

Risky Business

Quantifying Rodgers

It doesn't take any sophisticated analysis to know that replacing Aaron Rodgers with Jordan Love was going to have a major impact on Packers' winning chances this weekend. However, the magnitude of the impact created a unique challenge for the opposing coaches as well as handicappers. Just how much does a rookie quarterback disrupt a passing offense that is normally led by an NFL legend? Unfortunately for Jordan Love, it became clear very quickly he would struggle with the Chiefs' pressure.

In our match-up analysis on EdjSports we customize the simulations directly from DVOA. Entering the game, it was difficult to know just how much to downgrade the passing DVOA of the Packers without significant data on Love. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems fair to adjust the Packers passing offense from the very top tier (6th in passing DVOA) to the very bottom tier (29th in passing DVOA). Using these assumptions, and with the benefit of the custom simulations, we can generate some insights on just how much the absence of Rodgers matters in GWC from the opening kickoff, and for some critical in-game decisions.

At the opening kickoff, if we only adjust the passing DVOA for the Packers and leave all other parameters alone, the impact is -21.5% GWC. If we perform a rough extrapolation on that figure, it suggests replacing Rodgers with Love for an entire season would impact the Packers' expected wins by 3.65 games. While this figure is not tuned to a custom schedule and doesn't assume any improvement in Love, it gives us an idea of the importance of Rodgers.

It is also revealing to look at some key fourth down situations during the game where Andy Reid and Matt LaFleur surely had to be factoring Love into their decisions.

Possession	Ball Position	Clock	Score	Action	Love	Rodgers
KC	fourth and 1 at KC 39-yard line	15:00 2 nd quarter	KC 7 - 0	Go	+2.7% GWC	+4.8% GWC
GB	Fourth and 6 at KC 45-yard line	4:39 2 nd quarter	KC 7 - 0	Punt	-1.0% GWC	-3.2% GWC
KC	fourth and 1 at KC 38-yard line	0:58 3 rd quarter	KC 13 - 0	Punt	-3.3% GWC	-1.5% GWC

In these three situations, the effect of Love vs Rodgers does not flip the optimal decision but only the magnitude. Not surprisingly, with Rodgers in the game the overall GWC for the

Packers is boosted which amplifies the importance of optimal decisions. In other words, when the Packers actually have a chance to win the game these decisions are more impactful. It is also important to consider that the logic of giving the ball back to a wounded offense can cut both ways. It can argue for punting on a fourth and short because the Packers offense is unlikely to mount a long drive, but it also diminishes the risk of a failed fourth down attempt by the Chiefs. While there are certainly some late game circumstances that would warrant a more conservative approach by the Chiefs on fourth down, in general the dominant strategy of aggressiveness holds, even when the passing offense has been degraded to this extreme level.