

Rating The Packers : Week 10 vs Jaguars

By Bob McGinn Nov 17, 2020

The easiest way for the Packers to turn back the determined Jaguars late Sunday afternoon at Lambeau Field was behind a robust four-minute offense. That didn't work, with three rushes for 9 yards followed by a lousy punt. Green Bay's last chance at protecting their four-point lead was its defense, specifically the pass rush. Jacksonville was perched at its 47 with 2 minutes, 25 seconds remaining and two timeouts needing a touchdown to win.

One first down later, from the Green Bay 36, the Jaguars ran four plays and lost 16 yards. The Packers' rush line, a disappointment for much of the season, out of almost nowhere became an unstoppable force with a pair of sacks, a hurried incompleteness and a quick diagnosis of a screen pass that never got off the ground.

For years, football people have extolled the value of having a pass rush in the fourth quarter. On Sunday, the Packers had one.

"I thought that was very, very encouraging to be able to close out the game on the defensive side of the ball," coach Matt LaFleur said Monday. "You could really feel the rush there on the last three snaps. Any time you can get that, you have a great chance at winning."

The final three plays were the latest illustration of the potential that Rashan Gary showed during three seasons at Michigan and his first 1 ½ seasons in Green Bay. Gary's production never matched his expectations in the Big Ten and since his 3 ½ - pressures on Sept. 20 against the Lions, he had posted only two pressures in five games.

Defensive coordinator Mike Pettine and his staff put Gary on the field for just one of the Jaguars' first four snaps in that final possession. On the fifth play, they inserted Gary at left end over right tackle Jawaan Taylor, the 35th player selected in the 2019 NFL Draft and a two-year starter for Jacksonville.

Using a devastating power rush, Gary drove Taylor backward and fell on top of quarterback Jake Luton for a 6-yard sack. On the next snap, Gary split the double-team block of Taylor and right guard A.J. Cann to flush Luton, who then was sacked by the diving Preston Smith.

During Jacksonville's timeout, the Packers removed Gary in favor of a three-man line without him. After calling a timeout of their own, the coaches thought better of it and reinserted Gary at left end in a four-man front for the fourth and 26. This time, Za'Darius Smith forced Luton from the pocket. With Gary chasing hard along with Smith, Luton spun away to avoid a sack, but his short pass fell harmlessly incomplete. Gary finished with 3 ½ pressures, tying his season-high, and once again generating hope for a brighter tomorrow among coaches, teammates and fans.

“I’m a guy that constantly talks to Rashan, just about his ability, just loving the style and the way he plays,” nose tackle Kenny Clark said. “I root for him all the time. I think he’s going to be a really good player.”

Thus, the Packers escaped with a 24-20 victory against Jacksonville, a team that lost for the eighth straight time and played without starting quarterback Gardner Minshew and perhaps its best offensive lineman, center Brandon Linder. Without question, the greatest upset in Jacksonville’s 26-year history was the AFC Divisional playoff game at Denver in January 1997 when the Jaguars, a 9-7 wild-card team in their second season, stunned the 13-3 Broncos, 30-27. The Jaguars were a 14-point underdog that day in Denver. On Sunday, they were a 13 ½-point underdog. Three plays, all involving players losing their footing, hurt the Jaguars immensely and helped the Packers avert what would have been their worst upset loss in years.

In the second quarter, wide receiver Chris Conley was wide open on third and 9 just beyond the 50 but slipped and the pass was incomplete. Late in the first half, tight end Tyler Eifert slipped on a 12-yard route near the 50 so safety Adrian Amos was able to make an easy interception and set up a field goal. In the fourth quarter, the Packers were trailing, 20-17, and facing third and 9 from their 26. On the far right, safety Andrew Wingard was at the line covering Robert Tonyan. When Tonyan took an outside release and started up the sideline, Wingard slipped and the result was an easy 23-yard completion that led to the winning 75-yard touchdown drive.

“At the end of the day, we got the game and then we just couldn’t make the plays that were out there,” Jaguars coach Doug Marrone said. “We had an opportunity to win the game. That’s why we lost.”

With the victory, LaFleur completed the first 25 games of his regular-season coaching career with a 20-5 record. Only three coaches in NFL history won more than 20 of their first 25 games: George Seifert (23), Guy Chamberlain (22) and Paul Brown (22). Seven others also won 20.

“We’re fortunate and we’ll take the win, but we’ve got to improve,” LaFleur said. “Especially at home.”

The Packers are 16-9 against the spread in those 25 games. This was the third game coached by LaFleur in which the Packers were favored by more than a touchdown. In the other two cases – Washington (minus-13) last December, a 20-15 victory, and at Detroit (minus-12) last December, a 23-20 victory – the Packers also didn’t come close to covering.

Here is a rating of the Packers (7-2) against the Jaguars (1-8). Five footballs are the maximum, one-half football is the minimum.

The three stars of the game were: **1. Marquez Valdes-Scantling; 2. Rashan Gary; 3. Jamaal Williams.** As a team, the Packers received three footballs.

Receivers (3)

Marquez Valdes-Scantling, who played 60 of the 65 possible snaps on offense, didn't look ready to play judging by some of his weak blocking in the first quarter. That changed dramatically on the opening snap of the second quarter with a 78-yard touchdown behind CB Sidney Jones. "The previous play we had thrown a quick out to Davante (Adams)," MVS said. "I had run a go route and saw that I could get behind him. He (Jones) wasn't really respecting the deep (ball). So I told Aaron (Rodgers) I can get by him. The next play we threw a go ball." MVS didn't catch the ball cleanly; he often doesn't. He rarely gets caught, however, and with an assist from back judge Dino Paganelli he weaved the final 35 yards to the end zone. His career-best day of 149 yards also included a shallow crosser in which he ran away from Jones for 31, a bubble screen for 18 in which he showed uncharacteristic strength running through FS Jarrod Wilson and CB CJ Henderson, and an adjusted route for 22 in which he gave the scrambling Rodgers an inviting target. A straight-line speed receiver, MVS lacks the start-stop talent to be a go-to man. Still, he did all that damage with just six targets. Adams (53) came back from an ankle injury that sidelined him for seven snaps to catch a 6-yard TD for the winning points. Used as a decoy for the first six plays of the decisive seven-play drive, he ran a rope-a-dope route to free himself from Henderson, the ninth pick in the 2020 draft, for the score. Besides the injury, Adams faced other frustrations. He had a third-and-3 stop route in his hands but Jones poked it away. He was charged with a drop on a curl when Henderson slammed him from behind. His stylish stop-and-go route and catch against Jones for a 22-yard TD was called back. Worst of all, he fumbled to open the third quarter on a reception for 22. It was just the third lost fumble of his seven-year career. Adams had lost a ball out of bounds in San Francisco 10 days earlier so there's little doubt the Jaguars were targeting him. After switching hands, he was carrying the ball low and away from his body. Even with Adams either out or compromised down the stretch, Equanimous St. Brown (31), Malik Taylor (eight) and Juwann Winfree (seven) never saw the ball. St. Brown cracked inside nicely on DE Dawuane Smoot on a 20-yard carry by Aaron Jones. Taylor was one of the players presumably yelled at by Rodgers for not getting vertical on a free play. Winfree (6 foot 1, 210 pounds), who made his debut off the practice squad, was Denver's sixth-round pick in 2019 from Colorado. He has 4.52 speed, a 33-inch vertical jump, excellent strength (18 bench-press reps) and a score of 18 on the Wonderlic test. The three tight ends had a rough day as blockers. On the third and 1 in the fourth quarter, Mercedes Lewis (26) failed to prevent DE Adam Gotsis from getting inside and stopping Jones short. He was late with his hands and got stood up by the bigger man. Lewis is on the roster because the coaches feel he can make that block. If he can't, the Packers should have inserted RT Rick Wagner as an extra blocker. Robert Tonyan (40) certainly is on the same wavelength as Rodgers. The split-second he saw Rodgers scramble, he turned his route deep. Later, when S Andrew Wingard slipped, Rodgers saw Tonyan raise his arm. When Tonyan ran deep against speedy WLB Myles Jack, Rodgers trusted him to make something happen. Tonyan's sliver of separation resulted in Jack's 29-yard penalty for pass interference.

Offensive Line (2 ½)

One day after signing a blockbuster contract extension, David Bakhtiari returned from the rib injury that caused him to miss the last 3 1/2 games. His start was somewhat shaky. He drew a false-start penalty, was beat badly by DE Josh Allen, the seventh pick in 2019, but the pass was away and risked a 15-yard penalty by attempting to shove WLB Myles Jack off a pile. Once into a groove, however, he was controlling his opponents. At the other tackle, Billy Turner was the weak link. The chop-block penalty

wasn't the least bit intentional, but if he hadn't been tossed off his feet by Allen the flag never would have been thrown. Davante Adams lost the TD when Turner was penalized for holding after Allen beat him inside. In all, Turner was charged with team-high totals of 3 ½ pressures and 1 ½ "bad" runs. The coaches will remember how much Turner's play deteriorated in the second half of last season as a right guard. If a similar scenario unfolds now, Rick Wagner is an able option. Corey Linsley had an excellent battle with another ex-Buckeye, DaVon Hamilton, a second-round pick in April with a bright future. The only sack came on a tackle-tackle twist by Hamilton against Linsley. At guard, Elgton Jenkins pitched a shutout and Lucas Patrick was OK. Patrick's athletic deficiencies hurt the run game at the linebacker level and the screen game in space. As hard as Patrick tries, he just can't execute some blocks.

Quarterbacks (3)

It's the same pattern almost every year. The hard counts of Aaron Rodgers coax defensive linemen to jump in the first month or so, and then the defenders settle down and that's about it. This was the fifth straight game in which the opposing team didn't go offsides; they were penalized six times for that infraction in the first four games. On the other hand, this was the third straight game in which the eagle-eyed quarterback sprung to the line and had the ball snapped before a 12th defender could reach the sideline. That didn't occur in the first six games. Taking advantage of a favorable wind to start the second quarter, Rodgers' rainbow to Marquez Valdes-Scantling was dead on target for the long TD. His long-ball accuracy has been vastly improved this season. The other two touchdowns included Rodgers' 5-yard keeper in which he showed a second gear to stay clear of SLB Aaron Lynch and a high lob to Davante Adams in which his ballhandling was superlative. In fact, Rodgers seems to be carrying out his fakes with more elan than a year ago. His interception late in the third quarter set up the Jaguars' go-ahead score. Regardless of what happened in the early portion of the route combination, MVS was streaking underneath with far-slower Sidney Jones trying to keep up. It was the only time defensive coordinator Todd Wash rushed six. Even though the blitz was picked up well, Rodgers failed to step into the pass and then didn't lead the receiver. Earlier, Rodgers put one up for MVS on fourth and 3 that SS Daniel Thomas flat dropped. With Adams on the shelf for a spell, Rodgers began to bail and extend on some plays. He isn't eager about throwing to receivers that don't meet his standards.

Running Backs (3)

Matt LaFleur is doing everything in his power to get Aaron Jones to the playoffs. He gave him 41 snaps Sunday, 10 more than Jamaal Williams. In his seven games, Jones has played a modest 57.7 percent of the snaps. Despite missing Games 6-7 with a calf injury, it already seems as if Jones has taken a full season's worth of shots. On his 18 touches for 95 yards Sunday, Jones was hit so hard four or five times that one wondered if he'd get up. Although his future depends on signing a new contract with the Packers or another team, it would appear the very last thing on his mind is protecting himself. If he's not absorbing contact with the ball, he's getting it in blitz pickup. On one play, Lucas Patrick whiffed in pass pro against DE Dawuane Smoot, but Jones was right there using his 208 pounds to stymie the charge of a 264-pounder. Jones, on a route to the flat, had no idea that Davante Adams was going to fumble. Nevertheless, he was hustling the way all players should, and if not for Myles Jack's proximity to the ball, the recovery would have been made by Jones. He dove headfirst over bodies trying to get it. He did fail to gain on a third and 1. Both Jones and Williams dropped short passes. Interestingly, Matt LaFleur had Jones run the ball in short-yardage. On third and fourth downs with 1 yard to go, Jones is 0 for 1 this

season (now 0 for 2) whereas Williams is 4 for 5. In fact, Williams converted on third and 1 earlier in the game even though Mercedes Lewis and Marquez Valdes-Scantling blocked the play poorly. In his post-mortem, Jaguars coach Doug Marrone brought up the missed tackle on third and 7 in the second quarter that broke for 12 and sustained a TD drive. The guilty party was CB CJ Henderson, who missed Williams tight to the right sideline on a check-down that by rights should have been a 2-yard gain. In all, Williams broke four tackles in his 13 touches compared to two for Jones. Tyler Ervin (eight) went in jet motion four times before exiting with a shoulder injury. Now that another fullback, John Lovett, has joined Josiah Deguara with a season-ending knee injury, LaFleur might take a harder look at Dominique Dafney (6-2, 243), a rookie from Indiana State who has been on the practice squad since Oct. 12 or sign another one. TE Jace Sternberger took one snap in the backfield but he's not much of a back-side cut blocker, let alone able to dig some snarling inside backer out of a hole.

Defensive Line (2 ½)

According to independent Packers historical statistician Eric Goska, Jacksonville rookie James Robinson became just the sixth running back to log all the carries in a game against Green Bay. His 23 rushes were worth 109 yards (4.7). As usual, this unit didn't register a tackle for a loss. Despite the absence of C Brandon Linder (back), the Packers failed to take advantage of backup Tyler Shatley. This was the fifth game back for Kenny Clark after missing 3 ½ games with a groin injury. Clark is fine, but he's just not a premier run-stuffer right now. When Robinson carried three straight times on the first series for gains of 6, Clark was blocked by one man each time. He shed blocks three times on runs gaining 3, 3 and 1 yard. On an 8-yard carry, he looked to be on skates as he was washed back by a pair of blockers. He also had a pressure and aborted a screen pass at the end. Of the 64 possible snaps on defense, Clark drew a heavy workload of 57. In three-man fronts, defensive line coach Jerry Montgomery lined up Clark in the middle on the first four plays. After that, he used Clark on either the left or right side in three-man lines, normally as a 3-technique. Of his 27 snaps in three-man fronts, Clark played 15 outside and 12 in the middle. He also logged 23 snaps in two-man fronts and seven as the lone big man. The other snap counts were 39 for Dean Lowry, 22 for Tyler Lancaster and 14 apiece for Kingsley Keke and Montravius Adams. When Lowry gets high, he gets outmuscled and loses position. He did make the unit's biggest play by batting down a first-down pass late that, if caught by WR Keelan Cole, might have resulted in a Jaguars' victory. Lancaster is strong and athletic but doesn't have Lowry's range or experience. Keke tends to run around blocks more than he should on early downs, so unless injury were to strike the position his niche is more as a pass rusher. Adams needs to be more sound in everything he does. Adams has short arms (32 ¾ inches), which limits him from getting off blocks.

Linebackers (3)

Rashan Gary (31) plays a lot less than Preston Smith (52) each week because he's still feeling his way at the position. In the 3-4, Preston lines up to the side where an outside linebacker might be asked to cover. A six-year veteran, he knows where to drop even though his limited athleticism makes his value marginal in space. Gary is so much more fluid and speedy than Preston but lacks instincts and can't know much about dropping. Za'Darius Smith (53) remains the team's best and most versatile rusher. The Packers would like Gary to play more, but how to do it is the question. On Sunday, Gary had his best

game in two months with 3 ½ pressures. He flashed the power and snap in his body that has intrigued his coaches at every level. On one bubble screen, he started behind Za'Darius but ran past him to make the tackle. Other than a gift sack when rookie Jake Luton ran right to him, Za'Darius had just one other pressure. Preston finished with two pressures, including a clutch sack at the end. Za'Darius and Preston are inconsistent competitors and producers when it comes to playing the run. One of Preston's two missed tackles came on James Robinson's 20-yard run. Mike Pettine has sent a fifth rusher in the last five games almost twice as often as he did in the first four. Clearly, the four-man rushes weren't generating enough pressure. Christian Kirksey (64) returned after missing 5 ½ games with a pectoral injury. He can shoot a gap, work the edges and cover a little bit. He also plays small, gambles too much and will get buried in traffic. Kamal Martin (13) played only in the 3-4 defense. On his only pressure, he knocked Robinson on his rear end forcing Jake Luton to flee the pocket. Martin is so intent on being physical that at times he loses track of the ball. He's a rookie processing a lot before each snap. Rookie Krys Barnes didn't play due to COVID-19 protocols. Ty Summers didn't play from scrimmage. The 12-yard TD pass to Keenan Cole zipped between Kirksey and Gary in one of his rare drops. Oren Burks (five) also got in but Randy Ramsey and James Burgess were confined to special teams.

Defensive Backs (3)

The Packers survived a fifth straight game without Kevin King (quadriceps) and a first without Jaire Alexander (concussion). High winds, a rookie quarterback making his second start and the absence of No. 2 wideout Laviska Shenault (hamstring) made it more than a fair fight. Making his first start, Ka'dar Hollman (51) played mostly outside and was adequate. A press-man player at Toledo, he contested a pair of incompletions to Chris Conley on in-breaking routes. When Hollman lined up eight yards off, Jake Luton threw a hitch to Conley for 18 in which Hollman was buried on a block by Keelan Cole. Neither Hollman nor Josh Jackson (60) played like a starter. Jackson understands his limitation in speed and seems to lack the confidence necessary to play full out. He hasn't been overly physical in run support, either. Chandon Sullivan (64), the steady nickel back, played every snap for the first time. He drew a pass-interference penalty on third and 6. When he neglected to touch James Robinson while he was down, the back jumped to his feet and added 10 more yards. Mike Pettine stressed safe coverages; he added only one defensive back all day. That was Raven Greene (39), who had a late pass break-up and never shies away. At safety, Darnell Savage (61) might be regarded as the free safety but he played much more at the line than Adrian Amos (64). Savage had the only tackle for a loss, made some other tackles flying off the edge and showed how physical he can be for a small player. Nevertheless, he remains slow to see route combinations and the threat of the deep pass. In the first half, he got caught looking in the backfield in zone coverage, which allowed DJ Chark to run five yards by him. What would have been a 56-yard TD minus the wind or a pressure by Rashan Gary turned into a badly underthrown pass that Savage caught up to and knocked away. He had another faux pass involving a receiver running behind him inside the Green Bay 10 but the pass was overthrown. Amos capitalized when TE Tyler Eifert slipped by catching the pass for an interception and making a 23-yard return. In San Francisco, Savage dropped the ball in almost the same situation.

Kickers (1)

Punting four times against the wind and once with it, JK Scott averaged 43 yards (gross), 20.4 (net) and 3.89 seconds of hang time. He gave up 113 return yards, including 91 on a TD by Keelan Cole on the punt with the wind. Scott severely outkicked his coverage with a 59-yard boot that hung just 3.69 and came down on the numbers. No member of the coverage team was within 17 yards of Cole when the line drive came down. As luck would have it, it came down to Cole vs. Scott near the 25. Scott's only play was to make sure the sideline was cut off in hopes the pursuit might catch up, then be aggressive and take a shot. Mason Crosby always has tried to be physical in similarly dire situations on kickoffs. Instead, Scott froze and even let up when Cole feinted and then continued unimpeded down the sideline to the end zone. It was a pathetic effort. Scott was much improved kicking off, averaging 70 yards and 4.16, although four of his five attempts were with the wind. Crosby made a field goal from 39 yards.

Special Teams (1)

On four of the five punts, the gunners were S Henry Black and WR Malik Taylor. On Keelan Cole's 91-yard TD, coordinator Shawn Mennenga pulled Taylor for CB KeiVarae Russell, a four-year veteran who was making his debut for Green Bay after being activated from the practice squad. He was signed on Oct. 28. When Cole caught the ball and headed straight up the field, several players were out of position and stacked in one lane. Cole wasn't even touched. Besides JK Scott, LB Ty Summers had the best chance but missed. The kickoff coverage was excellent, especially against a pair of reverses called by Jaguars coordinator Joe DeCamillis. Battling the wind, Tyler Ervin let one punt roll and had a kickoff carom off his shin. When Ervin departed with a shoulder injury, the Packers no longer had old pro Tramon Williams to call upon and make sure catches. The unenviable task fell to Josh Jackson. His decision to let one punt hit and roll 19 yards to the 2 didn't exactly spawn confidence when Jackson fielded a punt at the 7 with 4 minutes left and the outcome hanging in the balance. It wasn't textbook, but Jackson secured the ball high against his chest and gained 7 yards. The snap leaders in the kicking game, all with 25, were Oren Burks, Randy Ramsey and Summers.