



Notes

Jones makes case for starting spot

By [Tyler Dunne](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Green Bay - He tackled a renegade 15-year-old fan. He sacked **Matthew Stafford**. And when it was all over, **Brad Jones** may have earned himself a starting spot for the postseason.

The Green Bay Packers' 45-41 win over Detroit Sunday was one game-long audition for every outside linebacker not named **Clay Matthews**. The Packers need someone - anyone - to provide a push on the right side. Most of the season, it's been a frustrating quest. Defensive coordinator **Dom Capers** didn't crown anyone in particular, yet hinted that Jones may be the guy.

On Monday, when asked about the position, it was the first name he brought up.

"I thought Brad Jones had a very good game," Capers said. "I thought he played physical in the run. Of course, he had the sack. I thought he had two or three good rushes. I thought **Vic So'oto**, you saw him show up in terms of rushing. And **Frank Zombo** did a pretty nice job in the run, so we're going to get those guys reps this week and take a good look, see how things go and make a decision on who we decide to go with."

Capers added that in the playoffs he'll likely roll multiple players through. In 16 games, the Packers have gotten six sacks from five players. Over the last month, **Erik Walden** has lost his grip on the position. And injuries - a broken scapula, hyperextended knee and bad hamstring - set Zombo back weeks, months. Right outside linebacker wasn't solved any more heading into Sunday than it was in August.

But after Sunday, Capers has plenty of footage to draw from. Both Jones and So'oto, non-existent virtually all season, stood out.

With 8:10 to go in the fourth quarter, Jones took down Stafford for his first sack on the season. He earned it, too. Rushing from the left side, Jones bulled around the outside shoulder of right tackle **Gosder Cherilus**. Stafford began to roll the opposite direction, but Jones shook off Cherilus - 85 pounds heavier - and lassoed the quarterback down by the ankles.

So'oto wasn't bad, either. Midway through the third quarter, he sacked Stafford. Coaches haven't trusted him in a full-time role, yet. A tight end and defensive end at Brigham Young, he's still raw. One option, however, could be to free So'oto as a one-dimensional edge rusher on third downs and use Jones on base downs.

Jones has remained active on game day this season because of his special teams contributions. Coordinator **Shawn Slocum** said he works well in open space. That's been his role. Through the first 14 games combined, Jones played only 68 total defensive snaps according to Pro Football Focus. On

Sunday, Jones played 35 snaps.

At one point, he even took down a runaway fan.

"Yeah, he made a nice tackle there," Slocum said. "I'm glad because we had a missed tackle by (Packers director of security) **Doug Collins**."

Important weapon: Rookie returner **Randall Cobb**, suffering from a groin injury, missed a pro game for the first time Sunday. His absence cued a mini blooper reel.

Cornerback **Pat Lee**, who returned 13 kicks in 2010, bobbled his first kickoff and took a safety on his second. After catching the ball out of the end zone, he took a knee in it.

Cobb averaged 27.7 yards per kick and 11.3 yards per punt return with two touchdowns his first season. All along, he's given the Packers something they've lacked for the better part of two decades - a viable return game.

The void was obvious.

"I think it's pretty evident," Slocum said. "Randall's done a good job. He's had a couple turnovers this year but, outside of that, I think he's done an excellent job in terms of ball security and making decisions and he's got a lot of opportunities to do it."

Slocum said wind was affecting the flight of kicks and punts Sunday, which could have been one reason for Lee's poor decision.

"That play is all about the ball," Slocum said. "If the ball is in the end zone, you can take the touchback; but if the ball is in the field of play, you can't bring it back in the end zone. And then he got confused because it looked to me like the referee blew the play dead without him continuing to play. So, we got the safety."

Finishing last: After Sunday's shootout, the Packers finished last in the NFL in total defense (411.6 yards) for the third time. The team's defense finished last in 1983 and 1956.

Part of the reason is a changing NFL game, part of the reason is losing safety **Nick Collins**. But all season, the big plays continued.

They've found ways to cope. Green Bay also had a team-record 31 interceptions - most in the NFL - and rank 14th in points allowed (22.4).

"You've got to evaluate what you've got to do to keep them out of the end zone," Capers said. "If they're gaining a lot of yardage against you and you're keeping them out of the end zone, I think it still gives you the best chance of winning. Now we'd all like to not give them any yards and keep them out of the end zone, but with the way the game is set up nowadays, it's a little different than what it was 10 or 15 years ago."

"I think there's statistics that tell the whole story and there's statistics that are flags," coach **Mike McCarthy** added. "Good flags and not-so-good flags. You don't want to give up that many yards, that's for sure, but at the end of the day, it is a team game. How the offense plays does affect how the defense is being challenged; special teams factors into it. . . . Are we concerned about the yards? We don't like it,

but at the end of the day, it's keeping them out of the end zone and taking the ball away. And we do a good job of that."

Going outside: In 2007, McCarthy and the Packers practiced indoors in the postseason and it cost them. The New York Giants upset them at a bone-chilling Lambeau Field in the NFC Championship Game. This season, with possibly two games at home, do not expect McCarthy to repeat history. Nitschke Field is equipped with heated coils under the surface.

"We have the ability to practice outside, as we did not in '07, just because of the field conditions," McCarthy said. "Having Nitschke Field now that's heated is a big bonus for us, so the ability to handle the football is something we've been trying to spend a lot of time on the last month, and having the opportunity to do it this upcoming week and next week is really beneficial."

The Packers will practice Wednesday and Thursday and take the weekend off. Thursday, they'll practice in pads.

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