

Rating the Packers: Week 11 vs Vikings

By Bob McGinn Posted: Nov 27, 2018

Sunday night in Minneapolis marked the sixth time in 11 games this season that the Green Bay Packers failed to intercept a pass.

The decline in interceptions is league-wide. All the pro-passing, pro-quarterback rules that have been legislated in recent years have taken their toll on picks, too. Green Bay's opponents have intercepted only one.

Still, it's hard to imagine the Packers could turn their season around in December unless they at least double their current total of six, which was tied for 24th in the league.

No quarterback in the Vikings' 58-year history ever passed for more yards (867) against one foe in a season than Kirk Cousins just got done doing against the Packers. His combined passer rating of 128.4 would have been even higher if the Packers hadn't intercepted him in the Week 2 game at Lambeau Field.

It took a lucky break to intercept Cousins, too. His pass to Laquon Treadwell went right through his hands and to Ha Ha Clinton-Dix.

Another of the Packers' half-dozen picks also was a gift. Buffalo rookie Josh Allen threw across his body back inside into the end zone where Jaire Alexander intercepted. The other four all required a high degree of skill.

In Washington, Clinton-Dix cut off tight end Jordan Reed for the interception. One week later, Clinton-Dix made one of the Packers' defensive plays of the year cutting in front of Bills wide receiver Kelvin Benjamin.

At Lambeau Field, Kevin King went high to intercept a bomb against San Francisco's C.J. Beathard on an all-out blitz, and then Bashaud Breeland made a nice break to pick a terrible pass by another backup, Brock Osweiler of Miami. Mike McCarthy surely will remember the Packers' 30 interceptions in 2009 and the 31 in '11. Since then, Green Bay has settled for 18 in 2012, 11 in '13, 18 in '14, 16 in '15, 17 in '16 and just 11 last season.

The prospect of playing four games in cold weather next month should affect passing games and lead to an increase in interceptions. What the Packers don't want to do is break the franchise record for fewest interceptions in a season, which was eight in 2004.

The Packers also tackled poorly against the Vikings. There were 13 missed tackles on defense, two fewer than the season high of 15 against the Redskins.

Mike Zimmer and McCarthy exchanged their customary emotionless handshake after the Vikings' 24-17 victory at U.S. Bank Stadium. Here is a rating of the Packers, with their 1 to 5 football totals in parentheses. As a team, they received two footballs.

The three stars of the game were: **1. Kenny Clark; 2. Aaron Jones; 3. Corey Linsley.**

RECEIVERS (1)

The days of Xavier Rhodes being able to travel with Davante Adams (played all 53 possible snaps on offense) might be over. Last year in Minneapolis, Rhodes did that and was able to limit if not eliminate Adams. The Vikings played the first quarter with Rhodes pressing Adams when he was outside. On the second series, Adams drew a 26-yard interference penalty on Rhodes and beat him to the corner on a back shoulder for a 15-yard touchdown. Shortly thereafter, Mike Zimmer began playing a lot of zone, even Cover 2 with the safeties deep. Adams would have had much higher numbers if Aaron Rodgers hadn't missed him deep several times. The three-and-out on the first drive was on Adams for lacking sideline awareness and stepping out of bounds prior to an 11-yard completion. The low grade at the position is due to poor blocking. When Adams failed to cut off SS Harrison Smith, he shot inside to stop Aaron Jones on fourth and 1. On the same play, Mercedes Lewis (23, 11 with his hand down) was beat inside by DE Danielle Hunter, who combined with Smith on the tackle. This is the flawed execution McCarthy bemoaned afterward. Another "bad" run was the fault of Marquez Valdes-Scantling (44), who also missed the hard-charging Smith. MVS also missed a block on SS Anthony Harris whereas Equanimeous St. Brown (36) missed two blocks. To the wide receivers' credit, they extended their no-drop streak to a remarkable six games. After MVS failed to beat CB Trae Waynes on a 12-yard curl route early, Rodgers gave him just one more chance and that was a 3-yard dump with 5 minutes left. On the other hand, St. Brown beat Waynes on a pair of 15-yards outs and then for 23 when he deftly broke off a take-off route and came back toward the scrambling Rodgers. When St. Brown was in and out because of injury J'Mon Moore (11) played but got the cold shoulder, too. The fourth-round draft choice has played 58 snaps and been targeted once. Lewis started and played the first 12 snaps. When Lewis found himself matched up against DE Everson Griffen in maximum protection, he got beat outside for a knockdown. Jimmy Graham (22, nine with his hand down) was on a pitch count because of his 10-day-old broken left thumb. Against a two-deep secondary he dropped one seamer before hauling in another for 25 with a fine stutter move against MLB Eric Kendricks. Lance Kendricks (22, nine with his hand down and two in the backfield) and Robert Tonyan, whose only snap was a vertical route, also played.

OFFENSIVE LINE (2 ½)

The starters were sailing along until Lane Taylor (32) left early in the third quarter with a thigh injury and David Bakhtiari (43) sat out 10 snaps late in the third quarter and into the fourth with a left knee injury. Only at that point did the Vikings' four-man rush begin to get home. Mike Zimmer decided to play coverage, rushing five or more on just four of 33 dropbacks (12.1%). Justin McCray (23), who lost his starting job at right guard to Byron Bell (51) after the first month, replaced Taylor. Having not played since Game 3, McCray looked rusty. It also appeared as if he might have put on excess weight. He and Jason Spriggs (10), who took over for Bakhtiari, were overrun for a sack by stunting DT Sheldon Richardson and Danielle Hunter. Then Spriggs lost the edge to Griffen and allowed another partial sack. Spriggs pass-blocked OK in 52 snaps at right tackle in New England but looked terrible here. Taylor went down when the talented Richardson walked him back to Aaron Rodgers. Otherwise, Taylor gave a good account of himself, especially mauling straight-ahead in the run game. Bell, a big waist-bender, gets beat a lot in protection but many times escapes without blame because one or more of his linemates got beat worse. Corey Linsley didn't get NT Linval Joseph blocked on a failed run on third-and-2. Otherwise, it's hard to fault him. On a third-and-1, he moved Joseph on a 4-yard rush. There is a fascinating battle because they've been playing each other twice a season since 2014. On a screen pass, they got locked up and didn't disengage from one another for 5.2 seconds.

QUARTERBACKS (1 ½)

Having studied Aaron Rodgers' inaccuracy and overall inconsistency this season, Mike Zimmer decided to forgo blitzing and make the quarterback beat him from the pocket. At this point, Rodgers can't do that against a top-notch defense. For the second week in a row he froze at the end of a close game. On the second and 1 at the Minnesota 20, he had plenty of time to catch the shotgun snap, grip the ball properly and get it out to MVS in the left flat for the first down. Instead, he hurriedly fired it without laces and it skidded short on the turf. On third and 1, Davante Adams ran a gorgeous slant-and-go that put him five yards clear of rookie free agent Holton Hill, who was playing his third snap for an injured Rhodes (hamstring). Shockingly, Rodgers threw so late and long that Adams didn't have time to accelerate and go get it. It's hard to win when the face of the franchise can't make easy throws with the outcome at hand. Earlier, he had Adams open for a 47-yard TD behind Rhodes but threw off his back foot and the ball was five yards too far. On the left sideline, he threw so far over the head of Jimmy Graham that the officials picked up a flag for pass interference that would have been for 11 yards. For some reason, Rodgers is reluctant to give the rookie wideouts and others the chance to make a contested catch and, at the very least, prevent the pass from being intercepted. He also seems to have no interest whatsoever in check-downs. Rodgers was responsible for 1 ½ of the four sacks, partially because he's not keen on the chain-moving short stuff. He absorbed another delay-of-game penalty for no apparent reason. He caught Everson Griffen with his hard count but his free-play bomb to Adams wasn't even close. As the game wore on, it looked like Rodgers might gone sandlot at times handing out route assignments on the fly in the huddle. His best moments came on extended plays. He looked unsettled when stationary, especially after injuries thinned his blind-side protection. Of the 53 snaps, 28 came with him in shotgun compared to 25 under center. He didn't carry the ball; the last time that happened in a full game was Game 15 of 2014.

RUNNING BACKS (4)

At the risk of upsetting Rodgers, Mike McCarthy and the offensive staff obviously wanted to feature Aaron Jones (40). The first two calls were runs for Jones. His 20 touches (17 carries, three receptions) were a season high and equaled his highest total as a rookie. Just 16-for-54 rushing against the Vikings last year, he attacked them for 17-72 on the ground and 3-21 receiving Sunday night. Unlike Green Bay, Minnesota is a good tackling team. The only two tackles that Jones broke came at the expense of Danielle Hunter and Everson Griffen. Jones made his yardage by seeing the cut-back lane, making a decisive cut and hurtling north-south before tacklers could take their best shot at him. His balance is pretty phenomenal. He's a strong 208 pounds and won't go down without a struggle. The area where Jones has made significant gains is pass protection. He seems eager to please as Rodgers places him in the proper position, and when duty calls he's showing the proper blend of patience, technique and toughness stopping rushers. In a chip situation, he got in close quarters and helped halt DE Stephen Weatherly. Jamaal Williams (13) probably should be a major consideration in short yardage. He's a rugged, highly motivated runner.

DEFENSIVE LINE (4)

With Mike Daniels (foot) sitting out his first game since 09/17, the play counts swelled for Kenny Clark (66 of 70 snaps), Dean Lowry (55), Tyler Lancaster (22) and Montravius Adams (19). They all rose to the occasion. Clark could be the team's best player week after week. Teams just can't run the A gaps because of him. On the Vikings' second failed third and 1, Clark controlled RG Mike Remmers, tossed him aside when RB L Murray drew close and helped make the tackle. Despite the absence of Daniels, coordinator Mike Pettine declined to go after Kirk Cousins (27.9% blitz rate). Of the Packers' nine pressures, seven came from the linemen. Clark led with four. On the sack, his sixth of the season, Clark power-rushed Pat Elflein, a strong but undersized center, back into Cousins. Clark, a.k.a. Mr. Modest, jumped away from the pack set for one of those self-indulgent moments. Only then did he realize that wasn't him and somewhat sheepishly headed for the sidelines. Two of his three hurries came on stunts. When the Vikings committed what Mike Zimmer called a "total miscommunication," Lowry took advantage of Remmers' miscue and sacked Cousins in 2.5 seconds. He also had a knockdown and TFL on a draw play after getting rid of LG Tom Compton. This was Lancaster's sixth game but his most extensive playing time. It also was the best he has looked, too. It's possible the Packers might have something in the rookie free agent from Northwestern. Lancaster (6-3 ½, 313) is very fast (5.03), very strong (32 reps on the bench press) and very athletic (9-5 broad jump). In this game, he demonstrated ability against run and pass. On the first failed third and 1, he blew up Remmers with penetration. On another run, he wheeled around a block and showed burst to make the tackle after a 3-yard gain. In the fourth quarter, he walked back Compton and flattened Cousins just after the ball was gone. Adams is starting to learn what being a pro takes. He's playing harder, for one thing. His pad level has improved, too. No longer is he an easy mark for run games. On the second third and 1, he beat RT Brian O'Neill inside and helped Clark clean up. Minus Daniels, Pettine went back to some three-man rushes (10) and just a one-lineman front (four).

LINEBACKERS (1)

With Nick Perry (knee) on injured reserve, the Packers went with a three-man rotation and didn't use rookie James Crawford. The pass rush was disappointing. After a three-sack outing in Seattle Kyler Fackrell (55) plummeted back to earth without a single pressure. He tried everything in his arsenal but couldn't get around LT Riley Reiff (66), RT Brian O'Neill (53) or swing tackle Rashod Hill (23). His missed tackle came on third and 5. Probably his best play came on a wheel route when he peeled off the rush and blanketed RB Ameer Abdullah. Matthews registered two pressures but was double-teamed on just 22.2% of dropbacks. Once again, he just isn't winning nearly enough one-on-one rushes against average tackles. As far as being active, it was one of his top efforts against the run. He disposed of WR Adam Thielen to help on the first failed third and 1. He shed Mike Remmers on a 1-yard gain, eluded TE Tyler Conklin on a three-yard gain, slipped FB C.J. Ham and WR Stefon Diggs for a 1-yard loss and added a second TFL after not being blocked. Other than a critical batted pass on a late third down, Reggie Gilbert (30) was ordinary. The Vikings exploited the limited range of Blake Martinez (70) and Antonio Morrison (46) with TE Kyle Rudolph (7-63) inside and other receivers in the flats. Martinez has to get off the block of C Pat Elflein on the one-man screen to Dalvin Cook that ruptured into a 26-yard TD. Morrison played with a controlled fury. Four or five times he pursued at full speed and delivered heavy body blows upon arrival. On an old-fashioned iso he sprinted at Ham and the result was a fearsome collision. Morrison hates being blocked. He is one tough customer. On the screen to Cook, not only did Morrison's speed prevent him from getting there on time but he also took a too-optimistic angle. When the 300-pound O'Neill pulled onto Morrison near the sideline, he ended up hurling O'Neill off him and the tackle suffered a head injury. Rookie Oren Burks (seven) played on some passing downs after being relegated to special teams only the past two weeks.

DEFENSIVE BACKS (1)

Minus Kevin King (hamstring), Bashaud Breeland (groin) and Raven Greene (ankle), the Packers started Jaire Alexander (70) and Josh Jackson (60) outside, Tramon Williams (70) at nickel and Kentrell Brice (24) and Josh Jones (57) at safety. When Brice was in and finally out with ankle and head injuries, Ibraheim Campbell (53) worked at safety. When Jackson had problems, Tony Brown (nine) got the nod at right outside late. No one played well. Alexander blew up a screen to Adam Thielen for minus-10 and made two or three other physical tackles. However, he continues to give up big plays, either by losing the ball or being out of position in fairly routine coverages. He and Brice each missed two tackles. On the other side, Jackson keeps getting picked on with inside-breaking routes because he isn't challenging receivers. After losing playing time because of excessive penalties, he might be feeling his way in the style of coverage NFL rules dictate. He also showed less than an urgent desire to get to the ball. At times, he seems to wait for others to make the tackle. Williams got eaten up by Stefon Diggs on a 30-yard TD and made a questionable decision on the 14-yard TD pass to Thielen. Diggs whipped Brown inside on third and 6 to close out the game. Brice, in his third year, might play too big for his body. He can't stay on the field. He went helmet-to-helmet with Dalvin Cook in a wicked collision and had to be helped off. Jones missed three tackles. Two came against Cook and resulted in 17 additional yards. He continues to play out of control. In the second quarter, Jones walked down to the box prematurely. Holding his ground, he could do no more than tip a pass to Kyle Rudolph that went for 17 yards instead of an interception. On a 33-yard pass to Thielen, Jones could see the ball all the way but made a feeble attempt to dislodge it. Campbell, a four-year vet who arrived Nov. 5 on waivers from the Jets, demonstrated the ability to make hard, sure, face-up tackles.

KICKERS (3)

JK Scott hit three moon balls inside the dome with hang times of 5.12, 5.20 and 5.44 seconds. Those three punts ended up as a fair catch or inside the 20. Yet, as good as Scott can be, he seems to have one awful punt most weeks. This time the Packers were backed up at their 13 late in the third quarter trailing by three. Scott hit a short (43), line-drive (4.08) punt that was returned 20 yards by Marcus Sherels to the Green Bay 31, setting up the winning touchdown. His six-punt averages were 46.0 yards (gross), 39.3 (net) and 4.75 hang time. Mason Crosby hit from 38, averaged 68.3 and 3.62 on three kickoffs (two touchbacks) and delivered a respectable onside kick that was gobbled up by Kyle Rudolph.

SPECIAL TEAMS (1)

Trevor Davis lasted 10 snaps (returns, punt gunner) before departing with a hamstring injury. Tramon Williams has fielded thousands of punts in secure fashion over the years. With 6 minutes left, he stepped away from Matt Wile's 21-yard pooch punt (4.6 hang) at the last second while surrounded by Vikings. Instead of running away, he stood there. The ball bounced off his upper body and was recovered by Sherels in the latest misadventure for Ron Zook's units. Williams' sharp 23-yard punt return was forgotten because of his gaffe. Penalties also remain a large issue. J'Mon Moore had two and Jamaal Williams drew another. Tony Brown should have been called for either running into or roughing K Dan Bailey on his 56-yard miss to close the half. Ibraheim Campbell replaced Raven Greene, who had replaced Jermaine Whitehead, as the brains of the punt and punt-return squads.