

# Rating The Packers : Week 11 at 49ers

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By Bob McGinn Posted 11/29/2019

After a terrible start, the Packers appeared to have regained some semblance of equilibrium midway through the second quarter Sunday night at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif.

They trailed the San Francisco 49ers, 10-0, but the 49ers hadn't done anything more than the Packers on offense, and the assumption was that Green Bay would at some point score enough to make it a close game.

Of course, the Packers' offense remained inept for 60 minutes. But, even if the Packers had snapped out of their offensive funk and equaled their average scoring output of 25 points through 10 games it wouldn't have made any difference because the defense caved in the last 2 ½ quarters.

Once again, it was explosive plays, one of the two most critical areas (the other being takeaways) of defense and one Mike Pettine has failed at since replacing Dom Capers as coordinator last year, that killed the Packers.

The 49ers added 13 points before halftime on three possessions that featured passes of 22, 42 and 22 yards. When the Packers gave up a 61-yard touchdown pass late in the third quarter, the game was over.

San Francisco's six gains of 20 yards or more increased the total of 20-plus plays to 48 in 11 games against Green Bay this season. Thirty-two of the 48 have been for 25 yards or more.

Tight ends have destroyed the Packers. The last five starting tight ends they've encountered have caught 32 passes for 500 yards.

Each week, opposing tight ends and wide receivers have been running free in the middle of the defense. It's a telltale of a poorly coached unit, which starts with Pettine but also includes the seven assistant coaches working beneath him and coach Matt LaFleur.

In the previous 25 seasons (playoff games included), the Packers have allowed an average of at least four 20-plus gains four times. The current average of 4.36 would rank fourth if it were to hold up for the entire season. The worst average was 5.0 in 2011, followed by 4.82 in 2013, 4.77 in 2004 and 4.0 in Pettine's first year as coordinator.

Green Bay already has yielded 18 gains of more than 35 yards. Since 1995, the Packers have never allowed more than 24 in a full season. Pettine's platoon gave up 12 last season.

Injuries aren't a factor. It's possible no defense has been as intact as Green Bay's has been through 11 games. This is a far cry from 2018, when the unit was hit hard by injury.

Pettine hasn't exposed his back seven to harsh coverage assignments brought on by heavy blitzing. Although the Packers' pass rush statistically hasn't been as good as last season, ranking 13th in sack percentage compared to seventh in 2018, Pettine's four-man pressure game has been sufficient.

The Packers continue to blow assignments in the secondary week after week, as was the case on the 49ers' pair of long touchdown passes.

Moreover, there was a noticeable difference in how much harder and more physical the 49ers' defense performed under coordinator Robert Saleh than the Packers' defense did under Pettine. Middle linebacker Fred Warner, free safety Jimmie Ward and several defensive linemen demonstrated a level of intensity and violent play seldom seen by a Pettine-coached defense in Green Bay.

Through games of Sunday the Packers rank 28th in yards allowed, including 26th against the run and 23rd against the pass. They're also 32nd in opponents' average gain on first down (6.71).

The reasons Green Bay stands 15th in points allowed and 8-3 in the standings would be its tie for eighth in takeaways and 10th-place ranking in the red zone.

Watching the 49ers march 69 yards (34 on the ground) in 10 plays for a clock-killing touchdown late in the fourth quarter against a unit that appeared to call it a day early should have sent shudders throughout the defensive coaching staff.

The Packers hired LaFleur based in part on what he learned coaching under 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan during their eight years together in Houston, Washington and Atlanta. The teacher ruled Sunday night.

"It was bad ball," LaFleur said. "Disappointed with myself, with how we got outcoached and outplayed. It's unacceptable."

Now the Packers have a chance to get well against the creampuffs of the NFC East, the Giants and Redskins.

Here is a rating of the Packers in their 37-8 loss to the 49ers. Five footballs is the maximum, one-half football is the minimum. As a team, the Packers received one-half football.

The three stars of the game were: 1. Jamaal Williams. 2. Aaron Jones. 3. David Bakhtiari.

## Receivers ( ½ )

When a player signs a contract for \$18 million guaranteed, as Davante Adams did in late December 2017, there has been an unwritten understanding in Green Bay for years that he leads his position and does the right thing. Adams didn't Sunday. On the second play of the game, a 10-yard reception by Adams on a bubble screen that requires little skill, he drew an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. Trying either to be a tough guy or a big man, Adams walked up behind undersized CB Emmanuel Moseley in the 49ers' bench area and chest-bumped him from behind. It was ridiculous, the first lousy play of many for the offense. On the touchdown, Adams needed even less ability to circle left end behind perfect blocking led by David Bakhtiari on a 2-yard push pass. Then he had the chutzpah to break out into a dance routine even though it was late in the third quarter and the Packers remained almost hopelessly behind. As usual, there was an instance or two in which Adams flapped his arms at the officials begging for a call. A player of his stature ought to set an example for his fellow receivers and just return to the huddle. That stuff should be beneath him. Playing 60 of the possible 80 snaps on offense, Adams caught seven of 12 targets for 43 yards. Niners defensive coordinator Robert Saleh played more man coverage than normal and Adams, often matched up against Richard Sherman, couldn't separate. The same might be said for Geronimo Allison (54), Allen Lazard (52), Marquez Valdes-Scantling (30) and Jake Kumerow (22). Allison, who has been hit extremely hard several times in the last month, dropped a ball inside on third and 8. On the plethora of quick throws outside, Allison delivered some sharp blocks. He also drew an illegal-block penalty on a blatant push to the back and came close to another on the next running play. Lazard labors on over routes. His modest speed precludes him from running a successful route tree. The Packers' left no doubt that they currently value free agent Robert Tonyan more than Jace Sternberger, a third-round draft choice. With both healthy, Tonyan logged 27 snaps whereas the rookie was inactive. Tonyan still doesn't seem to be moving freely with the hip injury that cost him the last five games. His run blocking was a negative, too. Jimmy Graham (38) couldn't secure a 39-yard bomb; on the way down Jimmie Ward ripped it from his clutches. Twenty-two of Mercedes Lewis' 28 snaps came with his hand down.

## Offensive Line ( ½ )

It looked easy enough on the opening play when Corey Linsley went one-on-one against NT D.J. Jones, got push and the running play gained 5 yards. After that, Linsley had a night to forget. Seldom, if ever, has Linsley had this many poor plays in his six-year, 88-start career. In the first half alone, Linsley was charged with three "bad" runs for missing Jones and getting stuffed by him on fourth and 1. Jones (6-0 ½, 316), a sixth-round draft choice from Mississippi in 2017, won using leverage, strength and quickness. The fourth-down play occurred at the 49ers 28. Aaron Rodgers had the team up at the line in plenty of time but let the play clock wind down before calling a timeout. At the time, the 49ers had Solomon Thomas lined up at nose tackle. As the Packers substituted Aaron Jones for Jamaal Williams, Robert Saleh sent in Jones for Thomas. "We did appreciate that," Kyle Shanahan replied Monday when asked about the Packers' timeout enabling their best run-stuffer to get on the field. "It was perfect." It appeared as though Rodgers was lobbying for a pass play. Instead, Matt LaFleur went with a one-back, three-wideout set and ran Jones at D.J. Jones in the A gap. Jones pressed Linsley backward, disengaged and stuffed the carry for no gain. In the second half, Linsley failed to get off a combination block and backup WLB Elijah Lee halted Williams twice for 1-yard gains. Linsley's only blemish in pass protection was costly, to say the least. On third and 10, DE Arik Armstead collapsed the pocket against Billy Turner. Rodgers might have escaped but Linsley didn't finish the play, enabling MLB Fred Warner to register the strip-sack that a snap later turned into a 49ers' TD. Linsley also was late on a screen

pass that Warner blew up for minus-5 and got run over by Warner on a second-half blitz. Turner wasn't much better, playing a role in three of the five sacks. He was charged with 3 ½ pressures and one "bad" run. Elgton Jenkins yielded two pressures on early stunts. For the third time this season, Bryan Bulaga was knocked from a game because of injury. This one was to his right knee on the ninth snap when Robert Tonyan blocked Armstead into Bulaga from behind. Alex Light wasn't very good in 51 snaps against the Eagles and was worse here in 71. DE Nick Bosa, a strong candidate to be named defensive rookie of the year, piled up five pressures against Light while Armstead had the other 2 ½ against him. Bosa was too fast with his feet, his hands and his tempo. It was a mismatch. On Monday, Matt LaFleur suggested the Packers might make a position switch if Bulaga can't play. A likely move would be to shift Turner to right tackle, where he started four games for Denver last year and 12 for North Dakota State in 2010, and install Lucas Patrick at right guard. David Bakhtiari caught a break when speed-rushing DE Dee Ford (leg) didn't play. At times, Bakhtiari gave a lot of ground on power rushes by Bosa and others. Generally, he was able to sit down and regain control, giving up just one pressure. He wasn't charged with a "bad" run; he did pick up his 11th penalty of the season.

### **Quarterbacks ( ½ )**

It was stunning to see Aaron Rodgers rendered null and void by this defense, which was minus DE Dee Ford and ILB Kwon Alexander. It was more stunning to see the bloodless manner in which he accepted one-sided defeat. Rodgers completed 20 of 33 passes for 104 yards, a 3.2 average that marked the lowest of any of his 169 starts. In all, the Packers averaged 2.83 (70-198) per play, their worst since Game 15 of 2015 at Arizona (64-178, 2.78). Their worst before that was Game 10 of 2006 against New England (48-120, 2.5). When Rodgers exited the messy affair with 5 minutes left he hadn't even challenged the 49ers. The longest downfield pass that he completed was seven yards to Jamaal Williams in the left flat on a ball that was underthrown and barely caught. He was content getting the ball out of his hand in a hurry. His 20 completions included six check-downs for 39 yards, five bubble screens for 33, three quick outs for 14, two screens for minus-1, one slant for seven, one bootleg for seven, one backfield pass off jet motion for three and one push pass for two. Several times, the check-down receiver had a defender in close proximity. He didn't seem to mind. Of his four take-offs/fades, he airmailed two over the head of an open Davante Adams and another over Marquez Valdes-Scantling. He threw a good ball to MVS that would have required a great receiver to get his feet down for a 36-yard TD. He isn't, and didn't. Probably his best completion was a corner route to Adams for a conversion. For the third time this season he took advantage of a quarterback's newest and best friend – the push pass – to record a TD pass. Robert Saleh selectively blitzed (28.6 percent on passes), but of the five sacks two came on his only two six-man pressures and another on a five-man. The football was belted loose from Rodgers on the first sack. The ball also came loose on two of the other sacks but he was down by contact. It looked as though the ferocious nature of the 49ers' rush messed him up. At no time did Rodgers do anything to inspire or ignite the offense. It's hard to imagine other illustrious quarterbacks such as Drew Brees, Tom Brady, Brett Favre, Dan Marino, John Elway, Dan Fouts or Steve Young ever going down in such circumstances without putting up a fight. Meaning, meeting fire with fire, standing tall in the pocket or working to escape the rush, getting down and dirty, admonishing friend and foe alike, attacking downfield and scrapping to put some points on the board and maybe, just maybe, lifting his team from hopelessness to jubilation. Rodgers just slipped away to the sidelines with little or no emotion, trading helmet for ball cap perhaps comforted in the knowledge that the team's turnover differential, as well as his passer rating, hadn't been unduly damaged. Tim Boyle looked in command of himself and the offense in a 12-

play stint. It was the first substantial playing time of his two-year career. The 49ers were playing backups by then, but the Packers' offensive staff had reason to be encouraged.

### **Running Backs (4)**

The Packers flanked Aaron Jones (41) to split receiver six times. Like the Panthers two weeks ago, the 49ers' defensive backs remained right where they were. If Jones went wide right, Richard Sherman covered him. If he set wide left, either Emmanuel Moseley or Ahkello Witherspoon were in coverage. On Jones' one target, he ran a rather lazy speed out that created no separation against Witherspoon and the pass fell incomplete. On two of the occasions that Jones worked against Sherman, the distinguished veteran drew penalties for illegal contact and unnecessary roughness. It was out of whack that Jones wasn't targeted on a single check-down whereas Jamaal Williams (39) had eight. Jones always runs well, and this was no exception. He just needs more than 13 carries. His longest gain, 11 yards, came when he bounced wide right after DE Arik Armstead jarred Alex Light back almost into his lap. When DT DeForest Buckner shoved Billy Turner into Jones' path, he spun out and slithered for four. Jones broke a total of four tackles. None was by MLB Fred Warner, a second-year force who plays the position so unlike what the Packers have been making do with since Desmond Bishop and a young Nick Barnett. In 18 touches Williams gained 80 yards. He broke four passes, a lot for him, and suffered his first dropped pass of the season on a screen. His intensity always runs hot.

### **Defensive Line ( ½ )**

As the season has progressed, this unit has become less effective. Early on, starters Kenny Clark (played 42 of the 48 possible snaps on defense), Dean Lowry (27) and Tyler Lancaster (21) not only stubbornly hung tough against double-teams but also made an occasional play across the line of scrimmage. Clark, in particular, and Lowry every now and again offered pass-rush pop, too. Nowadays, the instances in which the front three are rolled out of their hole has increased. By no means has it happened so often as to undermine the integrity of the defense. But the unit has been more of a problem than a solution. The 49ers' offensive line continues to play better as a whole than the individual talent should allow. The effort of this defensive line is acceptable. It just doesn't approach the all-out passion exhibited by the groups in San Francisco, New England and Dallas, among other teams. Nobody in the group registered a pressure. For the first time, rookie Kingsley Keke (eight) saw the field before Montravius Adams (six) and also had more playing time.

### **Linebackers (1)**

At this point, the production of Rashan Gary (13) is more akin to that of a late-round draft choice or free agent than the No. 12 pick in the draft. Mike Smith, the outside linebackers coach, sent Gary onto the field for the first time in the 3-4 defense with 6 minutes left in the first half. The 49ers had gained merely 49 yards in their first five possessions. Obviously, Gary was one of 11 players on the field for the next three plays. It's still interesting to note that the 49ers exceeded their output in 18 plays by gaining 51 yards in those three before Gary was relieved. Later in the half, Gary's two snaps corresponded to 46 yards for San Francisco. With the 49ers limited to 15 snaps in the second half Smith didn't insert Gary until the last six plays during which the 49ers rolled up 52 yards and final touchdown. So far, he has been a big-money dud. His second-team counterpart, Kyler Fackrell (19), beat RG Mike Person for a knockdown but showed poor low-block shield on a rush for 11. Za'Darius Smith (40) and Preston Smith (40) have had much better days. Minus LT Joe Staley (finger), the 49ers started Justin Skule before replacing him with ex-TE Daniel Brunskill after 20 snaps.

Za'Darius's two pressures against Skule included a power sack in 3.3 seconds. Preston's lone pressure came in collaboration with Za'Darius for a sack in 3.6. The 49ers wham-blocked and trapped with FB Kyle Juszczyk and assorted tight ends. Za'Darius basically laid down against one trap, didn't squeeze the hole and the resultant run was worth 25 yards. Preston batted close to 50-50 handling blocks coming across the formation at him. Za'Darius does show a furious burst to the quarterback. On plays involving pursuit downfield, however, his motor often runs on idle. On the inside, the snaps counts were 48 for Blake Martinez, 13 for B.J. Goodson and one for Oren Burks. One of the best parts of Martinez' game last season was rushing the passer. This season, with Mike Pettine sending fewer inside linebackers and defensive backs, Martinez had just 18 rushes in the first 10 games. With Pettine's blitz rate at 32 percent Sunday night Martinez took full advantage of three rushes with an unblocked sack and a flush against RT Mike McGlinchey. Otherwise, it was the same old. He missed three tackles, made only one or two good hits and suffered mightily in comparison to 49ers dynamo Fred Warner. On one run, Martinez was unblocked and delivered a frontal strike to RB Tevin Coleman, who kept on moving through the tackle for four additional yards. He plays small, lacking the body snap to shed blocks with violence. Whether it's zone or man coverage, Martinez isn't an attribute there, either. Although Burks probably is a step faster than S Ibraheim Campbell the coaches continue to play the veteran alongside Martinez in nickel.

## **Defensive Backs ( ½ )**

Since returning from an ankle injury in Game 8, rookie Darnell Savage (46) has made minimal impact. In fact, he might be one of those players that looked better in shorts than pads. He missed three more tackles Sunday. He isn't big enough to take people on high. He and Adrian Amos (48) will have to live with the memory of the 15-yard TD run by Raheem Mostert that concluded the scoring. When Mostert broke free inside, Amos and Savage exhibited awful technique and even worse desire in their feeble, missed attempted tackles. Nobody could cover TE George Kittle (6-129). When Amos had him in man coverage, he needed 11 yards to bring him down. From a three-TE set Kittle got deep on a corner-post route into the open middle of the field against quarters coverage for a 61-yard TD. Kittle ended up catching the ball in the sector where Jaire Alexander (48) should have fallen back and taken away. Jimmy Garoppolo, who posted a career-best passer rating of 145.8, went after Kevin King (34) on his first two passes and gained 23 yards. Matched on Kittle at times, King didn't show much speed chasing across the field. By far, King was the best tackler in the secondary. Alexander had a slow day as Garoppolo also did business against nickel back Tramon Williams (33), who moved outside later when King departed. Williams never got the help he was supposed to have when Deebo Samuel turned a 13-yard in-breaking route into a 42-yard TD. Even at 36, Williams still can catch almost everyone. Samuel, a rookie who ran 4.44 last spring, stayed a step ahead of Williams to the pylon. Williams broke up a third-down pass to RB Jeff Wilson but needed 15 yards to get Wilson down on an early inside trap for 25. With all 12 defensive backs healthy, S Will Redmond was inactive and CB Tony Brown didn't play from scrimmage. Campbell (21) was OK as the nickel linebacker. Chandon Sullivan (20), the fourth corner ahead of Josh Jackson, Ka'dar Hollman and Brown, was too soft on a third and 10 out to Kendrick Bourne for 13.

## **Kickers ( ½ )**

Not even ideal, 63-degree weather in late November could cure JK Scott's month-long slump. With the offense and defense scuffling, the Packers really needed him to change field position. Instead, Scott averaged 37.2 yards (gross), 34.8 (net) and 4.17 seconds of hang time. His six-punt averages were dwarfed by the four-punt averages of San Francisco's Mitch Wishnowsky (45.5, 46.3). Scott wasn't constrained by short fields. The Packers needed him to crush the ball high and deep and for the fourth straight game he flopped. With 33 seconds left in the first half, Scott could manage only a 33-yard effort. Given a short field, the 49ers completed one 22-yard pass and kicked a field goal. Scott has an odd habit of kicking some punts that don't even go 40 yards despite hanging forever. He did that twice. The other four were more of the line-drive variety. Strangely, three of his six boots backed up a few yards upon landing. Mason Crosby's only function was kicking off twice, and both were for touchbacks.

## **Special Teams (1 ½)**

The pathetic punt-return unit coordinated by Shawn Mennenga added another miserable showing. Tremon Smith, the team's third punt returner after Trevor Davis and Darrius Shepherd, lost three yards in two returns. He was fooling with fire on one skidding punt, fortunately picking it up cleanly before being snowed under. His other return (minus-1) went nowhere when RB Raheem Mostert beat the double-team block of Tony Brown and Darnell Savage. Add it up: Davis (3-1), Smith (3- minus-3), Shepherd (2- minus-9). The frigid totals are eight returns for minus-11; the opponents are 20-162-8.1. Josh Jackson took six shots as a punt gunner. When he did a poor job against a single blocker, Richie James had a 10-yard return. Ty Summers and Burks shared the snap lead with 26.