



Michael Hunt

David Bakhtiari one of many reasons not to panic

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A group of Monday morning quarterbacks met Tuesday afternoon to solve all of the Green Bay Packers' ills.

Between an assemblage of corporate sponsors, Wayne Larrivee, Vic Ketchman of Packers.com and me, Mike McCarthy has nothing to fret about for Sunday's home opener against Washington.

Yeah, well, at least rookie left tackle David Bakhtiari was there to keep the luncheon discussion honest.

Bakhtiari is an interesting study. A fourth-round pick who leaves college early had no guarantee to make an NFL roster, much less protect the blind side of the game's best quarterback in a starting role during the season opener.

But observing Bakhtiari at our table and then up on the podium, it became clear why panic turned into low-grade concern not long after Bryan Bulaga blew out a knee on, of all times, Family Night.

Larrivee mentioned that Bakhtiari has "California cool," which is true, but it seems as if the rookie has taken it to a level of total placidity in his role as Aaron Rodgers' primary protector. Joe Buck mentioned at some point during the San Francisco game that Bakhtiari probably didn't sleep well at the thought of going up against Aldon Smith the first time out, but that seemed to be a misread on the part of the Fox announcer.

"I don't let anything get too big," Bakhtiari said. "If you do, you get too anxious and the walls come crashing down. I try to take it day-by-day. Today, for instance, I knew I was going to come here and talk to some nice people. Tomorrow we get back at it (in practice.)."

"I don't want to think about all the pass rushers I'll have to go up against this year."

He went up against one of the better ones Sunday and came out just fine. At least the line, which has been reorganized this season for a variety of reasons, wasn't a big issue in the 34-28 loss to the 49ers.

Us day-late Monday morning-ers had the rest of it solved.

The Packers really, really missed Morgan Burnett in the back end. Colin Kaepernick is that good, but a solid safety would have made a difference on a day when the Packers did not let Kaepernick beat them with his feet.

The front seven was surprisingly stout after last season's Candlestick debacle. The cameras caught Johnny Jolly smiling as if to say, "Yeah, I've still got it after three years away from football."

Now Jolly does not play a skill position, which would have made it almost impossible to come back after such an extended absence. But it's still a terrific story for a guy who deserved a second chance. Add Jolly to all those other big bodies up front and the Packers, who held up against the game's best offensive line, have a chance to stand in against anyone.

The running game is probably not worth worrying about until the playoffs, when the ability to drain the clock will be critical. The best teams — the '07 New York Giants, the '10 Packers — figured it out by postseason.

But the one thing to take away from Sunday that projects the Packers as a solid team was their attitude. I liked it when McCarthy lashed out at a moral-victory question. I wasn't crazy about Clay Matthews' late hit on Kaepernick, but it's pretty clear the Packers were sick of the "soft" tag applied to them after the San Francisco playoff experience that ended last season.

Tighten up the secondary, and this team is going to be a handful.

Send e-mail to mhunt@journalssentinel.com

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