

SPORTS

Against Packers, Vikings just got run over

EDEN PRAIRIE (AP) — The problems for the Minnesota Vikings with Christian Ponder at quarterback were obvious from the start.

Their list of missing players on offense has grown long and increasingly conspicuous. Playing their primary rival on the road in the rain at night with only three days to rest and prepare was already an uphill climb.

When Eddie Lacy began to trample through their defense early in the first quarter for the Green Bay Packers, well, that's when the Vikings really lost it.

"There's nothing more disheartening as a coach for you to get manhandled up front, to be in the wrong gaps, to have people running the ball at you," coach Mike Zimmer said the day after the Vikings were pummeled 42-10 by the Packers at Lambeau Field.

In 2000, Zimmer's first season as a defensive coordinator, Dallas gave up the most yards rushing in the NFL. Only one team allowed more yards per carry.

"And I said, 'Never again,'" Zimmer recalled Friday. "So I guess that's where that all stems from."

His players have largely been tough to run against since. Over his next 13 years as a defensive coordinator (six more with Dallas, one with Atlanta and six with Cincinnati), Zimmer's teams finished in the bottom half of the league in yards per game three times, and four times in yards per attempt. They were in the top 10 six times in yards per game and seven times in yards per attempt.



Contributed photo by Eric Andre

Packers running back Eddie Lacy (27) finds opening running room in front of Vikings linebacker Gerald Hodges (50) in last Thursday's game at Lambeau Field. Lacy rushed for 105 yards and two touchdowns in Green Bay's 42-10 victory over Minnesota.

The Vikings had a stout front seven, or at least an effective scheme, to stop the run long before Zimmer was hired. They were in the top half of the NFL in yards per game and yards per attempt every year since 2006, and last season ended a seven-year streak of finishing 11th or higher in the league in

both categories.

After factoring in what the Packers did against them Thursday, with 105 yards and two touchdowns on 13 carries by Lacy, the Vikings fell to 17th in the NFL. They allow an average of 4.3 yards per rush and are 19th in the league with an average of 121.8 yards sur-

rendered per game.

"There was a lot of freelancing, a lot of guys in the wrong place," said Zimmer, who delivered the majority of his answers Friday at his news conference in stern, clipped tones. He was clearly as upset with his team as he'd been since taking the job.

Zimmer said he looked "hard" at the game film trying to find a lack of effort on either side of the ball, but didn't see it. Defensive end Brian Robison, however, said he felt "some people had checked out" after the Packers built a 28-0 halftime lead.

"You could see it on the

sidelines. Everybody was quiet," Robison said.

The Vikings forced a three-and-out by the Packers on the game's first possession, but they quickly got the ball back and turned Lacy loose — for 18, 29 and 6 yards to set up a short touchdown pass by Aaron Rodgers. The Vikings settled in and played better in the middle of the game, but on Green Bay's first drive of the third quarter Lacy had carries of 9, 10 and 11 yards, which took him into the end zone.

Then came Lacy's 10-yard touchdown run on the ensuing possession. That provided the ultimate insult on a humbling night for the Vikings. He barreled into Robert Blanton at the goal line and without breaking stride popped the strong safety's helmet off.

The Vikings fell to 1-8-1 against the Packers since the start of the 2010 season. They'll have the benefit of being at home against Detroit, and then the most manageable stretch of the schedule follows: at Buffalo, at Tampa Bay, back home against Washington and the bye week.

But they won't get far if they don't learn to play with more discipline on defense, and learn to trust the scheme they're being taught rather than straying from responsibilities to chase highlights.

"You can't be out there trying to make plays because once you do that, you leave another guy out to dry," defensive end Everson Griffen said. "So you've got to rely on your technique to make that play for you."

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