-1 run. Just like the old days, he flattened down from the back side twice and made the tackle. As a rusher, it was a different story. He had two pressures, including a sack that was set up by Jermaine Whitehead and Daniels. Defensive coordinator Mike Pettine tried to free Matthews by using him three times as a rover on third down. He hasn't had a dominant rush game this season. On the other side, Nick Perry (40) settled for one pressure but, like Matthews, was more effective against the run. Reggie Gilbert (34) and Kyler Fackrell (28) played almost as much as the starters. Gilbert had 2 ½ tackles for loss and one pressure. Fackrell turned the corner against old pro Andrew Whitworth for an impressive sack in 3.5 seconds. On the inside, Blake Martinez (78) played one of his better games. He did some good things in his eight rushes, covered adequately in the flats and was good on the goal-line. Martinez was the victim of a legal pick by Higbee that knocked him off Gurley and led to his easy 30-yard TD pass. Oren Burks (eight) hardly played after a soft showing against the 49ers.

### **DEFENSIVE BACKS (3 ½)**

The coaches benched heavily penalized Josh Jackson (three), started Jaire Alexander (78) on the right outside and moved Tramon Williams (78) to the slot. Ha Ha Clinton-Dix (78) played every snap but Kentrell Brice, who had played all but one snap in the first six games, settled for 66. Jermaine Whitehead (75) played most of the game at ILB next to Martinez before leaving late with more back problems. Alexander was a revelation both in coverage and as a tackler. His five breakups all had a considerable degree of difficulty. Three came against blazer Brandin Cooks and one each against Robert Woods and Nick Williams. In each case, Alexander showed nose for the back and exceptional technique, nerve and speed. Early, he belted the 255-pound Higbee off his feet in the Rams' bench area before jawing with him. On a jet sweep, he shed WR Josh Reynolds and put down Cooks with the surest of tackles. Cooks made plays, too. He turned and burned Alexander on a corner for 32 and a dig for 17. Goff went after the rookie and generally left Kevin King (76) alone. His performance was solid. The longer the season goes the more Williams' age shows. On Gurley's 17-yard clinching carry around left end, Williams was in position to make the play but wandered inside as if he were fooled. Then he didn't even begin to sprint until Gurley slowed to give himself up. Whitehead has physical limitations in coverage. On three or four receptions he was a step late. Yet, he's a tough, good football player who does a lot of the dirty work (tackling Gurley in space). On a few of his eight blitzes he would instinctively chuck a receiver on the way in. Saffold, a 323-pound nine-year veteran, threatened Whitehead after the 195-pounder hit him in the face and wouldn't back off. Clinton-Dix missed one tackle but also delivered some hard shots in the deep middle that made Robert Woods think twice. The Rams kept trying to beat Brice over the top but he held his water and escaped unscathed this week.

### **KICKERS (3)**

The difference between Johnny Hekker, a Pro Bowl punter, and JK Scott, a rookie trying to find his way, was glaring. Hekker, with a net of 43.3 yards, had one downed by Sam Shields inside the 1 that precipitated the safety. Three of his seven boots were inside the 20; none of Scott's five attempts were. The Alabamian opened with a 51-yard touchback and finished with a 25-yard punt from deep in the Packers' end when a boomer was required. That set up the winning field goal. The punt had 5.01 seconds of hang time but didn't go anywhere. His five-punt averages were 42.8 (gross), 38.4 (net) and 4.66 hang time. He also had a free kick that carried 61 yards with remarkable 5.36 hang time. The comeback kid, Mason Crosby, hit from 41 and 53.

## **SPECIAL TEAMS ( ½ )**

If Mike McCarthy, Mr. Turnover Differential, wants a fumbler to return kickoffs, he'll stick with Ty Montgomery. Lousy blocking by James Crawford and Lucas Patrick enabled CB Dominique Hatfield and LB Ramik Wilson to get at Montgomery, but so what? There was little or no reason for Montgomery to bring Greg Zuerlein's boot out from two yards deep. Plus, he's careless with the ball. He flags it in contact situations. He's not a physical runner. He has a history of fumbles. In the wake of the catastrophe Sunday, every team left on the schedule will smell blood and assault Montgomery. The Packers have a major decision to make. Hekker stood up and completed a 12-yard strike to Sam Shields on a fourth-and-3 fake punt. The victim was Kevin King. Josh Jones led the aggressive coverage. Better yet, he wasn't penalized. Snapper Hunter Bradley was 50-50 on perfect laces vs. spun laces.