

2018 Packers Individual Report Card:Defense

the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Feb. 2019

Defensive Line

Kenny Clark: Clark showed signs of developing as a pass rusher in 2017, when all 4½ of his sacks came in December, and that carried into his third season. Six sacks were the most for a Packers defensive lineman since Mike Daniels in 2013 (6½). Doesn't win with speed, but possesses good strength at point of attack and a relentless motor. Even better defending the run. Constantly takes on multiple blockers, helping linebackers make plays on the second level. Only 23, Clark has a bright future. **Grade: A-**

Mike Daniels: A foot injury ended Daniels' season in November. Had only two sacks in 10 games, a disappointment after Pro Bowl season in 2017. Let one sack get away in Week 2 after wrapping up Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins but not bringing him to the ground. Remains one of the Packers' top defenders with good strength and pad level, giving him leverage for bull rush on the interior. Tough to block against the run. Turns 30 years old before start of next season. **Grade: B-**

Dean Lowry: Versatile defender along the line. Has the build of a five-tech defensive end but capable of playing all positions. Three sacks last fall were a career high, one more than his total in each of his first two seasons. Added five tackles for loss. Height (6-6) is an asset, helping him knock down passes at the line of scrimmage when he can't reach the quarterback. Has six pass breakups in his first three years, including three last season. **Grade: C+**

Tyler Lancaster: Undrafted rookie from Northwestern, where he played one season with Lowry. Started season on the practice squad but was promoted to the active roster in early October. Started five of his 12 games. Decent athlete but did not show much burst as a pass rusher. Solid run defender, willing to mix it up in the trenches. Finished with 26 tackles. **Grade: C-**

Montravius Adams: Played all 16 games after missing more than half his rookie season because of a broken foot. There were glimpses of his immense athletic potential. Blew past Miami Dolphins right guard Jesse Davis to record his first career sack. Good bull rush led to a half sack at Chicago. Speed is a plus, but needs to get stronger and play with better leverage. Too often blown off the ball. Entering critical offseason. **Grade: D**

Muhammad Wilkerson: Started season playing good chunk of snaps but broke his leg in Week 3 at Washington. Five tackles in three games. No sacks but was solid defending the run. **Grade: Incomplete**

James Looney: Sixth-round pick last spring, started season on practice squad. Promoted to active roster Nov. 24. Played 19 snaps in three games. **Grade: Incomplete**

Fadol Brown: Started season in Oakland, where he spent rookie season on practice squad in 2017. Played eight games for Raiders in 2018. Signed with Packers on Dec. 5. Played 39 snaps in four games with three tackles and two quarterback hits. **Grade: Incomplete**

Linebackers

Blake Martinez: The linchpin of an injury-ravaged defense, played through an ankle injury to complete all 16 games and make 144 total tackles. Also had a career-high five sacks. Slipped in pass coverage, however, and didn't cause any turnovers. **Grade: B**

Kyler Fackrell: Third-year player had 10½ sacks, seventh-best among all linebackers in the NFL and far and away the team leader. Trusted in red-zone coverage situations and willing in the run game. Pass rush disappeared at times. **Grade: B**

Antonio Morrison: Hard hitter was usually assignment sound in run situations and special teams. Reliable when called upon in a matchup-based role that saw him on the sideline quite a bit in pass situations. **Grade: C+**

Clay Matthews: Despite a career-low 3½ sacks while playing 16 games for the first time since 2015, Matthews was around the quarterback and led the team in quarterback hits. He also improved in the run game and tackling and was one of the few reliable options at linebacker for the Packers all season. **Grade: C+**

Reggie Gilbert: Despite an opportunity for more playing time due to injuries, the second-year pro played in all 16 games but produced just 2½ sacks. Too often disappeared on the field. **Grade: D**

Nick Perry: Played nine games but had just 1½ sacks and one forced fumble before his season ended on injured reserve. The full sack came in Week 1, and Perry had seven games without reaching the quarterback. **Grade: D**

Oren Burks: A shoulder injury slowed his progress coming out of the preseason, but despite playing offenses that featured tight ends and running backs in the pass, Burks was often left on the sideline (122 defensive snaps). **Grade: D**

James Crawford: Undrafted rookie played just one snap on defense, but appeared in every game and played 70 percent of the snaps on special teams. **Grade: C**

Kendall Donnerson: Signed to the active roster Dec. 4, the seventh-round pick out of Southeast Missouri State did not appear on the field. **Grade: Incomplete**

Jake Ryan: Inside linebacker blew a knee in training camp and missed the entire 2018 season while on injured reserve. **Grade: Incomplete**

Cornerbacks

Kevin King: When healthy, has shown some promise. Physical corner who carries himself with swagger. Length shortens passing windows. Rarely healthy. Played just 15 of 32 games in his first two seasons, both ending with him on injured reserve. History of shoulder injuries a major concern. Unable to extend arms at full length to defend passes, preventing him from playing the football. Just one interception in two years, and that was on a deep pass against the San Francisco 49ers in October. Inability to play the football might be an issue the rest of his career. **Grade: C**

Jaire Alexander: Fearlessness was perhaps his best attribute as a rookie. Never backed down from a challenge, and notably had his best game against the vaunted Los Angeles Rams passing attack, defending five passes. That game also highlighted the biggest area where he needs to grow: playing the football. Eleven pass breakups but just one interception last season. Ball often arrived quicker than he expected. Should work itself out as he adjusts to speed of the game, but hands could be a concern. Removed from punt return team because of inconsistency fielding the football. His 4.38 speed enabled him to recover from mistakes. Bright future if he can take next step as a playmaker. **Grade: B-**

Josh Jackson: Built like a free safety at 6-foot, 196 pounds, and that might be his long-term NFL position. Entered league last year with significant concerns he was too slow to play cornerback and did nothing to alleviate those as a rookie. Lack of speed was highlighted by his three defensive holding penalties and one illegal contact penalty. Only four cornerbacks in the league were penalized more, according to NFLpenalties.com. Doesn't tackle well, turning hips to the side instead of coming in square, but possesses best ball skills in Packers secondary. Would need to bulk up five or 10 pounds if he moves to safety but has the frame to do it. Size, range and ball skills could be intriguing in middle of the field. **Grade: D+**

Bashaud Breeland: Signed with Packers on Sept. 26 and played in seven games, making five starts. Experienced ups and downs in first season with Packers but played at an impressive level considering he had no offseason, no training camp and was returning from a significant foot injury. Missed a handful of big plays but also had a pick-six against Atlanta. Versatile in the defensive backfield, able to play corner or safety. A free agent, and Packers would be wise to re-sign him. Only 27, should be a reliable starter with a full offseason. **Grade: C**

Tony Brown: Undrafted rookie from Alabama originally signed to practice squad and promoted to active roster Sept. 29. Played 11 games and made three starts. Intriguing prospect because of his athleticism (ran college track), but had much to learn. Occasionally lost control of his emotions on the field, leading to foolish penalties. **Grade: D-**

Davon House: Signed a second straight one-year deal to bring veteran leadership and depth to the position. Season ended in Week 3 with shoulder injury that required surgery. **Grade: Incomplete**

Natrell Jamerson: A fifth-round pick by the New Orleans Saints in last spring's draft. Former Badger didn't make team after camp in New Orleans and signed to Houston Texans' practice squad. Claimed off waivers by Packers on Dec. 5. Played two games in Green Bay. **Grade: Incomplete**

Will Redmond: Signed to active roster Nov. 6. Played four defensive snaps in five games. Former third-round pick by San Francisco 49ers in 2016. Injuries derailed his time in San Francisco, where he spent rookie season on injured reserve because of knee and missed half of his second season because of ankle. Between 49ers and Packers, spent time on Kansas City Chiefs practice squad. **Grade: Incomplete**

Safeties

Tramon Williams: Signed to add depth and leadership to a young corner position, Williams eventually played most of the year as a safety to help the team. Didn't tackle like a safety and missed more than a half dozen, and failed to make an interception for the first time in his career. He also had his fewest passes defensed ever (two), but was a stabilizing factor in a banged-up secondary. **Grade: B**

Kentrell Brice: Improved on early deep-ball coverage mistakes; third-year pro played through several injuries to appear in 13 games. **Grade: D**

Josh Jones: Slowed by injury and coaching decisions early in the season, he eventually moved into a larger role as the year progressed. Had issues in coverage and run assignments but also flashed potential. **Grade: D**

Raven Greene: Undrafted rookie played largely on special teams and ended the season on injured reserve after appearing in just eight games. Reliable on the specialist units, Greene saw just 43 defensive snaps. In that limited time he had a sack and a forced fumble. **Grade: C-**

Eddie Pleasant: Played six games after being signed Nov. 28 and was immediately thrust into key situations. Had a dropped interception against the Cardinals and was picked on by Chicago in a must-win game late in the season. **Grade: D**

Ibraheim Campbell: Claimed off waivers Nov. 5 and placed on injured reserve Dec. 4, the veteran played in three games, making 18 tackles and forcing one fumble. Played better than initially imagined and has a chance to return for 2019. **Grade: Incomplete**