

Rating The Packers : Week 5 vs Lions

By Bob McGinn Posted 10/17/2019

Coaches fish for compliments when they say how hard it is to win every Sunday in the NFL.

Believe them when they say it's next to impossible to win with a turnover differential of minus-3 or worse. It takes special circumstances to triumph given such an impediment. The Packers certainly could vouch for that Monday night at Lambeau Field.

Counting playoffs, the Packers had lost 22 straight games with a turnover differential of minus-3 or worse. Despite their 3-0 turnover deficit the Packers still were able to defeat the Lions, 23-22.

Under rookie coach Matt LaFleur the Packers entered Week 6 tied with New England atop the league's giveaway-takeaway table at plus-7. Lost fumbles on a running play and a punt return coupled with an interception left the Packers battling from behind until Mason Crosby kicked a field goal from 23 yards as time expired. The Lions departed Wisconsin in an aggrieved state after umpire Jeff Rice called two illegal use of hands penalties on defensive end Trey Flowers in the fourth quarter. It turned one possession from a punt to a touchdown; the other cost Detroit about 1 ½ minutes to post a winning score. On Tuesday, NFL executive Troy Vincent said one of the penalties was supportable by a film review but that the other one wasn't. Penalties weren't the issue the last time the Packers won under such circumstances. Their 21-20 victory over the Buccaneers at Lambeau Field on Nov. 4, 2001, was the product of gigantic plays overcoming enormous gaffes. Eighteen years ago, the Packers' three giveaways (the Bucs had none) included two brutal picks flung by Brett Favre and a fumble by Ahman Green. The Brad Johnson-quarterbacked Bucs mounted mini-drives of 23, 41 and 44 yards after those mistakes to build a 10-point lead late in the third quarter. Favre's sins included an awful sideline toss that was intercepted by linebacker Jamie Duncan and another floater that was picked by cornerback Donnie Abraham. A third terrible interception, this one by cornerback Ronde Barber, was overturned by replay. Late in the third quarter, Green was left one-on-one with safety John Lynch. When Lynch took too sharp of an angle Green dashed by him for a 63-yard touchdown. Just more than 3 minutes remained when Mark Royals' 45-yard punt hung for just 4.03 seconds. Allen Rossum fielded the ball cleanly, picked up blocks by Donald Driver and Chris Gizzi and went right down the middle of the field for a 55-yard TD. Ryan Longwell's extra point capped the comeback. "Any ugly win is a hell of a lot better than an ugly loss, I'll tell you that," Favre said after the game. Said Bucs coach Tony Dungy: "Rossum is a dangerous return man. That shows how one play makes the difference." Since the Packers first began to reverse a generation of ineptitude in 1992, they have compiled an 8-36 record (counting playoffs) when saddled with a turnover differential of minus-3 or worse. According to Packers statistical authority/author Eric Goska, the records in those games for Green Bay's four coaches from 1992 through 2018 were 3-8 for Mike Holmgren, 1-2 for Ray Rhodes, 3-18 for Mike Sherman and 0-8 for Mike McCarthy (1-0 for LaFleur). After Game 5 of 2007 until Game 9 of 2016, McCarthy's disciplined teams never went minus-3 or worse in a single contest. In improving to 5-1, the Packers are tied for the third-best record in the NFL. Their point differential of plus-27 ranks ninth.

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Lions. Five footballs are the maximum, one-half football is the minimum. As a team, the Packers received four footballs.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Dean Lowry. 2. Jamaal Williams. 3. Allen Lazard.

Receivers (3)

Marquez Valdes-Scantling (played 57 of the possible 74 possible snaps on offense) can't begin to assume the role of Davante Adams (turf toe). Yet, his blazing speed that has translated into long gains shouldn't be underestimated. With the offense stalled entering the fourth quarter, MVS beat Rashaan Melvin on a takeoff for 46 yards. Melvin, a solid seven-year vet, was just a step or two behind. MVS, however, pinned Melvin behind him and the sideline with a craftiness well beyond his experience. Melvin didn't give up without a fight, clawing at the ball all the way down but to no avail. It was his third reception for 40 or more yards this season; he had four as a rookie. In the last four full seasons only Adams (five, 2018) has had more than four. MVS made his share of miscues, especially considering that he was covered most often by Darius Slay. It was reminiscent of September 2014 in Seattle (Seahawks 36, Packers 16) when Green Bay didn't throw a single pass at CB Richard Sherman. Slay saw two balls here: a long incompleteness to Geronimo Allison and a 3-yard hitch to Allen Lazard. MVS showed a degree of toughness, returning to play the second half after he was rolled up on from behind while blocking for a run. He also sifted his way through bodies to tackle Justin Coleman on his 55-yard interception return. Allison played 32 snaps before leaving with head and chest injuries. Now in his fourth season, he just isn't reliable as a possession receiver. Twice in third-and-medium situations, he failed to put the ball away on the sideline and Coleman dug it out. With MVS lacking strength inside and Allison a marginal athlete, the options were limited. Jake Kumerow played a career-high 65 snaps but was targeted only three times. He's a stylish route runner with ordinary speed. Another small-school free agent, Darrius Shepherd (29), looked overmatched in the slot against Coleman or Melvin. His big chance was the sideline throw at the 1. The pass was slightly behind him but should have been caught. Shepherd had no chance, however, when he slipped and the ball struck him in the face mask for the interception. Players on both sides complained about the slippery turf. "If you watch the tape, all of the games here, there's guys slipping all over the place," Matthew Stafford said. The field conditions represented something of an indictment for Allen Johnson, the Packers' fields manager. In hindsight, it was astounding that Lazard (17) didn't play a snap until the 12-minute mark of the fourth quarter. Certainly, the Packers wouldn't have won without him. From the Lions 35, he went high at the 10 but an aggressive play by Coleman knocked the pass away. On the next play, he ran a sharp out-and-up and this time hauled in the TD despite Coleman's tight coverage. On the winning drive, Lazard caught three passes for 30. With Coleman playing off in a show of respect, Lazard had time to square his shoulders and attempt to run right over him on the sideline. The gain of 12 might have been lost if officials had penalized wide receivers coach Alvis Whitted, who charged right in front of an official and a Lion defender as he erupted in praise for Lazard's mauling approach. A few plays later, Lazard ran a crisp speed out against Coleman for 15. Using his 6-foot-4 ½, 227-pound frame, he tries to intimidate defensive backs physically. Lazard's score of 25 on the Wonderlic intelligence test ranked him well up among the better wide receivers in the 2018 draft class. He ran 4.58 seconds in the 40 and had a 38-inch vertical jump but wasn't drafted. Jimmy Graham (54) didn't make a play until picking up a late first down with a tough catch in heavy traffic. He dropped a 13-yard pass in the end zone with FS Tracy Walker in coverage and had a chance for another TD from the 15. His biggest play was the third-and-5 holding penalty on Walker that was the result of Graham losing his feet at the top of his route. Not only did Mercedes Lewis (29) block better than Graham but he also was more effective in the passing game. He slipped behind SS Tavon Wilson off play-action for 25 and caught another pass for 25 by breaking off his route as Rodgers scrambled. Evan Baylis played one snap.

Offensive Line (4)

Billy Turner probably would rate as the fifth-best starter to date. On this night he probably was the best. As Ross Verba was fond of saying after his good games, "No sacks, no hurries." No "bad" runs for Turner, either. At 6-5 he's the team's tallest starter inside, and at times with his first move being up he's susceptible to getting displaced by shorter foes with superior leverage. Turner, though, is a scrapper. His first strike in the run game usually packs some punch, and he will try to finish blocks as well. Maybe his worst moment was failing to sustain a block against DT A'Shawn Robinson, who disengaged and caused Aaron Jones to fumble. Coach Matt Patricia and defensive coordinator Paul Pasqualoni decided to wave the white flag when it came to all-out rushes with their people against this line. Their blitz rate (4.8 percent) was paltry. Of their non-pressures, 12 were with three men compared to 28 with four. The Lions bull-rushed with a major focus on lane integrity. NT Damon "Snacks" Harrison slipped away from Corey Linsley on one of the two five-man pressures and recorded a sack. Otherwise, Linsley took Harrison. When upcoming opponents see that Elgton Jenkins was late reacting on Detroit's two blitzes they'll be sure to dial up other rushes to confuse the rookie. He has shown a powerful punch and improved positioning in the run game. The next step is becoming more consistent with his hand placement. The holding penalty was his third in two games. Bryan Bulaga owned outside rusher Devon Kennard until giving up a pair of fourth-quarter flushes. He has generated movement almost all season for the run. David Bakhtiari drew the toughest matchup in Trey Flowers, a relentless bull rusher. He yielded two pressures, drawing his fourth hold of the season. Bakhtiari's level of play hasn't been close to elite level. Of the Packers' 26 non-quarterback rushes just one resulted in 1 yard or less. Obviously, the Lions mustered almost no penetration.

Quarterbacks (4)

Cut from the Patriots' mold, Jarrad Davis (72 snaps), Jahlani Tavai (44) and Christian Jones (42) are bigger than most linebackers and, as a result, vulnerable against the pass. The plan was to spread the defense out and make them cover sideline to sideline. Twelve of the Packers' 74 snaps came from the shotgun with no running back alongside Aaron Rodgers. The Packers had averaged 4.2 snaps from an empty formation in the first five games. The total of 12 was their highest in a game since having 16 at Cleveland in Game 13 of 2017. When Rodgers needed a completion, he looked short and to the boundary. Other than a 12-yard scramble on the final drive, Rodgers was confined to the pocket by the Lions' so-called "mush rush." Detroit often rushed just 3 ½ after asking one of its ends to chuck a receiver on his way out. Despite having all day to throw, Rodgers elected not to engage in much contested-catch territory. He played to the defense and the punter until it was time to go. Dropped TD passes by Aaron Jones and Jimmy Graham were balanced somewhat by a TD pass to Jamaal Williams on a 1-foot push pass. Those things are gifts for quarterbacks across the league. The Packers now rank 27th in third-down efficiency after another lousy performance (4 of 12). The 35-yard TD to Allen Lazard was gorgeous. The interception was partially Rodgers' fault. Surrounded by aging tight ends and free-agent wideouts, he produced five first downs and a 77-yard drive for the winning field goal. It evened out his bad decision throwing inside instead of the corner for the interception that sealed defeat in the final seconds against Philadelphia.

Running Backs (3 ½)

Aaron Jones (36) had a day to forget. In the second series, Jones was slashing through a hole when he attempted to stiff-arm DT A'Shawn Robinson, who was coming off a block. Robinson powered through Jones' right arm and, even though the ball was tucked away tightly under his left arm, was able to jar it loose. It was only the second fumble of Jones' three-year career. His other, on a rush in Game 8 last season, was the turning point in a 31-17 loss to New England. In the third series, Matt LaFleur was able to get Jones matched up deep against LB Christian Jones. The ball was beautifully thrown but Jones dropped it at the 6 on what should have been a 33-yard TD. It was the fifth dropped pass of Jones' career but only the second one deep downfield. Jones' 15 touches for 60 yards paled in comparison to 18-136 for Jamaal Williams (39). On the 14-play drive that won the game, Jones took the first four snaps before Williams was given the last 10. Williams returned from a week's absence (concussion) and turned in a sterling performance after it was almost all Jones early. He didn't break a slew of tackles. There were just four, two by Tavon Wilson and two by Jarrad Davis, but the offense would have been sunk without his professionalism and fight. He surged for 4 on third and 1. He stiff-armed Wilson three yards deep in the backfield, turning a loss into a 5-yard TD. On a 45-yard carry, 20 yards longer than his career-best, he made Wilson miss 11 yards downfield. With the temptation of an open end zone ahead, Williams did what he had been coached to do by taking a knee and depriving the Lions of any time to mount a comeback. FB Danny Vitale (10) also played.

Defensive Line (3 ½)

This unit started the season well before collapsing against the Eagles. The results were adequate in Dallas and even better Monday. The Lions were coming off a 186-yard rushing effort against Kansas City behind Kerryon Johnson (26-125). After offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell went deep twice on his opening first-down plays, he returned to runs on the next three. The gains were 1, 0 and 1. Of the 17 carries by non-quarterbacks, eight were for 1 or less, and the long gain was 9. The Lions' offensive line and the Packers' defensive line are intact. It was strength on strength, and at least in the run game Green Bay won. Of the Lions' eight "bad" runs, Dean Lowery (played 42 of the possible 59 defensive snaps) had a hand in four. He did most of his damage against RT Rick Wagner, who was at least partly responsible on four of the eight. Wagner took care of Lowry, however, on the first play by locking him up one-on-one so Matthew Stafford had time to unload the 66-yard flea-flicker. Kenny Clark (54) and Tyler Lancaster (26) were square and stubborn against the run as well. In a departure, Lancaster lined up in the middle of the line on nine of the 26 snaps in the 3-4 defense. Clark, who usually plays there, had 16 and Montravius Adams (13) had one. On two of the eight "bad" runs the D-line shifted just before the snap in an attempt to mess up blocking assignments. Adams' first two snaps in the nickel defense demonstrated his erratic level of play. On the first, he moved out of his rush lane and Stafford ran through it for 10. On the next play, the Lions ran right over Adams with Johnson for 7 on their first successful carry. He also had a shot to intercept a check-down. Once again, nobody in this group generated a pressure. Rookie Kingsley Keke was used on special teams only. Kyle Fackrell (left) and Preston Smith celebrate a sack of Matthew Stafford in the third quarter Monday night at Lambeau Field. (Benny Sieu / USA Today Sports)

Linebackers (4)

Oren Burks (five), a third-round draft choice in 2018, has been back for two games after suffering a partially torn pectoral muscle Aug. 8. For now, at least, he is behind B.J. Goodson (34) when it comes to the run-oriented packages. When Burks got in midway through the third quarter he was mauled on a run straight at him and then was late to the perimeter on a 9-yard reverse. Meanwhile, Goodson keeps getting better after being acquired Sept. 2 from the Giants for a seventh-round draft pick. When WR Kenny Golladay missed a crack-back block on Goodson, he crushed RB J.D. McKissic after a 1-yard gain. He made two other hard hits by holding his water, reading blocks and filling the hole. In coverage, he helped force Matthew Stafford into a wild overthrow of TE Logan Thomas in the red zone by taking a zone drop precisely in the throwing lane. As an entire defense, there were just three missed tackles. Blake Martinez (59) had two, including one when he gambled by running through and missing Kerryon Johnson on an 8-yard gain. His best moments came on the goal line. On the outside, Preston Smith (53), Za'Darius Smith (50), Kyler Fackrell (17) and Rashan Gary (nine) combined for a season-low total of four pressures. LT Taylor Decker controlled whoever rushed him, and the three inside players allowed just one pressure. RT Rick Wagner was the weak link with three pressures. At least the unit finished; three of the four pressures were sacks. Za'Darius' only pressure was a tremendous individual effort for a sack in which he beat backup LG Kenny Wiggins up the field, trashed Johnson and sacked Matthew Stafford in 3.7 seconds. Detroit double-teamed Za'Darius on 26.9 percent of passes. Preston was unblocked in splitting a sack with Fackrell before beating Wagner out of his stance for a sack in 2.2. Fackrell played more than Gary because he has a larger repertoire of pass-rush moves and has been more productive.

Defensive Backs (3)

The Lions took advantage of the Packers' aggressive tendencies early on two bombs worth 124 yards. On the flea-flicker, Kevin King (58) took a peek into the backfield instead of just sprinting full speed with Kenny Golladay and the result was 66 yards. At the same time, safeties Will Redmond (57) and Adrian Amos (59) bit on the run action. On the next series, Darrell Bevell caught Mike Pettine blitzing Tramon Williams (33) from the slot. When Williams was shut down by Kerryon Johnson, Matthew Stafford had time to deliver a 58-yard corner route to Marvin Hall (5-9 ½, 190), who ran 4.39 in 2016 as a free agent from Washington. Again, this is King's man, and he couldn't keep up. King had a rough night. Stafford picked on him in the red zone because he was playing so far off. With all the action going King's way Jaire Alexander (58) had a relatively quiet but certainly not ineffective game. Bouncing back from a toasting by Amari Cooper, Alexander was instrumental in why Marvin Jones wasn't a factor. Darnell Savage (ankle) was sitting out but he plays much like Redmond. They're attack-type safeties that will make plays as well as giving up plays. Redmond just wants in on the action. The first time Johnson found running home Redmond came roaring up and ended that with a smashing shoulder-block tackle at the knee. On what turned out to be the Lions' second-last play, Redmond appeared to interfere with Jones on a 40-yard bomb but it wasn't called and coach Matt Patricia elected not to challenge. Amos looks like a stable, steadying influence not unlike Morgan Burnett. He's much better against the run than the pass. After stifling Johnson on a wheel route in the end zone, Amos got caught inside on a screen and the gain was 20. He also got beat by TE T.J. Hockenson on an end-zone fade but the pass was dropped.

Kickers (4 ½)

Matt Prater's remarkable 5 of 5 off a slick track in 43-degree weather included makes from 54 and 51 yards. His veteran counterpart, Mason Crosby, also was in perfect rhythm with a 3 of 3 night (37, 48, 23). Crosby's five kickoffs averaged 70.4 yards and 4.0 seconds of hang time. Benefiting from 18 yards of roll on two of his three punts, JK Scott averaged 51.7 (gross, net) and 4.45 hang time.

Special Teams (½)

The Lions didn't want Sam Martin to kick off for touchbacks. The Lions wanted the ball in the hands of Darius Shepherd because it was clear they didn't respect his ability. The Lions, coached by former Green Bay coordinator John Bonamego, swarmed Shepherd on five kickoffs for an average return of 17.4. The blocking by coordinator Shawn Mennenga's unit was terrible. Breakdowns were evident almost everywhere. Even after all that, Shepherd was a yard deep in the fourth quarter fielding a boot with 4.16 hang time but took it out anyway. His worst moment was the punt that he tried to catch over his head and return. It wasn't entirely Shepherd's fault. Ka'dar Hollman and Redmond did a lousy job on their double-team of Detroit's Dee Virgin, who easily beat them down the field and then slammed into Shepherd. The ball went flying backward where RB Tra Carson had the best chance for the recovery. When players were unpled Carson had lost the ball to Tavon Wilson. On Wednesday, Carson was released. It was risky trading Trevor Davis to Oakland Sept. 19 for a sixth-round pick because Shepherd was perhaps too undersized for kickoffs and generally unproven out of North Dakota State. Josh Jackson, who didn't play from scrimmage, and Ty Summers led with 25 snaps each. Jackson was holding S Miles Killebrew on a kickoff return, then almost compounded his error with another penalty by engaging with Killebrew and head-butting him. Elgton Jenkins false-started on an extra point, making Crosby try from 38 yards. Hunter Bradley went 3 of 5 on short snaps, with three perfect laces and two requiring holder JK Scott to spin the ball.