

Notebook: Crosby gears up for cold-weather kicking

Written by
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Green Bay Press-Gazette

The way Mason Crosby has been kicking, perhaps the only thing that can derail his perfect season is the weather.

The Green Bay Packers kicker, who has made all 15 of his field goals this season and hasn't missed a regular-season kick since Dec. 5, 2010, against San Francisco, said he's starting to get into his winter mindset with the first snow of the season falling this week.

With him kicking the ball better than ever, he doesn't seem too concerned about the changing conditions.

"Not really," Crosby said on Friday. "It was raining out in San Diego last week, and the footing was a little dicey there. I had a couple of issues and was sliding a little bit until I got the right cleats on."

All Crosby did there was drill a 47-yard **fieldgoal**. Those used to be anything but sure things in his first four seasons, when he never made 80 percent of his field goals in any one season. Now, those kicks seem routine.

"I've just been trusting it," Crosby said. "So that makes it a lot easier. But right now, I'm

just starting to get my mind right mentally to prepare for the cold."

Crosby didn't kick in Lambeau Field on Thursday before the snow melted, and it's not expected to snow before Monday night's game against Minnesota. Still, Crosby and punter Tim Masthay will get some work in the stadium before practice Saturday.

When it comes to dealing with the weather, the most important time is pregame warm-ups, when the kickers test the field and weather conditions. The forecast on Monday night calls for temperatures in the low 30s with a slight chance of rain.

When asked if poor weather is the only thing that could throw off Crosby's perfect season, special teams coordinator Shawn Slocum said: "There are other obstacles — the weather, the opponent and preparation during the week that gets you in position to be successful."

Expecting improvement

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Though left tackle Marshall Newhouse was charged with allowing only one of Jared Allen's two sacks in the first game against the Vikings, the Packers' coaches are expecting the second-year pro to perform better against the NFL's sack leader the second time around.

Newhouse was slow to get his hands on Allen, so the coaches are looking for him to get a quicker punch on Allen. Playing at Lambeau Field, where crowd noise won't be the factor it was at the Metrodome, should help Newhouse, too.

"He'll be more technically sound," offensive line coach James Campen said. "Playing against an elite player like that, and a player that's technically sound like Jared Allen is, and couple that with a motor like he has, that's an advantage for a player to be better the next time around because he played against him and understands him much better. You're not going to get it all against Jared Allen in one game."

Despite Newhouse's struggles early in that first meeting, offensive coordinator Joe Philbin said the Packers never thought about replacing him.

"I don't remember ever talking about it," Philbin said.

Neal's return

Defensive end Mike Neal practiced in pads Friday for the first time since his knee surgery nearly two months ago, but his return to game action isn't imminent.

For the second straight day, Neal took part in individual drills but has not had any 11-on-11 action.

"I think you have to really increase his activity yet at practice to get to the point where we feel he's ready for a game," coach Mike McCarthy said. "He hasn't participated in team drills yet. Once again, we're just going one hurdle at a time, and as he continues to cross them and everything is positive from a medical standpoint, time will answer (when he can play). I don't have a timeline."

Other injuries

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Clay Matthews is listed on the injury report as having a knee injury and not the quadriceps injury that has bothered him most of the first half of the season.

He practiced in pads on Friday on a limited basis after sitting out Thursday's workout.

Guard Josh Sitton (knee) also was limited in practice. Safety Morgan Burnett (hand) was a full participant. Only linebacker Frank Zombo (hamstring) and left tackle Chad Clifton (hamstring) did not practice. The Packers don't have to give a status report until Saturday because they play Monday.

More staff changes

Vice president of organizational/staff development Betsy Mitchell is retiring from the Packers at the end of the year, according to a team source.

The 60-year-old Mitchell has been with the Packers for 19 years, including the last four in her current role.

Earlier this week, the Packers announced that Jason Wied, vice president of administration/general counsel, was taking an indefinite leave of absence for personal reasons.

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