

Rating The Packers : Week 4 vs Eagles

By Bob McGinn Posted 9/30/2019

Every NFL team must deal with injuries, some more than others due mainly to the luck of the draw.

In the two months since their first practice of training camp, the Packers could hardly have had a better break on the injury front. They lined up against the Eagles on Thursday night minus just five useful but certainly not integral players due to injury: wide receiver Equanimeous St. Brown, guard Lane Taylor, defensive tackle Montravius Adams, linebacker Oren Burks and nickel linebacker Raven Greene.

When the Packers stormed out to a 3-0 record, few people would have noted just how fortunate they had been to be playing with all of their top players.

Contrast Green Bay to Philadelphia, which was missing big-play wide receiver DeSean Jackson, two of their top three defensive tackles in Malik Jackson and Tim Jernigan, and three cornerbacks with starting experience in Jalen Mills, Ronald Darby and Cre'Von LeBlanc.

Injuries tend to even out, of course, and so it was almost inevitable that bad fortune would strike the Packers before long. On Thursday night, they suffered more injuries to key players in one game than they had in two months.

Three starters went down and didn't return: right tackle Bryan Bulaga (shoulder) late in the second quarter, wide Davante Adams (turf toe) early in the fourth quarter and cornerback Kevin King (groin) on the final series.

Along the way the Packers also lost running back Jamaal Williams (neck/head) on the first play, special-teams dynamo Tony Brown after four snaps and dime back Will Redmond (head) early in the third quarter. None returned.

The Eagles didn't escape unscathed. Sidney Jones (hamstring), their No. 3 cornerback, lasted just 10 plays. Avonte Maddox (concussion/neck), a starting cornerback, was lost in the last minute.

By the end, with the injury lists evened out, it became a battle of attrition. As is often the case, the team that was more effective running the ball and stopping the run prevailed.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 34-27 loss to the Eagles. Five footballs are the maximum, one-half football is the minimum. As a team, the Packers received two footballs.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Davante Adams. 2. Kevin King. 3. Geronimo Allison.

Receivers (3 ½)

Depleted at cornerback, the Eagles on Friday re-signed old-pro Orlando Scandrick. After being gouged for 414 net passing yards they had to do something. When Sidney Jones and Avonte Maddox tried to play him straight-up, Davante Adams (played 57 of the possible 81 offensive snaps) caught eight passes for 158 yards in the first half. Coach Matt LaFleur was bound and determined to get Adams the ball, even bringing out a bounce pass off jet motion. The Eagles played softer and softer, and as a result, Adams gained more than half of his 180 yards after the catch (94). It's almost impossible to jam Adams because of his darting feet and rapid releases. He was injured when the weight of SS Andrew Sendejo's body caused damage to his right big toe. In the era of artificial turf and inferior footwear, turf toe was far more common than today. Jessie Clark, the Packers' fullback in the mid-1980s, once explained his injury to me as if his great toe had been jammed upward until it felt as if it had touched his shin. They can linger for a long time. The best moment for Marquez Valdes-Scantling (70) was reaching behind to catch a 17-yard slant knowing LB Nigel Bradham was laying in wait. He's a straight-line speed receiver. Geronimo Allison (64) probably made a major impression on LaFleur and Aaron Rodgers after selling out his body to catch a wobbly pass between two defenders for 31. One play later, he went vertical again for a 19-yard touchdown. Minus Jake Kumerow (shoulder), Darius Shepherd (15) and Allen Lazard (14) logged career highs for snaps. Lazard shielded Maddox with his big frame to gain a pass-interference penalty in the end zone. Jimmy Graham (57) ruined his best effort of the season by dropping a 1-yard pass in the end zone that would have tied the game with 9 minutes left. If he had gone up with two hands instead of one it probably would have been a TD. Graham broke a tackle (LB Kamu Grugier-Hill) on this night, converted a flat route into a wheel route for a 14-yard TD and had six receptions, his high since Game 12 last season. For the first time, Robert Tonyan (19) played more than Mercedes Lewis (18). Tonyan remains an interesting prospect. On his only target, he made a clutch grab in traffic for 11. Asked to whom block on defensive ends, he succeeded on one of two. As a free agent from FCS Indiana State, he doesn't play scared. Lewis allowed the game's only sack by taking a bad angle coming across in motion and missing DE Derek Barnett, who turned the game around with a strip-sack. In Lewis' defense, that protection call was flawed.

Offensive Line (2 ½)

On 59 gradable passes, defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz rushed five or more just six times (10.2 percent). With that secondary, his hands were tied behind his back all night. Generally, DT Fletcher Cox lined up over RG Billy Turner. The protection slid toward Cox, leaving LG Elgton Jenkins often one-on-one with either Hassan Ridgeway or Akeem Spence. They're run stuffers, but still it was impressive that Jenkins allowed just one hurry and wasn't charged with a "bad" run. Even if Lane Taylor was healthy the odds are that Jenkins would have supplanted him by now. As usual, Turner was fortunate that Aaron Rodgers was getting the ball out and dancing away from trouble. Three of Turner's four hurries were against Cox, a Pro Bowl fixture. When the Packers surprisingly ran Jones inside on first and goal from the 7 with 1:06 left, the gain was 4. Everyone else on the line blocked his man one-on-one except for Turner, and it was his man (Cox) that probably prevented a TD by shouldering to his right and making the tackle. Bryan Bulaga was humming along blocking DEs Brandon Graham and hard-charging Josh Sweat when his shoulder injury sent him to the sidelines. Enter Alex Light, the second-year free agent from Richmond who won the swing tackle berth. His NFL experience had been 26 snaps last season. The Packers need more than Light provided. His four pressures included three to Graham and one to DE Vinny Curry. Also, he was at least partly responsible for three of the team's six "bad" runs. Light is a tough guy. It remains to be seen if he has enough talent to play.

David Bakhtiari and Bulaga committed false-start penalties on Rodgers' hard counts, giving the offense eight in four games. In all, Bakhtiari has four penalties. Working against Barnett and Curry, Bakhtiari allowed the team's only two knockdowns. Graham also beat him to the recovery of Rodgers' fumble.

Quarterbacks (3)

The Packers moved the ball better than they have all season. It was due in part to the decision by Aaron Rodgers to utilize possession-style checkdowns to Aaron Jones and Y sticks to Jimmy Graham. Also, eight of the team's 31 first downs came via penalty, the most in franchise history based on research by Packers statistical authority Eric Goska. It was fairly easy sledding through the air. Lacking talent at cornerback, the Eagles played bend-but-don't-break football most of the way, and Rodgers took what was there for 422 yards (he had three higher totals last season alone). On the one time Jim Schwartz ran an empty blitz with seven rushers against six blockers, Rodgers still managed to locate Graham for a TD even though LB Nigel Bradham was almost into his face. He also ran five times for 46 yards, scrambling four times left for 32 and once to the right off an aborted screen for 14. His overall accuracy was average. When it came time to settle accounts, however, Rodgers failed. From the 1, he underthrew a fade to Graham on first down. On third down, he kept the ball on a run-pass option that resulted in a harassed incompleteness; Aaron Jones probably would have scored if given the ball. Then, after taking the team back down the field again, Rodgers made a crushing mistake from the 3 on what was a designed pick play. In effect, he determined where he was going with the ball before the snap, which was Marquez Valdes-Scantling on an in-breaking route. The cornerback covering MVS, free agent Craig James, entered the lineup on the previous play after Maddox was carted off. It made sense to attack the Johnny-come-lately, but certainly not at the expense of normal progression. Time wasn't the issue. The rush was late. Had Rodgers paused, Darrius Shepherd was 15 yards removed from the nearest defender because Malcolm Jenkins inexplicably doubled MVS. Tight coverage by James resulted in a tipped interception for Bradham, and the game was over.

Running backs (3 ½)

Jamaal Williams started the game in a two-back set, each on one side of Aaron Rodgers, in a little-used formation. Under pressure, Rodgers dumped to Williams, who had to be carted off after DE Derek Barnett delivered an illegal hit to the head when the running back already was being held up by two other defenders. Thus, Jones ended up playing 68 snaps, 15 more than his previous high of 53 in Dallas two years ago. Judging by his rushing statistics (13-21) you might not think he performed well, but he did. In the first quarter, Jones eluded S Malcolm Jenkins, spun off CB Sidney Jones and turned nothing into a 3-yard TD. A run like that, his fourth TD of the season, made it puzzling why he didn't get additional red-zone chances. He broke five tackles, his high for the season. As his career progresses Jones exhibits growing confidence in his hands. Of FB Danny Vitale's 20 snaps, 11 came as the lone back in shotgun. Jones needed a breather, and Vitale did OK. He motioned back and forth to split receiver, ran the ball once for 3, caught an ankle-high pass and looked athletic.

Defensive Line (½)

Defensive coordinator Mike Pettine played with safeties alongside ILB Blake Martinez until he had seen enough and inserted B.J. Goodson with 9 minutes remaining. Pettine trusted that it would take the Eagles more than one blocker apiece to handle Kenny Clark (played 60 of the possible 62 snaps on defense), Dean Lowry (54) and Tyler Lancaster (30). Going with Goodson was akin to acknowledgment by Pettine that the D-line stunk. It didn't matter to the Eagles if Green Bay used three big bodies (35 times) or two big bodies (21 times). Against the nickel defense, the Eagles' three running backs carried nine times for 54 yards (6.0). Against the base defense, those three backs averaged 6.06 (18-109). Not once did the Packers' defense record a tackle for a loss. This might have been Clark's poorest game since he developed into an outstanding nose tackle in 2017. Yes, all nose men will have bad plays when they're tired or their technique is off and they get ridden out of a gap by a double-team block. The other guys are getting paid, too. What accounted for most of the Eagles' 176 rushing yards was that their linemen single-blocked the Packers' big people, which in turn enabled one of the Eagles to get out on Martinez or Adrian Amos. C Jason Kelce, who was voted to the Pro Bowl in 2014, is just 6 foot 2 ½ and 295 pounds. Despite being in his ninth year, Kelce used his quickness to control Clark a lot. On the longest run by an Eagle (Miles Sanders, 30), Kelce single-blocked Clark enabling LG Isaac Seumalo to neutralize Martinez. Other times, RG Brandon Brooks handled Clark one-on-one. Nobody was getting off blocks. Lowry (54) got off to a bad start when he was wiped out by Brooks on the second play, a 19-yard burst by Jordan Howard. On Sanders' 30-yard run, Lowry was trapped by TE Dallas Goedert. When the Eagles started from their 1 in the fourth quarter Lowry didn't stand firm against a down block and Howard's gain was 10. Lancaster made a name for himself down the stretch last season by staying square, disengaging from blocks and finding the ball. Playing passively here, he was little more than a speed bump. With the performance level, it seemed appropriate to play rookie Kingsley Keke (seven) and Fadol Brown (two). Pettine was reluctant, however, which tells you something about where those players are. As for pass rush, there wasn't much. The lone pressure came from Clark.

Linebackers (1 ½)

The Eagles' running plan was plain and simple. They had seen teams struggle trying to outflank Za'Darius Smith (47) and Preston Smith (52), the rangy outside linebackers who have proven to be difficult to hook. So the Eagles pounded away between the Smith's, figuring that other than Clark the Packers were weak up the middle. Mission accomplished. Coach Doug Pederson wasn't going to just drop back and let the Smith's rush the heck out of Carson Wentz and let the Packers take the ball away some more. Just like Minnesota and Denver did, Pederson probed the Packers' weak underbelly and found a winner. Blake Martinez (62) is small, and he is playing small. With Philly's O-linemen leaving their combo blocks quickly or not at all, he had a big man in his face much of the night. In that event, the only chance Martinez has to make a tackle is at least four yards downfield. He made one nice stop on a run-through for no gain. Perhaps out of frustration, he also seemed to take too many chances with his run fits. Martinez also had problems in coverage and as a rusher. In five blitzes, he made no impact. On the 20-yard TD pass to Howard, Martinez has to get through the trash and cover Howard. That requires decisive decision-making, which Martinez didn't have. No one on defense distinguished himself on the goal line. For his part, Martinez had an unblocked frontal shot at Howard and got run over inside the 2. He also had a chance to halt Carson Wentz on a third-and-1 sneak but his attempt was too feeble. B.J. Goodson, a more robust player than Martinez, played seven snaps in the fourth quarter and showed how it can be done. On a swing pass to Howard, Goodson got to the sideline and delivered a clean, hard hit. When RT Lane Johnson came straight at him on a short pull, Goodson attacked Johnson and

stacked up the play for a 4-yard gain. He also made a solid tackle for a gain of 1. Neither Za'Darius, who was questionable with a knee injury nor Preston was involved in the run game. Za'Darius couldn't get anything going rushing against LT Jason Peters, a massive and talented old campaigner. He blew a sack on Wentz in his only pressure. Preston had two of the team's paltry total of five pressures. He was too high against a pulling lineman on a rush for 19 and was fooled on a screen for 13. Backups Rashan Gary (18) and Kyler Fackrell (13) were nonfactors. Gary's speed from the backside in pursuit has stood out. Fackrell needs to be more stout against the run.

Defensive Backs (3)

Minus speedy DeSean Jackson, the primary concerns for Mike Pettine were TE Zach Ertz and WR Alshon Jeffery. Strangely, slot Nelson Agholor, the Eagles' leading receiver with 18 catches, was targeted just once. The only saving grace for the Packers regarding Ertz was the Eagles didn't need him more. Of eight balls thrown his way, he caught seven for 65. Ertz (6-5, 250, 4.70) isn't especially big or fast but he is smart (Wonderlic of 26), makes sharp cuts and is trusted implicitly by Carson Wentz. Adrian Amos (62) started on Ertz but gave up two early completions. Amos looks somewhat unsure of himself in space. He couldn't cover Ertz, and based on his tepid performance in the box, the Packers are missing Raven Greene against the run. After that, Will Redmond (26), Darnell Savage (62) and Preston Smith all gave up completions to Ertz. Amos' best moment was an open-field tackle of the 237-pound Wentz on a third-and-9 scramble for 6. Savage was pancaked by WR Mack Hollins on a run for 16. Unlike two weeks ago on the 75-yard run by Minnesota's Dalvin Cook, Savage did a good job getting down ball carriers three times when they were in the clear. Redmond, an eager hitter, was beaten handily by Dallas Goedert on a 3-yard TD. On the outside, Kevin King (55) took full advantage of his height (6-3) to contain Jeffery. He broke up a skinny post, a fade on a two-point conversion attempt and a third-and-5 pass. He also did a much better job than last week recognizing a slant-and-go deep route. Jaire Alexander (62) wasn't quite as busy as King but still made his presence felt. On Jeffery's 6-yard TD catch, Alexander must hold inside position. He is a big-play threat. He makes coverage adjustments rapidly for a second-year man. Tramon Williams (48) was involved in coverage on Agholor. He was the most-used rusher from the secondary; he registered one knockdown in four rushes. When King departed, Josh Jackson (10) moved in at nickel and Williams moved outside. After Jackson was involved in a coverage snafu, Chandon Sullivan (five) finished the game at nickel.

Kickers (1)

Last week, Diontae Spencer returned a kickoff for 60 yards after a poor boot by Mason Crosby. Miles Sanders' 67-yard runback Sunday was helped by Crosby's below-average boot (66 yards, 3.72 seconds of hang time). That set up the Eagles' first TD. When Crosby hooked a kickoff out of bounds, it set up the second TD. His five kickoffs for distance averaged 66.8 and 3.65, and he made field goals from 30 and 31. JK Scott punted twice, averaging 41.5 yards (gross and net) and 4.82 hang time.

Special Teams (1 ½)

Two long kickoff returns in successive games didn't mark a good first month for new coordinator Shawn Mennenga. Unlike the Denver game, when Jackson missed the tackle on Spencer, the problem this time was everyone stayed blocked. The Eagles double-teamed Robert Tonyan and Will Redmond. At the point of attack, Danny Vitale was unable to shed his one-on-one block. After that, the unit's glaring lack of speed showed up. Jackson really can't run for his position, and Geronimo Allison was unable to close, either. The safety to that side, Chandon Sullivan, got caught up in the trash, so it required Mason Crosby to knock him out of bounds. He went low to make the stop, a less than desirable play for a valuable kicker. Hunter Bradley had one low snap but holder JK Scott made the difficult spot look routine. New punt returner Darrius Shepherd has made questionable decisions for two straight games. Tremon Smith does have top speed, but on his first kickoff return, he ran into Tonyan after the tight end was flattened by LB L.J. Fort. On Smith's other return, Fadol Brown missed his block and there was nowhere to run. B.J. Goodson's 21 snaps led in the kicking game.