

SPORTS

Rodgers, Packers roll 44-31 over Vikings

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Aaron Rodgers smiled as he answered the question. Yes, he said, Green Bay’s running game has exceeded his expectations.

With the Packers powerfully moving the ball on the ground, the absence of three primary receivers hasn’t affected Rodgers one bit.

Ignoring the injuries around him, Rodgers picked apart what’s left of Minnesota’s depleted defense by throwing two first-half touchdown passes to Jordy Nelson and guiding the Packers to a 44-31 victory on Sunday night.

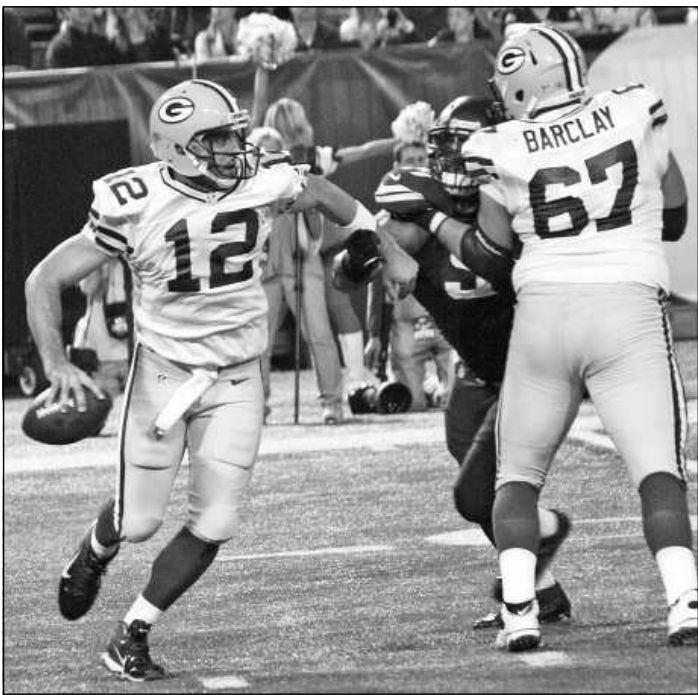
“I wasn’t going to let this team beat us. I wanted to make sure that I put our team in a position to be successful here. A lot was on my shoulders,” said Rodgers, who completed 24 of 29 passes for 285 yards to help the Packers (5-2) stay in first place in the NFC North despite injuries to Randall Cobb, James Jones and Jeremichael Finley.

The Packers were still missing Clay Matthews and two other starting linebackers on the other side of the ball, too, but the Vikings (1-6) were stagnant until some meaningless movement at the end made the final score look a little better.

“I didn’t play well enough for this offense to stay on the field,” said Ponder, who didn’t have any turnovers but finished a pedestrian 14 for 21 for 145 yards, plus a late touchdown run as the third different starting quarterback for this team in three weeks.

Adrian Peterson gained a quiet 60 yards on 13 carries, and the Vikings held the ball for a mere 19 minutes and 6 seconds: less than one-third of the game. The Packers ran 30 more plays than they did: 73 to 43.

Rodgers, of course, had a lot to do with that by finding Nelson, Jarrett Boykin and Myles White open when he could. But Eddie Lacy, James Starks and the offensive line overtook the game in the second half. Lacy and Starks each had a touchdown run, and the Packers matched their season high with 182 yards rushing.



Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (12) gets a block from tackle Don Barclay (67) while breaking away from Vikings defensive end Everson Griffen (97) in Sunday’s game at the Metrodome. Rodgers passed for 285 yards and two touchdowns in Green Bay’s 44-31 victory over Minnesota.

Their three highest single-game totals this year are all more than any of them in each of the previous three seasons.

“We’re all teammates here,” Lacy said, adding: “We’re happy for one another and help each other play.”

Here are five things we learned from the last game between these division rivals in this 31-year-old domed stadium:

ROUGH REUNION: After seven seasons with the Packers, Greg Jennings joined the other side with a big contract with the Vikings with \$17.8 million guaranteed, but getting the ball thrown his way this year has hardly been a sure bet as the quarterback carousel has spun around.

Jennings caught just one pass in the game for 9 yards, though he drew a pass interference penalty on Tramon Williams late in the second quarter to set up a touchdown run by Peterson that pulled the Vikings to 24-17. Jennings, who apologized this week for some mild criticism he spoke this summer toward Rodgers and the Packers, embraced his former teammate on the field after the game.

Jennings didn’t stick

around the locker room long enough to take questions from reporters. Said Rodgers: “We had some good memories together.”

DETERIORATED DEFENSE: This once-proud Vikings defense that led the NFL with the fewest yards rushing allowed for three straight seasons from 2006-08 and tied for the league lead in sacks in 2011 no longer has any strengths to rely on.

Defensive end Jared Allen went without sack or even a tackle, across from Packers rookie David Bakhtiari. Backup safeties Mistral Raymond and Andrew Sendejo were exposed, filling in for injured starters Jamarca Sanford and Harrison Smith.

“It’s very frustrating,” said cornerback Josh Robinson, who was in decent position against Nelson in the end zone but still beaten for the first-quarter score. “This defense isn’t very tough mentally. We’ll be upset about the game, but all you can do is try to work, improve, correct the mistakes and get better.”

NOT THIS TIME: Peterson had 409 yards rushing over two regular-season games against the Pack-



STAFF PHOTOS BY KEVIN BONESKE

Packers running back Eddie Lacy (27) breaks a tackle of Vikings defensive back A.J. Jefferson (24) in Sunday’s game at the Metrodome. Lacy rushed for 94 yards and a touchdown in Green Bay’s 44-31 victory over Minnesota.



Vikings running back Adrian Peterson (28) is tackled by Packers defensive tackle Ryan Pickett (79) in Sunday night’s game at the Metrodome. Peterson rushed for 60 yards a touchdown in Minnesota’s 44-31 loss to Green Bay.

ers in 2012. Over the last three weeks, he has only 150 yards.

“It was slim pickings,” Peterson said, adding: “We didn’t help the defense out at all.”

ROOKIE RETURNERS: After Cordarrelle Patterson caught the opening kickoff with his heels barely at the back edge of the end zone, he sprinted through the

middle of the Packers coverage. Only Micah Hyde had a chance to tackle him, and his diving attempt whiffed as the first-round draft pick from Tennessee raced away for a touchdown on an NFL-record 109-yard return.

Hyde made amends in the next quarter, though. The rookie cornerback from Iowa returned a punt 93 yards for a score to stretch

Green Bay’s lead to 24-10.

FAVORITE FOE: Rodgers has dominated the Vikings like no other quarterback against one team in the NFL’s modern era. In his last eight games against them, the Packers have won seven. He has completed roughly three-quarters of his passes, with 22 touchdown and only three interceptions.

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