

Rating The Packers : Week 2 vs Lions

By Bob McGinn Sep 22, 2020

Of this, there can be no argument: the Packers' electrifying start on offense has placed them in some storied historical company.

Based on research by Eric Goska, a statistical historian and author regarding all things Packers, the 2020 squad is the sixth in NFL history to amass 1,000 or more yards in the first two games of a season. With their 1,010 yards, the Packers rank No. 6 on the all-time list.

What should excite fans of the franchise is that those other five teams finished with a composite regular-season record of 60-16, a winning percentage of .790. One won the NFL championship, two were defeated in the Super Bowl and two were ousted in divisional playoff games.

On Monday, Lions coach Matt Patricia called the Packers a "great team" and a "very dangerous team" after his defense allowed 488 yards in a 42-21 setback at Lambeau Field. In the opener, Green Bay gained 522 yards in a 43-34 victory over the Vikings.

Here's a brief look at the top five teams of all time in yards after two games.

New England Patriots, 2011 (13-3): Had 1,126 yards (200 rushing, 926 passing), three sacks and one giveaway under coach Bill Belichick. Tom Brady, in his prime, featured wide receiver Wes Welker and tight ends Rob Gronkowski and Aaron Hernandez. Finished No. 2 in total offense (428.0). Were upset in the Super Bowl by the Giants, 21-17.

Buffalo Bills, 1991 (13-3): Had 1,119 yards (379 rushing, 740 passing), two sacks and five giveaways under coach Marv Levy. Jim Kelly directed the no-huddle "K-Gun" offense with Thurman Thomas as the running back and Andre Reed and James Lofton at wide receiver. Finished No. 1 in total offense (390.8). Lost the second of four straight Super Bowls, 37-24, to the Redskins.

Baltimore Ravens, 2019 (14-2): Had 1,083 yards (447 rushing, 636 passing), three sacks and no giveaways under coach John Harbaugh. Lamar Jackson ran and passed in an MVP season. Mark Ingram also rushed for 1,000 yards, and tight end Mark Andrews was the leading receiver. Finished No. 2 in total offense (407.6). Lost in the AFC Divisional playoffs to the Titans, 28-12.

San Francisco 49ers, 1998 (12-4): Had 1,061 yards (417 rushing, 644 passing), four sacks and one giveaway under coach Steve Mariucci. Steve Young's last great season. Garrison Hearst was the running back and Jerry Rice, Terrell Owens and J.J. Stokes were the wide receivers. Finished No. 1 in total offense (425.0). Lost in the NFC Divisional playoffs to the Falcons, 20-18.

Los Angeles Rams, 1951 (8-4): Had 1,034 yards (269 rushing, 765 passing), two sacks and nine giveaways under coach Joe Stydahar. Norm Van Brocklin and Bob Waterfield alternated at quarterback, Elroy "Crazylegs" Hirsch and Tom Fears were the wide receivers and the three-headed "Bull Elephant" backfield included "Deacon" Dan Towler, Dick Hoerner and Paul "Tank" Younger. Finished No. 1 in total offense (450.8). Defeated the Browns, 24-17, in the NFL Championship Game.

The Packers, who ranked No. 18 in total offense (345.5) last season, presently have one sack and no turnovers. Given the fact this is the first season with no exhibition games, the fact the Packers haven't had a fumble is remarkable.

This is the first time in the Packers' history that they haven't turned the ball over in the first two games. They had one giveaway in 2015, '11, '09, '08 and 1945.

The precision with which the Packers have played offensively to start coach Matt LaFleur's second season has been stunning.

"Am I happy with where we are? Yeah," LaFleur said Sunday. "I think we've done a lot of great things. Do I think there's a lot to improve upon? No doubt about it."

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. Aaron Jones. 2. Corey Linsley. 3. Rashan Gary.

Receivers (1)

Two games into last season the snaps at tight end were 89 for Jimmy Graham, 65 for Mercedes Lewis and 42 for Robert Tonyan. Now, those totals are 92 for Tonyan, the same 65 for Lewis and 28 for Jace Sternberger (Josiah Deguara played eight at TE in the opener). Although the Packers certainly don't miss the 33-year-old Graham, they're still not appreciably better at the position. On Sunday, Aaron Rodgers made this interesting remark about Tonyan: "Smart players are the best players to play with, and he's a very smart player." His confidence in the third-year free agent from Indiana State was evident on the 11-yard touchdown pass late in the second quarter that put Green Bay ahead for good. Rodgers saw FS Tracy Walker on top of Tonyan in man coverage. If Walker had been trailing Tonyan, the plan was for him to head to the corner. With Walker on top, the plan was for Tonyan to stop and turn around just inside the end zone. The pass went airborne at the 20 but Tonyan didn't turn back until it was at the 11. Walker had no chance to react because the quarterback and tight end saw it the same way. It was impressive how Tonyan made the catch with his hands rather than his body. The Lions double-covered Davante Adams and Marquez Valdes-Scantling on the play, leaving Walker one-on-one with Tonyan. The Packers would become even more effective if one of the tight ends can emerge in the red zone. Tonyan, who played 44 of the possible 73 snaps on offense, has shown sure hands, dropping just one of 20 targets in his first two seasons. Still, his game needs considerable tightening. Seeing Rodgers on the move in the first quarter, Tonyan adjusted beautifully and had a stride on Walker inside the 15. It was by no means an easy catch but it's one that Tonyan must make and didn't. His blocking remains pedestrian.

The longer the game went, the more he was falling off blocks. The Packers dropped six passes in all, and Sternberger (16) was the main culprit with two. First, there was the wide-open boot pass that looked like a 20-yard gain. Second, there was an adjusted route that clanged off his hands at the 3. If you can't catch, you can't play. Of Lewis' 33 snaps, 18 came with his hand down and 11 from a wing position. Lewis offers next to nothing as a receiver but the Packers like the way he battles outside linebackers in the run game. Adams (38) suffered a hamstring injury late in the first quarter when someone rolled up from behind as he was chicken fighting rookie CB Jeff Okudah. He returned shortly thereafter, then watched the last 1 ½ quarters as a precautionary measure. Okudah, the No. 3 pick in the draft making his pro debut, tried to jam Adams knowing Matt Patricia was giving him extensive double-team help. Minus Adams, Allen Lazard (61) became No. 1, MVS (46) became No. 2 and both Tyler Ervin (28) and Malik Taylor (15) played more. Lazard made a tough catch inside for 10 on fourth and 6, dropped another, drew three of the four coverage penalties on the Lions' injury-depleted corps of cornerbacks and blocked persistently. MVS dropped a 17-yard dart in the end zone; on the previous play, the pass looked too low to charge him with a drop. From the No. 2 position in a trips-right formation, MVS went deep against Okudah for 41 yards. Okudah, who ran a disappointing 4.47 at the combine, was in good shape but then looked back for the ball prematurely and lost contact.

Offensive Line (4 ½)

The Lions have one of the league's poorest fronts, and making matters worse was the absence of ex-Bear DT Nick Williams (shoulder). At least he has a modicum of interior rush. Mammoth veteran NT Danny Shelton is a shock absorber only. Da'Shawn Hand, a fourth-round pick in 2018, played poorly. DTs John Penisini and Kevin Strong are just guys. Hard-trying Trey Flowers is Detroit's only legitimate rush threat. Romeo Okwara had a long day. With his vulnerable secondary, Matt Patricia elected not to blitz; his pressure rate on passes was 13.5 percent, and he sent more than five only once. Early on, Flowers slipped inside of David Bakhtiari and drew a holding penalty. On the play, Elgton Jenkins was a split-second late coming over to help in that gap. Flowers later gave Bakhtiari more trouble with inside power rushes but a more aware Jenkins halted the threat three or four times. On the only play in which an interior player pulled, Jenkins was involved in a mixup at right end and the carry lost 2 yards. Other than that, the Packers cut off all penetration by the Lions. Of the four "bad" runs, the only other one involving individual fault was charged to Jace Sternberger. That 259-yard rushing outburst, the highest by Green Bay in 17 years, was the result of cohesion and talent. The linemen simply weren't missing blocks. On Aaron Jones' 75-yard touchdown run up the gut, Jenkins left his double-team with Bakhtiari at the ideal moment and then picked up LB Jamie Collins. The other key block on the play was by Corey Linsley. ILB Jarrad Davis, oblivious to where the ball was, crashed into Linsley and gave himself up when he needed to squeeze the hole. Linsley pitched a shutout in his one-sided matchup with Shelton, the 12th player drafted in 2015, before walking off late with a right thumb injury. The Lions are so hard up for an edge rusher that WLB Christian Jones joined Okwara taking reps against Rick Wagner. Other than one late hurry, Wagner moved his feet sufficiently in pass pro and leaned on the right people for the run. Lucas Patrick yielded the only sack on an inside charge by Collins. Okwara deposited Patrick on his back on one rush but even though he toppled at Aaron Rodgers' feet the pass got safely away. Patrick did some pancaking of his own, too. Yosh Nijman, a green but athletic backup, made his debut in the last series for Bakhtiari. Veteran Billy Turner practiced extensively during the week but was withheld because of a

knee injury. With as poorly as Turner played at right guard in the second half of last season, Matt LaFleur may stick with a right side of Patrick and Wagner.

Quarterbacks (4)

Last season, Aaron Rodgers attempted 635 passes in 18 games and had two batted down: Chicago OLB Aaron Lynch in Game 14 and Seattle SS Bradley McDougald in the playoffs. On Sunday, Rodgers attempted 30 passes and had three batted down: two by LB Reggie Ragland, one by LB Christian Jones. Apart from that zaniness, it was business as usual for Rodgers. His good day might have been outstanding if not for the six dropped passes and the ankle injury that reduced Davante Adams' playing time to 52 percent. Minus CB Desmond Trufant (hamstring) and nickel back Justin Coleman (hamstring), the Lions lined up with Jeff Okudah, Amani Oruwariye and Darryl Roberts at cornerback. They weren't exactly Darius Slay. When the Lions weren't holding the wide receivers, the wide receivers were getting open. With no rush to speak of, Rodgers at times had his choice of receivers running free. He was sharp for a second week, generally throwing with accuracy and velocity. Yes, there were the bats, and he threw some balls high and others low. But he also made four or five great throws that helped decide the outcome. The Lions possess one of the heaviest and slowest linebacking corps in the business. Rodgers took advantage by throwing crossing patterns, quick wide swing passes and checking to some perimeter runs. He was in shotgun 45 times compared to 28 snaps under center. The drops certainly peeved Rodgers, but he seemed to contain his emotions in response.

Running Backs (5)

The 236 yards from scrimmage by Aaron Jones (35) was a club record for a running back. It's hard to play much better than Jones did Sunday. His speed and slashing style of running terrorized the Lions. On the edge, whether it was run or swing pass, the Lions' defense couldn't keep up. On his breath-taking 75-yard TD, he cut through the middle so fast that neither safety, Duron Harmon nor Will Harris, could lay more than a glove on him even though they were aligned on the hash marks in a two-shell look. Harris' angle might have been sufficient against an ordinary starter. Given Jones' ability to accelerate so quickly Harris came in too flat. Harmon was late. Jones appears to have done a lot of strength work on his legs. That coupled with a relatively low center of gravity is enabling him to slip through arm tackles. The impressive development of Jamaal Williams (31) keeps Jones fresh. Nine times LaFleur sent Jones out as a conventional wide receiver. From the slot, he ran a neat shallow crosser for 22 yards. In the third quarter, he was covered wide left by CB Darryl Roberts and, on a basic take-off route, made a contested catch for 30. Imagine the carnage if an upcoming opponent were to send out a typical linebacker in man coverage against Jones. He broke four tackles, sacrificed his body on a blitz to keep ILB Jarrad Davis from Aaron Rodgers and showed a spin move in traffic. Williams looks a little sleeker than in the past. One reason he averaged a career-best 7.9 is improved vision. He has become a more patient runner than Jones. In a good way, Williams is hunting and pecking just a little before attacking the hole. He broke three tackles, including two by LB Jamie Collins. It's questionable if there would be a reason to play AJ Dillon (seven) in a close game. He took the field for the first time with 6 minutes left. He did break three tackles in five carries, but his overall game can't begin to compare to the other two. Tyler Ervin (28) frequently was used in his jet sweep-orbit motion role but only touched the ball once. With Josiah Deguara (shin-ankle) out, ex-Chief John Lovett (11) was the blocking fullback.

Defensive Line (2)

Without Kenny Clark (groin), the Packers were highly vulnerable against the run. He's their anchor, the one man in the group that can shed a block consistently and make tackles. Coordinator Mike Pettine reacted as expected, building eight-man fronts to prevent Lions play-caller Darrell Bevell from controlling the game with the formidable trio of Adrian Peterson, Kerryon Johnson and D'Andre Swift. After the backs carried 14 times in the first 25 plays, the Lions began to pass on almost every down despite leading, 14-10. Maybe Bevell lacked confidence in the run because RT Halapouliveati Vaitai (foot) and LG Joe Dahl (groin) sat out. Their replacements, RT Tyrell Crosby and LG Oday Aboushi, performed like the backups they are. Dean Lowry, who played 44 of the 59 possible snaps on defense, proved hard to move for rookie RG Jonah Jackson. He was considerably better than the week before. Tyler Lancaster (33) stayed square often enough in a difficult matchup against C Frank Ragnow, probably the Lions' best lineman. Kingsley Keke (35) started in the base and filled in for Clark as the lone big man in the 4-1 pass-rush package. He made two tackles on plays for no gain and, as always, showed some athleticism and range. He didn't get anything done as a rusher. The Packers are in their fourth year trying to make something out of Montravius Adams (12), their third-round draft choice in 2017 from Auburn. His 2020 debut didn't look much different from his other 39 games.

Linebackers (3)

For the second consecutive Sunday, Christian Kirksey (59) played every snap. Although he did play for Mike Pettine in Cleveland for two years, Pettine's scheme has evolved since then and so Kirksey has much to master. Some of his play is good, some of it isn't. Although Kirksey is much smaller than his counterparts in Detroit, he's no shrinking violet. On third and 1, he charged into his gap ready for what was to come. Instead of Kerryon Johnson, the ball carrier, it was RG Jonah Jackson, who gored Kirksey onto his back. Undeterred, Kirksey kept running around against the run and pass trying to be productive. There's little doubt that better speed gives Kirksey a wide sphere of coverage than Blake Martinez possessed. On one route combination, he was able to sift through picking obstacles and cover TE T.J. Hockenson. Kirksey hasn't made any crushing hits yet but Martinez seldom did, either. Credited with a game-high 12 tackles, he didn't have a miss. On the 4-yard TD pass to Marvin Jones, Kirksey must get to that soft spot in the zone. Free-agent Krys Barnes (15) took the expected run-down snaps alongside Kirksey while Oren Burks was relegated to special teams only. Barnes seems instinctive. By adjusting the path of his only rush, he hurried Matthew Stafford. By reading and triggering fast, he drew a hold on LG Oday Aboushi. On the outside, the snap totals were 56 (18 standing up, three with his hand down) for Za'Darius Smith, 55 for Preston Smith and 33 for Rashan Gary (four with his hand down). Gary had the best day, posting 3 ½ of the trio's six pressures. For the second week in a row, it was Gary's outstretched arms in the quarterback's face that led to an interception. On Sunday, Adrian Peterson looked pathetic whiffing on the pickup of Gary that seconds later became a pick-six. Gary split a double-team by RT Tyrell Crosby and RB D'Andre Swift for a full sack in 2.7 seconds and then beat LT Taylor Decker inside for a half-sack in 3.5. The Lions double-teamed Za'Darius on 42.6 percent of passes, limiting him to two pressures. When the base defense springs leaks stopping the run, Pettine likes to stand Za'Darius up over the center in an attempt to mess up blocking combinations. From the outside, Za'Darius tends to guess and drift inside, and he was hooked twice on runs for substantial yardage. Preston probably dropped 10 times in coverage whereas Za'Darius dropped only once. The Packers miss athletic, heady Kyler Fackrell in that role; Preston is marginal in space. His rush has been slow to materialize, too.

Preston loves anticipating the count, but his offside penalty just before the half almost cost three points. Rookie Jonathan Garvin got a two-play look in the second quarter.

Defensive Backs (3)

Not facing Kenny Golladay (hamstring) deprived Jaire Alexander (53) and Kevin King (53) of a tremendous individual challenge. Marvin Jones, Danny Amendola and Quintez Cephus aren't major threats. Jones caught a few short passes on Alexander early but nothing after that. Alexander contested the completions and deftly broke up a deep corner route. Matthew Stafford kept going to Amendola against nickel back Chandon Sullivan (43). Stafford missed Amendola deep and behind Sullivan. On the pick-six, Sullivan was in perfect position, timed his break and caught Stafford's horrendous throw. King showed his strength throwing down Adrian Peterson on a carry. He also upended T.J. Hockenson on a screen. It was a long afternoon for Adrian Amos (54), who again looked stiff in coverage. Darrell Bevell succeeded in matching Hockenson against Amos on the second play and the result was a 29-yard completion. Later, little Marvin Hall came across the middle for a 17-yard TD on which Amos appeared flat-footed and offered little response. Amos missed two tackles, as did Darnell Savage (54). Will Redmond (12) opened as the sixth defensive back but Raven Greene (21) took over as the game progressed. Redmond is a tough guy. Pettine sent him twice on the rush and the results were positive. Rookie SS Vernon Scott (five) recorded a sack when Redmond caused Stafford to run toward him.

Kickers (4)

Kicking has been off around the league but not in Green Bay with old standby Mason Crosby. He hit field goals from 43 and 35 yards, toed all five extra points and produced seven touchbacks in eight kickoffs. His averages were 71.4 yards and 3.77 seconds of hang time. He's in the groove. JK Scott was credited with three inside the 20 although on one, a bone-headed penalty charged to Detroit's Jamal Agnew, erased a touchback. His averages were 42.7 yards (gross, net) and 4.43 hang time.

Special Teams (3)

It was a strong afternoon for long snapper Hunter Bradley. Several of his snaps required absolutely nothing from holder JK Scott other than just putting the ball down just as he caught it. The laces already were in ideal position facing the goalposts. Montravius Adams jumped offside on the extra-point block team and was benched. Tyler Ervin continued making solid decisions on returns. The punt-team gunners were Josh Jackson and Will Redmond; Jackson and Ka'dar Hollman were the main outside holdup players on punt return. The snap leaders, all with 23, were Oren Burks, Ty Summers and Redmond. Jace Sternberger (16) and Malik Taylor led the players from the offense.