

# Rating The Packers : Week 8 at Chiefs

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By Bob McGinn Posted 10/29/2019

Andy Reid didn't think the Packers could run out the clock. Andy Reid thought wrong. Starting from their 2, the Packers killed all 5 minutes, 4 seconds remaining with a convincing display of muscle and might Sunday night to defeat the Chiefs, 31-24, at Arrowhead Stadium. Reid elected to punt on fourth and 3 at the Kansas City 40, figuring with three timeouts left his defense could get a stop and score a tying touchdown. The decision by the Chiefs coach looked even better when Darrius Shepherd didn't field a punt by Dustin Colquitt that rolled 14 yards before being downed at the 2.

"It was a phenomenal punt and we backed them up," Reid said. "Our defense had been playing well throughout the night and I had confidence in them that we would get the ball back with good field position. Listen, it didn't work out."

The Packers proceeded to run Aaron Jones between the tackles six times for 29 yards and Jamaal Williams once for 2. On third and 5, coach Matt LaFleur put the game in the hands of Aaron Rodgers, who flanked Jones wide right and hit him for a gain of 8 with linebacker Ben Niemann in man coverage. Three kneels by Rodgers and the Packers were 7-1 at midseason.

"That was a classic 4-minute offense to finish off the game the right way," Rodgers said. "I loved the whole drive. That was special to finish that off."

In their one previous 4-minute chance this season the Packers did the job against the Vikings. Starting from their 21 nursing a 5-point lead with 3:14 remaining, the Packers ran six times for 25 yards around a 7-yard completion by Rodgers to record two first downs and leave just 5 seconds for the Vikings. Certainly, one of the hallmarks of a championship team is the ability to run the ball effectively when everyone in the stadium knows the run is coming. Last season, the Packers (6-9-1) had few late leads to protect and thus didn't have a true 4-minute situation. Their defense did and failed in four excruciatingly close losses against the Rams, Patriots, Seahawks and Vikings in the span of five games. In the finale, the Lions killed the last 5:33 at Lambeau Field, adding a humiliating exclamation point to their 31-0 victory. The Packers hadn't executed a 4-minute offense to perfection since the 2017 opener. Protecting a 17-9 lead against Seattle at Lambeau Field, the Packers ran off the last 6:17. In 2014, the Packers became a potent 4-minute team largely because they had a punishing big back in Eddie Lacy, who carried 286 times for 1,313 yards (4.6 avg.) in 18 games. Entering the NFC Championship Game in Seattle, the Packers had six 4-minute situations. They succeeded in five, killing the last 3:31 against the Jets (a 31-24 victory), the last 3:23 against the Vikings (24-21), the last 2:40 against the Patriots (26-21), the last 2:11 against the Falcons (43-37) and the last 4:06 against the Cowboys (26-21) in an NFC divisional playoff game at Lambeau Field.

Against the Seahawks, however, the Packers had not one but two chances to kill the clock late. Each time the Packers ran three plays and punted, adding impetus to a comeback by Seattle that led, among countless other factors, to their defeat in overtime.

Six of Green Bay's seven victories have been by 11 points or less. The fact that the Packers recorded one takeaway to none for the Chiefs, who dropped two chances for interceptions, was critical in the outcome.

"As far as the game last night, I had a chance to go back and look at the tape," Reid said Monday. "When you're playing a good football team, you can't have the mistakes that we made in a close game. Whether it's a turnover, a missed field goal, dropped interceptions.

"The thing that I took as a positive was that we played extremely hard and aggressive football. On their part, they made some plays. Their quarterback, in particular, made some big throws and did a nice job."

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Chiefs. 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. Aaron Jones. 2. Elgton Jenkins. 3. Aaron Rodgers.

### **Receivers (3)**

Minus Davante Adams (turf toe) for a fourth straight game, the three free agents and one fifth-round draft choice continued to perform in workmanlike fashion. Of the 33 passes, just 14 went to the wide receivers compared to six for the tight ends and 11 for the running backs (two were throwaways). Jake Kumerow made the only great play. However, there were no dropped passes, no penalties and noticeably effective blocking. The 34-yard reception by Kumerow, who played 35 of the possible 69 snaps on offense, was sensational. On third and 9, he ran an over route off short motion from the slot against FS Daniel Sorensen. Kumerow's concentration, hand placement and determination enabled him to make the diving catch even though Sorensen had one of his hands between Kumerow's. He also changed speeds and made a sharp cut to escape press coverage by CB Charvarius Ward on a 14-yard sideline comeback. Having made two explosive catches in as many weeks, Kumerow's confidence has to be growing. Coach Matt LaFleur is using Allen Lazard (46) on routes hoping he has space to run over smaller defensive backs after the catch. At some point, the coaches might try to put 15-to-20 pounds on Lazard and utilize him as a receiving tight end. Neither Geronimo Allison (44) nor Marquez Valdes-Scantling (43) did much. Allison was hung out to dry on a throw by Aaron Rodgers, absorbed a big shot from LB Damien Wilson and didn't seem himself thereafter. This was the second time in the eight games that Mercedes Lewis (43) had more playing time than Jimmy Graham (42). Lewis is sustaining his run blocks better than last season. At times, he helps Aaron Jones' cutback elections by occupying the back-side end. He's able to lockout and get some movement at the point of attack, too. Lewis' pass blocking, however, is another story. He was responsible for a sack and two hurries. He added definition to his body during the offseason, and it paid off. Lewis still can't win as a receiver; on one of the five sacks, Rodgers appeared to be looking at him 20 yards downfield but didn't pull the trigger because Sorensen was blanketing the tight end. Graham isn't able to create space, either. All he did on his longest gain (11 yards) was leak out of the protection unit.

## **Offensive Line (3 ½)**

Lane Taylor has turned in many solid performances in the 52 starts he's made since 2015, but he just can't begin to measure up to Elgton Jenkins in terms of athleticism and horsepower. The rookie from Mississippi State turned in one of his best games as the only offensive linemen without a pressure or "bad" run. Jenkins is moving defenders consistently. On double-teams, he seems to have a good feel for when to leave the defensive lineman and go after the linebacker. Teams have tested him with assorted twists and stunts, largely to no avail. He seldom whiffs blocking for run or pass. Billy Turner, the other guard, is a big effort guy. He allows two pressures or so most weeks because that's just who he is. With no bad misses, this was one of his better run-blocking days. Linsley allowed a sack on a would-be Hail Mary to close the first half and another pressure to go with two of the team's three "bad" runs. That's four misses for Linsley or about twice as many as normal. Bryan Bulaga was nicked for a sack by DE Emmanuel Ogbah before departing with a finger injury in the fourth quarter. Bakhtiari drew his eighth penalty of the season with his fifth for holding. He has such good feet, balance and strength that there's no reason for him to be pushing the envelope. After 105 starts David Bakhtiari should have a book on the umpires and the referees and what they call. Alex Light, the second-year free agent from Richmond, played 13 snaps for Bulaga and three for Bakhtiari when an injury arose. Light is a no-nonsense competitor who goes for the throat. This group got a break when DT Chris Jones (groin) and DE Frank Clark (neck), probably the Chiefs' two best players on defense, didn't play.

## **Quarterbacks (4)**

It's not that Aaron Rodgers doesn't trust his wide receivers and tight ends. He just doesn't trust them like he does Davante Adams. Thus, in a tight game, he decided that the best matchups were running backs on the linebackers that defensive coordinator Steve Spagnuolo provided almost all day. Rodgers enacted his shifts and motions to feature Aaron Jones and Jamaal Williams, and in the end, Matt LaFleur's design carried the day. On the first drive, Rodgers helped settle down the noisy crowd with third-down completions after he extended plays. His 34-yard completion to Jake Kumerow was pinpoint. The 3-yard TD pass to Williams was either pinpoint or luck, especially considering Jimmy Graham went for it and was near the running back. It was good fortune Bashaud Breeland, the backup cornerback for Green Bay last season that was discarded in March, dropped what should have been a rather routine interception. He always has had good balls skills, too. Two plays before the TD pass to Williams, Rodgers overthrew Allison in the end zone on a ball that probably should have been picked by SS Tyrann Mathieu. Rodgers scrambled for 29 yards. On the one snap when Spagnuolo rushed seven, Rodgers knew it had to be man coverage. He said the heck with this and high-tailed it almost immediately around the right side for 15. Two of the five sacks and two of seven other knockdowns were charged to Rodgers, either for holding the ball too long or running into harm's way. Despite being hit 12 times, Rodgers clutched the football with both hands and didn't fumble. In fact, he hasn't fumbled since Game 4. He did lose possession twice, but in those cases, he knew he was out of bounds or down by contact. Rodgers has a remarkable sense for where he is on a football field and where the other 21 players are, too. Few quarterbacks have ever had such a sense of place. The two delay penalties gave the Packers five for the season.

## **Running Backs (5)**

Since Aaron Jones (44) dropped the 33-yard TD pass against Detroit he has been on fire as a receiver. At Texas-El Paso, he had 658 rushes compared to 71 receptions. His receiving work was limited to out of the backfield, and he wasn't used much from the slot. Matt LaFleur changed that. Today, Jones is running a respectable route tree and killing linebackers in the process. He beat LB Anthony Hitchens on a slant-and-go for 50 yards before zipping 67 yards on a split-receiver screen for the winning TD. He caught seven of eight targets for 159 yards (116 after the catch), the second-most by a running back since Andy Uram went 4-174 on Nov. 1, 1942, against the Chicago Cardinals at City Stadium. Jones broke just one tackle in his 20 touches (for 226 yards) due in part to how quickly he gets to the defense. He is far from a patient runner. He accelerates, gets what's there, bounces wide if he finds a stone wall and almost always falls forward. His crashing, reckless style might not do much for his longevity. For now, at least, that irrepressible style must be weighing heavily on opposing defensive coordinators. Williams (32) took two or three heavy whacks from the Chiefs' salty corps of linebackers but bounced right up. That inspires teammates. He can flank wide and burn linebackers, too. FB Danny Vitale (14) did just enough on his goal-line block from the side on DE Emmanuel Ogbah to get Williams into the end zone from a yard out.

## **Defensive Line (3 ½)**

The biggest play on defense was made by Tyler Lancaster even though he played just 11 of the 59 possible snaps on defense, his lowest total of the season. With the score tied midway in the third quarter, the second-year free agent from Northwestern stuck out one arm as he was going to the ground resisting a block. LeSean McCoy was flagging the ball in his right arm, and Lancaster's poke knocked it loose. As Lancaster was on the ground, the ball was kicked slowly toward him. He pulled it in for the recovery. It was the Packers' first recovered fumble by a running back on a rush since Game 10 last season when Seattle's Chris Carson coughed it up on a strip by Clay Matthews. The other snap counts were 50 for Kenny Clark, 38 for Dean Lowry, 14 for Montravius Adams and two for Kingsley Keke. The numbers were down because for the first time defensive coordinator Mike Pettine used OLB Za'Darius Smith at defensive end in the 3-3 defense. Smith lined up there 11 times in that package; the Chiefs gained 76 yards. The assumption is that Pettine wasn't satisfied with the pass rush he had been receiving from having three of his 300-pounders in the 3-3. Smith, who is listed at 272 pounds, more than held his own when the Chiefs ran the ball. Lowry had three of the unit's four pressures. He's just a high-effort guy. It was disappointing that the unit didn't have a tackle for loss given that LT Eric Fisher (groin) and LG Andrew Wylie (ankle) didn't play.

## **Linebackers (3)**

Mike Pettine's objective was to limit the number of big plays made by the Chiefs' stable of playmakers: Tyreek Hill, Travis Kelce, Sammy Watkins, Demarcus Robinson and Mecole Hardman. Had it been superstar Patrick Mahomes (knee) at quarterback rather than journeyman Matt Moore, he probably would have had to pressure. Against Moore, he blitzed on merely 13.2 percent of passes. Moreover, Pettine rushed three nine times after using a three-man rush just 13 times in the first seven games combined. The four outside linebackers combined for just seven pressures. Za'Darius Smith (46) led with three, and two were sacks. As an end in the 3-3, he beat LG Martinus Rankin up the field in 2.8 seconds. As a rover standing up over the guard, Smith beat C Austin Reiter and Rankin in 4.1. He and Preston Smith (45) required medical attention in the second quarter. Za'Darius returned after missing two plays; Preston came back after three. It's the fifth time this season that Za'Darius has received attention from the medical staff. Preston had two pressures in an

uneven performance. Neither Smith is athletic enough to drop in coverage efficiently, but when one needs to drop it's Preston always getting the call. The problem is how stiff he is operating in space. At times, Preston performs like a highly alert player. Other times, he's oblivious to where the ball is. Kyler Fackrell (33) posted the only tackle for a loss by a front-seven player. The modus operandi for Rashan Gary (14) at the mid-point of his rookie season is to keep smashing into the tackle across from him. He's strong and physical, but when it comes to getting off a block or making a move, development is required. Blake Martinez (59) made even less impact than usual due in part to playing with his injured right hand in a club. It was a poor tackling day for the defense (13 misses), but for Martinez to miss only one playing one-handed was a job rather well done. B.J. Goodson played three snaps whereas Oren Burks didn't play from scrimmage. Pettine was willing to take his chances against the run. He used Adrian Amos next to Martinez.

## **Secondary (2)**

Matt Moore made his first start since 2017 and threw for 267 yards (passer rating of 107.1). There's no telling how many yards Mahomes and his stallions would have had against this outfit. Mike Pettine kept his safeties deep behind zone coverage and a no-blitz rush plan. The goal was not to get beat deep, and Moore's longest completion came on a screen for 30. Kevin King (59) saw a lot of Tyreek Hill and might still be back-pedaling. His main problem was missing three tackles, including one on Mecole Hardman's 30-yard TD. Instead of keeping his feet, King dived and missed Hardman nine yards downfield. Sammy Watkins generally played toward the side of Jaire Alexander (59). Of the nine passes thrown in Alexander's vicinity, three were completed for just 14 yards. He's quick to support the run but also missed two tackles. Darnell Savage (59) returned after missing 2 ½ games (ankle) and was feeling his way. Besides two missed tackles, he was ineffective on four rushes and wasn't on point in coverage. Adrian Amos (59) plays a little like an old-fashioned strong safety. Certainly, he's more comfortable in the box than the deep half or, heaven forbid, single safety. He's a fairly sure tackler, too. Other than an illegal-hands penalty on third down in the red zone Tramon Williams (53) continues to perform capably as the slot nickel. With Amos spending much of the game at inside linebacker Pettine went with Chandon Sullivan (35) rather than Will Redmond (10) as the other deep safety next to Savage. Sullivan vacated the middle of the field so Travis Kelce had space galore to haul in a 29-yard TD pass off deceptive action. He atoned for that by making a terrific deflection of a third-and-3 pass to Kelce. It turned out to be the Chiefs' final play.

## **Kickers (2 ½)**

After seven strong performances, JK Scott had a downer. He opened by hitting a liner into the middle of the field that was returned to the Green Bay 30. On his last two punts, he angled for the sidelines with little accuracy. His three-punt averages of 35.3 yards (gross) and 29.3 (net) didn't match up against Dustin Colquitt's three-punt averages (51.3, 51.3). Scott's average hang time was 4.23. Mason Crosby stayed in rhythm, making a 35-yard field goal and four extra points. Almost all of his placements are hit solidly without much movement. His six-kickoff averages were 67.7 and 3.93. He had two touchbacks.

## **Special Teams (2)**

Matt LaFleur benched Darrius Shepherd on kickoff returns in favor of Chandon Sullivan, who has more size and experience. Sullivan broke one tackle in a three-return, 16.0-average night. Shepherd elected not to field the final punt and watched it roll 14 yards to the 2. The Chiefs had an 18-yard punt return and a kickoff return of 33 that was shortened due to penalty. Danny Vitale and Ty Summers were aggressive in coverage. Tony Brown and Will Redmond were the punt gunners. Summers and Oren Burks led in snaps with 20. At least coordinator Shawn Mennenga's men didn't have a penalty for the fourth game out of the last five.