

# Rating The Packers : Week 6 at Buccaneers

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By Bob McGinn Oct 20, 2020

So many NFL coaches invoke the “it starts with me” refrain after a defeat that any degree of sincerity typically is lost.

Matt LaFleur, the Packers’ coaching wunderkind, fell on his sword Sunday night and then again Monday afternoon. He blamed himself for the 38-10 debacle in Tampa that dumped Green Bay from the ranks of the unbeaten.

“Certainly yesterday was extremely bad,” LaFleur said. “I think – I know – it totally starts with me first. I obviously didn’t get these guys ready to play, and I don’t think I did a good enough job as a play caller, either. That’s two problems in one.”

The second-year coach with the phenomenal record (18-5) will receive no argument here. The offense that LaFleur runs and the defense he hired Mike Pettine to coordinate looked as if they had been poorly coached. Bruce Arians, the Buccaneers head coach who also runs his own offense, and defensive coordinator Todd Bowles did outcoach LaFleur, as he publicly acknowledged.

Obviously, the game turned on Aaron Rodgers’ second-quarter interception that Jamel Dean, the Bucs’ No. 3 cornerback, returned 35 yards for a touchdown. Until then, the Bucs had been dominated. After that, they did the dominating.

Dean, a third-round draft choice in 2019 from Auburn, owns blazing 4.28 speed and a score of 22, better than average for his position, on the Wonderlic test. He also put in a lot of work in the classroom breaking down the tendencies of LaFleur’s offense.

On the play, Davante Adams began his right-to-left motion with 10 seconds on the play clock. He set up off the ball exactly on the numbers with 3 seconds showing. He took five vertical strides toward Dean, who was lined up 6 yards off the ball using outside leverage. With his shimmying style at the break point, Adams planted his right foot, cut toward the sidelines and after four strides was in an ideal position to catch the pass for 10 yards in the third-and-10 situation.

That’s when Dean, who appeared to be playing the outside quarter of the field in a four-across zone, burst in front of Adams. He had full vision of Rodgers, who was watching Adams all the way until he released the ball in 2.1 seconds.

“The minute he motioned over,” Dean told NBC’s Peter King Sunday night, “I automatically knew the route was coming. I did a whole lot of film study this week, and I just keep seeing that same thing over and over.”

Dean added: "He (Bowles) basically told us that he's (Rodgers) the best quarterback that he's seen. Everything revolved around him. He is the guy. When I heard that, I'm, like, I gotta prepare like I never prepared before."

Offensive predictability is never a good thing. LaFleur must make adjustments if, in fact, the Packers have become that predictable in that situation.

That was the game's most crucial play but the coaching staff fell short in other areas, too.

Normally, Rodgers enjoys seeing teams blitz. Bowles blitzed heavily Sunday, sending five or more on 45.2 percent of dropbacks and six or more on 11.9 percent. It was somewhat comparable to December 2018, the last time Bowles called a game against Rodgers. His Jets' pressure rates were 32.3 percent and 4.6 percent, and they sacked Rodgers four times and knocked him down nine other times. Rodgers played a terrific game, however, and coach Joe Philbin's team emerged victorious at the Meadowlands, 44-38, in overtime.

On Sunday, the Bucs sacked Rodgers five times and knocked him down eight other times. In the first four games combined, Rodgers had been sacked three times and knocked down four other times. The Bucs' rush unit, with seven legitimate threats in outside linebackers Jason Pierre-Paul and Shaq Barrett, inside linebackers Devin White and Lavonte David and defensive linemen Ndamukong Suh and William Gholston, was superior to what the Packers had encountered. The top rushers for their first four opponents were Minnesota newcomer Yannick Ngakoue, Detroit's Trey Flowers, New Orleans' Cameron Jordan and Atlanta's Grady Jarrett.

"I thought Todd mixed it up really, really good with his fronts, blitzes, coverages," Arians said. "You don't usually get Aaron confused. I don't think I've ever seen him confused."

LaFleur second-guessed himself for not being more persistent with the running game. Nose tackle Vita Vea, the 12th player drafted in 2018 and the prime run stuffer for the NFL's top-rated run defense, suffered a season-ending leg injury in the previous game.

"I've got to do a better job of staying with it," LaFleur said. "We talked going into the game (that) it was OK with the 2-, 3-, 4-yarders. Because that is a good run defense and certainly brought a lot of pressure."

When the Packers did run, the scheme featured toss plays toward the perimeter that were swallowed up largely due to the speed of White and David.

"I don't think it's just necessarily they have two fast linebackers," LaFleur said. "I think they've got two of the better edge rushers, certainly Suh inside and their safeties and corners do a great job. They do it on all three levels. Same with the Niners."

Pettine's defense failed to disrupt Tom Brady, was unable to keep Adrian Amos and Josh Jackson from unfavorable situations in coverage and, in a comical illustration of sideline disarray, was penalized for having too many men on the field twice in the span of five plays.

"You can never get comfortable," LaFleur said. "As soon as you do that, you will get knocked off and you'll get embarrassed."

Here is a rating of the Packers against the Bucs. Five footballs are 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. Krys Barnes. 2. Chandon Sullivan. 3. David Bakhtiari.

### **Receivers ( ½ )**

CB Carlton Davis, a second-round draft choice from Auburn in 2018, played Davante Adams as well as he has been played in quite some time. Davis is big (6-foot-1, 206 pounds), physical and has extremely long arms (32 ¾ inches). Plus, he clearly had done his homework on Adams' releases. The majority of corners get lost in the wash when Adams shakes and bakes off the line and at the top of his routes. Other than the first 15 plays, when Adams caught three balls against him for 33 yards, it was Davis' day. Back after missing 2 ½ games with a hamstring injury, Adams appeared to move well. His 10 targets produced just six receptions for 61 yards. On the second play, he failed to block Davis on a bubble screen and the mistake almost led to an interception. On the second interception, he failed to gain any separation from Davis on a slant that the defender tipped. In the third quarter, he showed poor sideline awareness on a third-and-8 back-shoulder throw that would have been a 17-yard gain. Adams played 52 of the 63 possible snaps on offense. Allen Lazard (core surgery) was missed. All that Marquez Valdes-Scantling (53) offers that Lazard doesn't is deep speed. He did get open downfield twice but the balls weren't thrown accurately. Malik Taylor (32) is just kind of out there. Playing in his first game since an August 2019 exhibition in Winnipeg, Equanimeous St. Brown (11) made a forgettable return. He dropped one short pass in the left flat and appeared to run a suspect route on another. Darrius Shepherd (six) played even fewer snaps. Mercedes Lewis (21) isn't the tight end you want running deep down the field. On the other hand, the Bucs would have paid attention had it been Robert Tonyan (37) or Jace Sternberger (20). Yes, the ball was slightly overthrown to the wide-open Lewis, but he showed absolutely no burst to go get it. A sundial might be appropriate to time him in the 40. On a 2-yard touchdown run, Lewis executed a block on Shaq Barrett that tight ends often struggle to make. He showed his strength on another running play by pancaking DT William Gholston. Tonyan and Sternberger weren't major factors in the game plan.

## **Offensive Line ( ½ )**

Easily the best performer was LT David Bakhtiari (40). He was having a strong day against OLB Jason Pierre-Paul when he suffered a chest injury on the Packers' first snap of the third quarter and didn't return. On a running play, Bakhtiari appeared to be struck in the chest by ILB Lavonte David before DT William Gholston fell on top of him. Rick Wagner's performance over the final 23 snaps wasn't pretty. He hasn't been a starter on the left side since his last two seasons at Wisconsin, and that was 2011-12. His NFL career as a starter with the Ravens and Lions was strictly at RT. Really, he had no chance against Pierre-Paul, who abused him for one-half sack, a pressure and a "bad" run. Wagner's waist-bending style, at 30, was even more glaring given his unfamiliarity on the left side. It isn't uncommon to see a veteran RT lose all sense of space and footwork at LT. If Bakhtiari is going to miss time, the coaches will have to consider other arrangements featuring Elgton Jenkins, Billy Turner or Jon Runyan at LT. Wagner played 119 solid snaps at RT in Games 1-2. Jenkins had extreme highs and extreme lows. On one hand, there were at least four occasions when he used his immense power to deposit four defensive linemen into heaps. That fate befell NT Rakeem Nunez-Roches twice. On the other, he was involved in four pressures. On one knockdown, Jenkins was very late reacting to a tackle-tackle twist. Part of the problem on the misfire deep to Mercedes Lewis was Jenkins getting plowed over by Gholston for another knockdown. A screen disintegrated in part because Jenkins shoved Gholston toward Aaron Rodgers for a knockdown as he released to head downfield. As good as Corey Linsley has played, he does have athletic limitations. One way or another, it's the job of the center to get David blocked on two carries for no yards by Aaron Jones. On the longest gain of the day, Linsley combo-blocked onto David and Jamaal Williams shot by for 25 yards. On the right side, scrappy Lucas Patrick fought the good fight against Ndamukong Suh whereas Turner turned in a losing performance. Watching Patrick attack Suh was reminiscent of Suh's battles with C-G Evan Dietrich-Smith from 2011-13 when Suh was a Lion. Patrick's day included one "bad" run and partial responsibility on two pressures. The Packers can live with that. Of Turner's 4 ½ pressures, two came against Pierre-Paul and 1 ½ against OLB Shaq Barrett. His run blocking was effective.

## **Quarterbacks ( ½ )**

If Aaron Rodgers was in his first or second season hoping to squeeze out a career in pro football, this was the kind of performance he would worry about once scouts from the 31 other teams saw it on film. After four sparkling showings, the Rodgers of Sunday was reminiscent of the ineffective Rodgers from last season. After not coming close to throwing an interception in the first month, he was picked twice and could have been picked twice more. On Jamel Dean's pick-6, Rodgers stared down Davante Adams on third and 10, didn't step into the throw and missed inside by a foot or two. On the second interception, a slant from a tight formation to Adams on third and 3, CB Carlton Davis made a terrific play to tip the ball to backup SS Mike Edwards. "We were in a condensed formation and should have been full width," Matt LaFleur said. "Regardless, probably should have popped a timeout. It didn't look right." As a 13-year starter with wide leeway to command the game at the line, Rodgers (60) could have checked to another play or asked for a timeout. Later, instead of throwing to an open Robert Tonyan, he tried to lead him and FS Antoine Winfield, the sure-handed rookie, dropped it. With Mercedes Lewis open 30 yards downfield, Rodgers' pass was just beyond his grasp. As a general rule, you throw to tight ends rather than leading them. Rodgers underthrew Aaron Jones on a wheel route and Marquez Valdes-Scantling deep and overthrew MVS on another bomb. The Bucs got after Rodgers, but he was at least

partially at fault for three pressures by holding the ball too long. He was charged with intentional grounding once and was fortunate not to be penalized for another. He had four throwaways, one more than he had in the first five games. It appeared as if he had no idea the play clock had expired in the third quarter before referee Jerome Boger got around to calling delay of game. In the course of being down 13 times, he began bailing out on some throws and missed open receivers occasionally. After being flattened twice by old antagonist Ndamukong Suh late in the second quarter he decided to engage in angry verbal exchanges more than once. His hard count bore no fruit. The plays that Rodgers did make almost all came on extended plays in the first quarter. Defensive coordinator Todd Bowles blitzed from everywhere but Rodgers never made him pay the price. Throughout his career, Rodgers has been a master of closing substantial deficits in the third and early fourth quarters by piling up yards against softened defenses. His four possessions of the second half picked up three first downs and ended with four punts. Unlike Rodgers, who did well not to fumble, Tim Boyle (three) fumbled on his first dropback when Jason Pierre-Paul beat Billy Turner inside. Boyle had just one hand on the ball when it was jarred loose. He did recover. Boyle was No. 2 over Jordan Love, the rookie who has yet to be in uniform.

### **Running Backs (1 ½)**

Aaron Jones (36) has improved as a pass blocker, and Jamaal Williams (32) almost always has been rugged and reliable. Both were disappointing against the blitz-happy Bucs. Jones was charged with partial responsibility for a sack when he was late picking up ILB Lavonte David. Williams had many more pickups because Jones lined up as a wide receiver 12 times compared to his three. Williams batted 3 for 4 against David, the miss occurring in the first half on a sack. Minus motion man Tyler Ervin (wrist), Matt LaFleur gave some of that role to Jones. On six snaps he took off on jet-sweep action. Jones was completely overshadowed by Tampa Bay RB Ronald Jones. His only gain for more than 7 yards in 13 touches was an early 20-yard reception on a leak-out against ILB Devin White. On the wheel route, Jones failed to secure the catch. He dropped a dump-off on the other sideline. Jones did break four tackles. The Packers' longest gain of 25 yards was an inside run by Williams off jet-action from Jones that caused White to take one or two false steps. Rookie AJ Dillon (10) played the fourth quarter, carrying five times for 31 yards. He's feeling his way just as observers are getting a feel for him. He broke one tackle and demonstrated a considerable forward surge. Dillon is a big body and target who has absorbed some wicked shots. The object is to avoid tacklers in the NFL as often as possible, not run through them. This isn't the Atlantic Coast Conference. When LaFleur wanted a two-back power set, he used John Lovett (five) rather than a tight end.

### **Defensive Line ( ½ )**

The unit had more snaps than usual because the Bucs were just trying to drain the clock in their last four possessions. As a result, the Packers used three big men on a season-high 37 snaps compared to 19 snaps with two and nine with one. Granted, there isn't a large number of pass-rush opportunities for the defensive linemen. Still, shouldn't someone beat somebody once in a while? It never happened. Chalk it up as another game without a pressure from the 300-pounders. Kingsley Keke, who played 37 of the 65 possible snaps on defense, got the start ahead of Tyler Lancaster (nine) but didn't get much done. He was OK at the point, but on one occasion took himself out of a gap through which a sizeable gain occurred. Lancaster, who had a shoulder injury, played just one snap in the second half. Kenny Clark (41) turned in a workmanlike performance in his return after missing 3 ½ games with a groin injury. He

showed range hustling to the sideline on a screen. He stuffed LG Ali Marpet on a third and 2. He shed C Ryan Jensen and made the tackle on a 2-yard gain. There were other instances, however, in which Clark and Dean Lowry (43) were displaced. Montravius Adams played 28 snaps, his highest total since the finale in 2018. Entering the lineup in the second quarter, he showed great energy early. He is an explosive athlete. He can penetrate. He's learning to use his hands. Adams' left hand is next to his face in his three-point stance, à la Mike Daniels. He surprised Jensen, slipped around him and tackled LeSean McCoy for minus-3, the only tackle for a loss. He beat Marpet and tackled Ronald Jones for a gain of 2. He tried an unorthodox spin move on Marpet and stopped a run after a 1-yard gain. Maybe the heat (88 degrees at kickoff) affected Adams because the more he played the less effective he was. He got rolled out a time or two. When backup Blaine Gabbert scrambled toward Adams at the end, he had enough left to get off the block but not enough to get the quarterback down. Jones' 113-yard effort was the most against the Packers in the regular season since Carolina's Christian McCaffrey rushed for 108 in Game 10 last season.

## **Linebackers (1)**

Za'Darius Smith (49), Preston Smith (43) and Rashan Gary (17) couldn't hold the proverbial candle when compared to the Bucs' pass rushers. Not even rushing a stationary target such as Tom Brady helped. Za'Darius and Preston each settled for one pressure; Gary had none. Rookie RT Tristan Wirfs, the 13th pick in April, had no problems whatsoever with whomever Mike Pettine placed across from him. The Bucs double-teamed Za'Darius on 25% of his individual rushes. For the first time, this season Pettine used Za'Darius in a stand-up rover role over center on first downs. There were six of those. The Bucs' veteran interior linemen avoided lunging at Za'Darius, just letting him come to them. Standing up Za'Darius has benefited the pass rush more than the run defense. Teams are just shoving him out of the gap he chooses on runs. LT Donovan Smith has been the Bucs' weak link upfront but the only pressure he allowed was to Preston, who hasn't been the same player he was in 2019. Unlike Preston, Gary got close with a few power surges. His penalty for grabbing Brady's face mask was borderline inexcusable. You just can't go up there. Jonathan Garvin (16), Oren Burks (14) and Randy Ramsey (10) filled in outside in the second half. Despite there being no threat of a run with the Bucs in an empty formation, Burks was slow reacting to TE Rob Gronkowski lumbering behind him on an over route that was completed for 31 yards. On another play, Burks was gored back eight yards by Donovan Smith on a pull block. Krys Barnes (57) continued his bid for the starting job if and when Kamal Martin (knee) and Christian Kirksey (chest) return. Barnes showed again that he possesses knockback capability as a tackler. He made three stops after gains of 1 or 2 yards. When RB Ke'Shawn Vaughn dropped a pass, Barnes drilled him. He was booked for two of the four tackles missed by linebackers. Ty Summers (22) wasn't bad, either.

## **Secondary (1)**

Bruce Arians mentioned it Sunday and again Monday: the 12-yard TD pass on third down to Rob Gronkowski against man coverage by Adrian Amos "was the great matchup we were looking for." Gronkowski, 31, can't run anymore but Amos gave him a free release and wasn't violent at the ball on the fade in the corner. The score came on a rare six-man pressure by Mike Pettine. Someone had to cover Gronkowski one-on-one, and the Packers went with Amos (65) over Darnell Savage (43). Problem is, Amos is becoming more and more of a liability in coverage. This might have been Amos' poorest game in Green Bay. On runs of 25 and 19 yards, he either took bad angles or lacked sufficient change of

direction to make the tackle. Even worse, he dropped one fairly easy interception and then showed dreadful tracking ability on a wayward pass that he didn't even touch but surely could have intercepted. Savage had a chance to smash Gronkowski on a long completion but his shoulder shove had little impact. Raven Greene (24) and Will Redmond (22) are versatile spares. Greene hasn't shown much coverage ability. Redmond, who knocked down Brady, might be Pettine's best rusher from the second and third levels. Not having Kevin King (quadriceps) really hurt. Pettine decided to travel Jaire Alexander (60) with Mike Evans almost wherever he went. With Evans slowed by a bad ankle, Tom Brady targeted him merely twice. Instead, he went after Josh Jackson (65) and Amos primarily with Chris Godwin and Gronkowski. Despite the fact Jackson was so bad he had to be lifted late against Atlanta, Pettine decided to start him over Ka'dar Hollman (five). Jackson made a great read off motion, crashed in and got the defense off the field with a third-and-2 stop. He also eluded C Ryan Jensen and TE Cameron Brate, messing up short passes. For 25 minutes, Jackson held up just fine. On third and goal from the 7, Jackson couldn't stick with rookie Tyler Johnson in the back of the end zone and the result was a TD pass. On third and 12, Jackson lined up 9 yards back in off coverage. He still couldn't avoid getting scalded deep by speedster Scotty Miller, who ran 4.39 in 2019 and raced right past to collect a 40-yard penalty for pass interference. In garbage time, Jackson was penalized for holding WR Cyril Grayson on third and 3. When in doubt, Brady went at Jackson. Another option would have been to start Chandon Sullivan (46) outside and throw a mix of people at nickel. CB Parry Nickerson, who was active for the first time, pulled up playing his second snap on special teams and wasn't available for defense. Sullivan had another solid game. He's a good football player.

### **Kickers (3)**

Mason Crosby came exceedingly close to hitting his first kickoff out of bounds. Instead, the official patrolling the pylon ruled it a touchback. His three kickoffs averaged 68.3 yards and 3.77 seconds of hang time. He connected on a field goal of 39. JK Scott punted seven times, the same number he had in the first four games. His averages were 46.4 (gross), 42.1 (net) and 4.69 hang time. He had two inside the 20, two out of bounds and one fair catch.

### **Special Teams (2 ½)**

Darrius Shepherd replaced the injured Tyler Ervin but wasn't tackled. All seven of Bradley Pinion's kickoffs were touchbacks and of his five punts, Shepherd touched two on fair catches. FB John Lovett and LB Ty Summers led the coverage teams. Ka'dar Hollman was one of the gunners on every punt. Will Redmond handled the first four as the other gunner before, in a surprise, Equanimeous St. Brown took the last three. Raven Greene was the personal protector on punts. The snap leaders in the kicking game were Oren Burks and Summers, each with 25.