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# THE NEXT BRADY?

Time will tell, but  
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is showing some similar  
traits to Patriots legend



**2021  
NEW ENGLAND  
PATRIOTS  
SEASON  
PREVIEW**



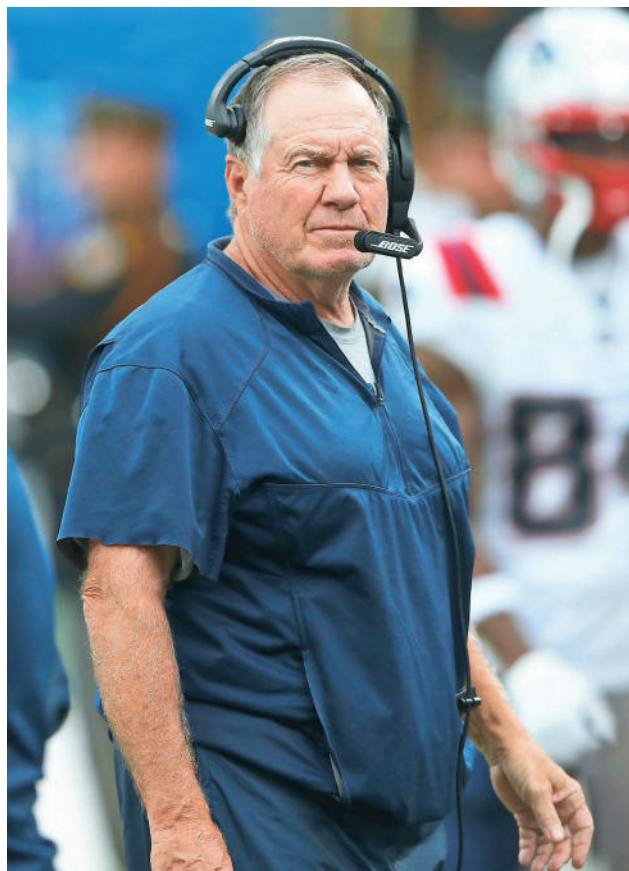
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**Wednesday, September 8, 2021**



# 2021 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS SEASON PREVIEW

**COVER:** Mac Jones photo by Noah K. Murray, Associated Press. Tom Brady photo by Hadley Green, North of Boston Media Group. Photo illustration by Dan Ryan.



Associated Press photo  
Bill Belichick's flurry of off-season transactions show he thinks his team can contend for the title this year.

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# Patriots a **threat** in 2021? Absolutely

BY BILL BURT

The New England Patriots have the appearance of just another middler, Wild Card chasing team.

They are coming off a 7-9 season, with more disappointments than celebration. Compared to, say, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, which return all 22 starters, the Patriots have redone nearly 40% of last year's team.

Their division, the AFC East, is almost as good as it gets, second only to the NFC West (Rams, Seahawks, Cardinals and 49ers).

Worst of all, they have quarterback issues. They'll start an over-the-hill dude or an inexperienced rookie -- both no-no's this time of year for "good" teams.

But appearances can be deceiving. The Pats stack up on the other side of the ledger, too.

The Patriots, when healthy, have a top-five offensive line, which is impressive considering the loss of guard Joe Thuney, arguably the best lineman from the last three seasons.

They might have one of the best running back corps in the NFL with Damien Harris looking like a true "RB1" player and two able, though unproven, backups in J.J. Taylor and Rhamondre Stevenson, not to mention trusty specialist James White.

They have two legit Pro Bowl-caliber tight ends in Hunter Henry and Jonnu Smith, as opposed to none in 2019 and 2020. Nelson Agholor, Kendrick Bourne and holdover Jakobi Meyers are three true wide receiving options, as opposed to just Meyers in 2020.

And guess what? The Patriots defense will be better than the offense.

Edge edge rusher Matt Judon, tackle Davon Godchaux and middle line-backers Kyle Van Noy and Dont'a Hightower are a huge upgrade over the 2020 defense.

Lest we forget special teams, the Patriots field the best punter in the NFL, Jake Bailey, and the trusty Nick Folk kicking field goals, as well as full-timers Matthew Slater, Justin Bethel and Brandon Bolden.

Last and definitely not least, there's that other guy, the head coach.

A telling sign of the Patriots' own expectations was the amount of guaranteed money expended over a 24-hour period on nearly 10 newbies -- \$137.5 million.

Bill Belichick is someone who throws money around like manhole covers.

His belief -- I believe, through his actions -- is that the Patriots can contend in

the AFC East and for the conference, though it won't be easy with the Buffalo Bills and Kansas City Chiefs, respectively, as guardians of those two 'ships.

While the Miami Dolphins appeared to surpass the Patriots last year, at 10-6, they should be had by this new Patriots group.

Then there are the Bills, a different animal altogether. They appear ready to compete for a Super Bowl.

But the ascent from good to very good to great is not always linear. The Bills would need to blow through the AFC East at 5-1, splitting with the Patriots or Dolphins. (Remember, winning in Miami is tough for teams from the Northeast)

The Patriots schedule is not very hard. Finishing third has its privileges, as in not playing the three other AFC division winners.

Over the first eight games,



AP

**Rookie running back Rhamondre Stevenson had an eye-opening pre-season.**

New England, after nearly two years of ridiculous expectations.

The Patriots are expected to be pretty good. I expect them to be better. Maybe a lot better.

Stay tuned.

You can email Bill Burt at [bburt@northofboston.com](mailto:bburt@northofboston.com).



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# 2021 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS SCHEDULE

1 Sun., Sep. 12 Miami 4:25 p.m. CBS	10 Sun., Nov. 14 Cleveland 1 p.m. CBS
2 Sun., Sep. 19 @New York 1 p.m. CBS	11 Thu., Nov. 18 @Atlanta 8:20 p.m. FOX
3 Sun., Sep. 26 New Orleans 1 p.m. FOX	12 Sun., Nov. 28 Tennessee 1 p.m. CBS
4 Sun., Oct. 3 Tampa Bay 8:20 p.m. NBC	13 Mon., Dec. 6 @Buffalo 8:15 p.m. ESPN
5 Sun., Oct. 10 @Houston 1 p.m. CBS	14 BYE WEEK
6 Sun., Oct. 17 Dallas 4:25 p.m. CBS	15 Sun., Dec. 19 @Indianapolis TBD
7 Sun., Oct. 24 New York 1 p.m. CBS	16 Sun., Dec. 26 Buffalo 1 p.m. CBS
8 Sun., Oct. 31 @Los Angeles 4:05 p.m. CBS	17 Sat., Jan. 2 Jacksonville 1 p.m. CBS
9 Sun., Nov. 7 @Carolina 1 p.m. CBS	18 Sat., Jan. 9 @Miami 1 p.m. CBS



The Patriots will get another look at one of the league's newest superstars in Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert, shown here last November. The Patriots return to Los Angeles on Halloween to meet Herbert, an MVP candidate in 2021.

AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



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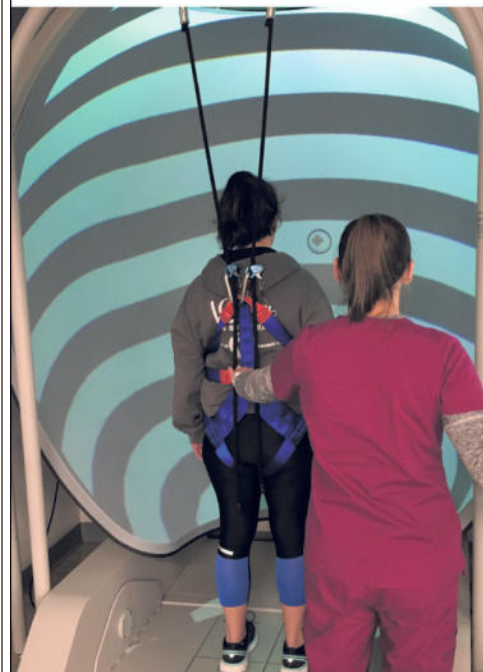
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# Familiar Formula: 2021 Patriots look a lot like 2001 team

There are a lot of similarities between the 2001 Patriots and the 2021 version that opens this weekend. Here, former Pats quarterback Tom Brady throws a pass during the AFC divisional playoff against the Tennessee Titans in January 2004 in Foxborough.

AP Photo/  
Stephan Savoia



BY BILL BURT

BBURT@NORTHOFBOSTON

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Remember this story, New Englanders?

The Patriots didn't look good at all the year before, especially the veteran quarterback.

Said quarterback gets sidelined.

A young, non-athletic, recently drafted quarterback from a big-time school is called in to replace the former superstar. Then magic happens.

Pretty much sounds like 2001 and Tom Brady, doesn't it? Well, sans the "magic," it also sounds a lot like the 2021 Patriots.

Only instead of a hit from Mo Lewis sidelining Drew Bledsoe, opening the door for a young quarterback out of Michigan, it was COVID-19 protocols that gave an extra opportunity to a young quarterback out of Alabama, Mac Jones.

But the comparison between 2001 and 2021 isn't just about young, driven quarterbacks.

Both squads are built the way Bill Belichick intended: tough, line of scrimmage dominating, special teams oriented with a ball-control offense and play-making defense.

That 2001 team took about two months, with Brady officially taking over, to get its identity. The 2021 Patriots will need to take advantage of an early schedule in their favor to establish some of those same characteristics as soon as possible.

The Pats Dynasty Part I, from 2001 through 2004, was

less about Tom Brady and more about all three phases.

It appears, with free agency, that Belichick has tried to create a team that emulates that one, adding tight ends (Jonnu Smith and Hunter Henry), wide receivers (Nelson Agholor and Kendrick Bourne), a pass rusher (Matt Judon), a defensive run stopper at nose guard (Davon Godchaux), a big left tackle (Trent Brown) and a slot cornerback (Jalen Mills), to name a few.

Are any of these guys All-Pro? Maybe Judon, maybe Smith. But most are above-average players, all assuming roles.

The 2001 Patriots apparently caught Pro Bowl voters by surprise with Brady and Lawyer Milloy named reserves with Ty Law and Troy Brown added as alternates. Running back Antowain Smith, picked up after the Bills let him go, rushed for 1,157 yards and 12 TDs



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that season.

The Pro Bowl team from a year ago had Stephon Gilmore, punter Jake Bailey and special teams star Matthew Slater. Judon was on the team as a Raven. The year before, Dont'a Hightower was on the team before opting out of the 2020 season.

As good as Smith was in 2001, the 2020 Patriots running back corps, with Damien Harris, J.J. Taylor, rookie Rhamondre Stevenson and James White, trumps that year's in talent and depth.

We didn't know it then but the 2001 Patriots ended up with finishing 7th overall in rushing attempts and 8th in rushing touchdowns.

While they weren't superior averaging 3.8 yards per carry, Belichick was committed to running the football with what turned out being a second-year system quarterback.

On defense, the Patriots ranked 19th in rushing yards allowed but were stingy near the goal line, allowing only seven rushing

TDs, tied for fifth-best.

There was toughness about that team that didn't really have explosive players on the offensive side of the ball.

Well, guess what? The 2020 version seems to be cut from the same mold, only with a little more ability for the big play while expecting to be harder to run against with the additions on defense.

Belichick's entire tenure in New England has been centered around special teams, an often forgotten aspect of the game. Mentions of "field position" often appear in his post-game statements, particularly after a win.

If the Patriots are anywhere near 11 or 12 wins, expect to hear a lot about it this fall and winter, with three players devoted solely to special teams -- Slater, Justin Bethel and Brandon Bolden.

That's not to say the quarterback won't have to make plays every Sunday or Monday night, but of Belichick's plan works, the position, at

least in 2021, won't be the be all, end all.

The Patriots in 2001 included some key holdovers from the Bill Parcells teams in the mid-1990s -- see Law, Milloy, Ted Johnson, Adam Vinatieri, Tory Brown, Bledsoe and Tedy Bruschi. The 2021 version, while not as gifted, appears to have more depth at every position.

That 2001 team caught us by surprise, coming off a 5-11 record in Belichick's first year taking the reins from Pete Carroll and Bobby Grier.

This team won't have the element of surprise.

Belichick is the greatest football coach who ever lived.

Mac Jones, if he enters the fray, was selected as a sort of Brady clone -- accurate, mentally tough and a winner.

As for winning the Super Bowl in February 2022, that would have to be considered a long shot.

Right?

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# Bill Burt ranks the 12 best teams in the NFL and picks real Super Bowl contenders

BY BILL BURT

BBURT@NORTHOFBOSTON.COM

*Bill Burt ranks the NFL's top 12 teams competing for a Super Bowl in 2021.*

## Legit contenders

### 1. Buffalo Bills

What I like most about the Bills is their patience in this "what have you done for me lately" era. Theirs has not been a meteoric rise but a steady one. Bills are the most complete team in NFL with MVP-caliber QB in Josh Allen.

### 2. L.A. Rams

You have to give it to Rams management. They made a mistake in Jared Goff (see 4-year, \$140 million extension) and cut the cord. They traded him for Matthew Stafford, and like the Bills, they now have everything in place, including an

elite defense. This is their year, period.

### 3. Kansas City Chiefs

The best player on the planet, Patrick Mahomes, will almost do the next-to-impossible ... get to the Super Bowl after losing the year before. The Chiefs are a great regular-season team but still have holes on defense come late January. Can't win AFC title in Buffalo.

### 4. San Francisco 49ers

The 49ers are going to be good. We just don't know how good. This team obliterated the Patriots a year ago like no other team did. And they did it with toughness. The question I have is at quarterback. With Jimmy Garoppolo, they would contend for a title. With the rookie, Trey Lance, they are a year away. It's up to them.

### 5. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Fifth for a team with Tom Brady and 22 returning starters? Yup. I believe the Bucs have a hiccup year, and it's maybe even worse than where I have them. Repeating is tough. You need a driven, maniacal coach. The Bucs have a player's coach in Bruce Arians, and getting everything out of this team, again, won't happen.

## Close but no cigar

### 6. Green Bay Packers

This is a big year for Aaron Rodgers. There is a new crop of QB stars. Time is running out if winning rings is tops on his list. The Packers have consecutive 13-3 seasons on their resume, but they couldn't finish the job, especially last year in Green Bay in late January. With Rodgers not really all-in with Packers, I question this team.

### 7. Cleveland Browns

In a weak NFL, the Browns are contenders.

They are my favorites to win their black-and-blue division, but I question this team's ability to make the right decision in big games. They are bunched up with the Steelers and Ravens, but Baker Mayfield appears to have made the jump — much to my surprise — to being good. He is the difference in that division, but still not in the Bills' or Chiefs' league.

### 8. New England Patriots

Yup. The Patriots. They are not as good as Buffalo or Kansas City and a tad behind the Browns, but they can beat every other AFC team, head to head, even playing on the road. I believe the pressure is on Bill Belichick to have a great year as coach, and I believe it will happen. The Patriots' issues at quarterback will be trumped by a great defense and ball-control offense.



Buffalo Bills quarterback Josh Allen is an important player in 2021. Bill Burt predicts Allen will finish the season with the MVP -- and a Super Bowl title.

AP Photo/David Derman

### 9. Tennessee Titans

There is something about this team I don't like. Maybe it's quarterback Ryan Tannehill. While this team is built for "toughness" and counts on Derrick Henry for 2,000-plus yards, the defense under Mike Vrabel has been a huge disappointment, ranking 28th in yards allowed and 24th in points allowed in 2020. I don't see that improving measurably, and Tannehill isn't all that.

Good but not that good

### 10. New Orleans Saints

I believe Jameis Winston will be good in 2021. If that's the case, the Saints could make some noise come January. With Drew Brees gone, coach Sean Payton will make the Saints a tougher team on both sides of the ball. The Saints were fourth fourth in yards allowed and fifth in points allowed in 2020. This team is good.

### 11. Baltimore Ravens

This is a career year for Lamar Jackson and head

coach John Harbaugh. The Ravens have apparently thrown everything behind Jackson's style, again, and it will probably mean a playoff berth. Jackson's MVP-season in 2019 was aided by a tough, upper-tier running back (Mark Ingram with 15 TDs). The Ravens don't have that. I see problems, again, in January.

### 12. Pittsburgh Steelers

This is Ben Roethlisberger's last stand. And it should be. The Steelers, in my opinion, have lost their identity. They don't do anything really well. They are still tough. They appear focused on a running game and improved offensive line. But this team doesn't excite me.

## Honorable mention

**Seattle Seahawks:** Decent playoff team at best

**Indianapolis Colts:** Carson Wentz squeaks Colts into playoffs

**Arizona Cardinals:** Coaching a big issue

**Miami Dolphins:** Quarterback is the issue

**L.A. Chargers:** Will be on playoff bubble; a year away

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Nelson Agholor	13	WR	6-0	198	28	7	USC
Henry Anderson	94	DE	6-6	300	30	7	Stanford
David Andrews	60	C	6-3	300	29	7	Georgia
Devin Asiasi	86	TE	6-3	257	24	2	UCLA
Jake Bailey	7	P	6-2	205	24	3	Stanford
Christian Barmore	70	DT	6-4	310	22	R	Alabama
Ja'Whaun Bentley	8	LB	6-2	255	25	4	Purdue
Justin Bethel	29	DB	6-0	200	31	10	Presbyterian
Brandon Bolden	25	RB	5-11	220	31	9	Mississippi
Kendrick Bourne	84	WR	6-1	203	26	5	Eastern Washington
Trent Brown	77	OL	6-8	380	28	7	Florida
Yodny Cajuste	72	OL	6-5	310	25	2	West Virginia
Joe Cardona	49	LS	6-3	245	29	7	Navy
Carl Davis	98	DL	6-5	320	29	7	Iowa
Cody Davis	22	DB	6-2	203	32	9	Texas Tech
Kyle Dugger	23	DB	6-2	220	25	2	Lenoir-Rhyne
Yasir Durant	63	G	6-7	330	23	2	Missouri
Davon Godchaux	92	DT	6-3	311	26	5	LSU
Lawrence Guy	93	DL	6-4	315	31	11	Arizona State
Damien Harris	37	RB	5-11	213	24	3	Alabama
Hunter Henry	85	TE	6-5	250	26	6	Arkansas
Justin Herron	75	OL	6-5	305	25	2	Wake Forest
Dont'a Hightower	54	LB	6-3	260	31	9	Alabama
J.C. Jackson	27	DB	6-1	198	25	4	Maryland
Jakob Johnson	47	FB	6-3	255	26	3	Tennessee
Jonathan Jones	31	DB	5-10	190	27	6	Auburn
Mac Jones	10	QB	6-3	217	22	R	Alabama
Matt Judon	9	LB	6-3	275	29	6	Grand Valley
Ted Karras	67	OL	6-4	305	28	6	Illinois
Brandon King	36	LB	6-2	220	28	7	Auburn

Harvey Langi	48	LB	6-2	250	28	4	Brigham Young
Shaq Mason	69	OL	6-1	310	28	7	Georgia Tech
Devin McCourty	32	DB	5-10	195	34	12	Rutgers
Jakobi Meyers	16	WR	6-2	200	24	3	N.C. State
Jalen Mills	2	CB	6-0	191	27	6	LSU
Quinn Nordin	3	K	6-1	189	23	R	Michigan
Gunner Olszewski	80	WR	6-0	190	24	3	Bemidji State
Mike Onwenu	71	OL	6-3	350	23	2	Michigan
Ronnie Perkins	51	LB	6-3	247	21	R	Oklahoma
Malcolm Perry	19	RB	5-10	175	24	2	Navy
Adrian Phillips	21	DB	5-11	210	29	7	Texas
Matthew Slater	18	WR	6-0	205	35	14	UCLA
Jonnu Smith	81	TE	6-3	248	26	5	Florida Int.
Rhamondre							
Stevenson	38	RB	6-0	227	23	R	Oklahoma
J.J. Taylor	42	RB	5-6	185	23	2	Arizona
Josh Uche	55	LB	6-3	245	22	2	Michigan
Kyle Van Noy	53	LB	6-3	250	30	8	Brigham Young
Shaun Wade	26	CB	6-1	191	22	R	Ohio State
James White	28	RB	5-10	205	29	8	Wisconsin
Joejuan Williams	33	CB	6-3	212	23	3	Vanderbilt
Chase Winovich	50	DL	6-3	250	26	3	Michigan
Deatrich Wise Jr.	91	DL	6-5	275	27	5	Arkansas
Isaiah Wynn	76	OL	6-2	310	25	4	Georgia

## Reserve/Injured

N'Keal Harry	15	WR	6-4	225	23	3	Arizona State
Anfernee Jennings	58	LB	6-3	259	24	2	Alabama
Dalton Keene	44	TE	6-4	251	22	2	Virginia Tech
Raekwon McMillan	46	LB	6-2	242	25	4	Ohio State
Nick Thurman	95	DL	6-4	305	26	2	Houston

## Reserve/Non-Football Injury

Joshuah Bledsoe	34	SAF	5-11	201	24	R	Missouri
Cameron McGrone	45	LB	6-1	236	21	R	Michigan

## Reserve/Physically Unable to Perform

Byron Cowart	99	DL	6-3	300	25	3	Maryland
Stephon Gilmore	24	CB	6-1	202	30	10	South Carolina
Terez Hall	59	LB	6-2	235	24	2	Missouri
Jarrett Stidham	4	QB	6-3	215	25	3	Auburn

## Reserve/Retired

Patrick Chung	23	S	5-11	215	N/A	12	Oregon
Julian Edelman	11	WR	5-10	198	N/A	13	Kent State

## Practice Squad

Tashawn Bower	96	DL	6-5	250	26	4	LSU
Myles Bryant	41	DB	5-9	185	23	2	Washington
James Ferentz	65	OL	6-2	300	32	5	Iowa
Nick Folk	6	K	6-1	222	36	14	Arizona
Garrett Gilbert	14	QB	6-4	221	30	4	SMU
Brian Hoyer	5	QB	6-2	216	35	13	Michigan State
Matt LaCrosse	83	TE	6-6	255	28	5	Illinois
Ben Mason	35	TE	6-3	256	22	R	Michigan
Bill Murray	97	DL	6-4	265	24	1	William & Mary
Tre Nixon	87	WR	6-0	187	23	R	UCF
Alex Redmond	64	G	6-5	294	26	5	UCLA
D'Angelo Ross	39	DB	5-9	190	24	2	New Mexico
Will Sherman	68	OT	6-4	300	22	R	Colorado
Jahlani Tavai	52	MLB	6-2	250	24	3	Hawaii
Kristian Wilkerson	17	WR	6-1	214	24	1	SE Missouri State

Source: Patriots.com. Roster as of Sept. 3, 2021



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# Six underrated Pats who could make a big difference

BY BILL BURT

BBURT@NORTHOFBOSTON.COM

Here are six members of the New England Patriots who aren't household names and will have the opportunity to make their mark on this team in 2021:

## Josh Uche, linebacker

The Patriots are loaded in a lot of areas when it comes to numbers. Linebacker is one of areas. A noted pass rusher out of college, Uche has been asked to do a lot more in his early time here. He is expected to start out as a rotational guy, but from the early looks this summer, he might headed to full-time status if he can cover the short passing and improve his run-stop skills. Bill Belichick loves these specialists/athletes – see Tedy Bruschi – and tries to get more out of them. On a lot of teams with not as



Associated Press photos

Josh Uche (55) sacks Giants quarterback Daniel Jones in the Patriots' final pre-season game.

much depth, Uche might be playing 80% of the defensive snaps. This could be a breakout year and second-round steal by Belichick in 2021.

## Jakob Johnson, full back

The sleeper position of

the Patriots Dynasty Part II was full-back, played by James Develin. He set the tone for a good, up-the-gut running game through the Super Bowl season in 2018. The new Patriots, with the quarterback asked to do a lot less than Tom Brady did,



The Patriots are hoping fullback Jakob Johnson can stay healthy and add more depth and power to their running game.

will be uber-focused on running the football with their bevy of backs and good offensive line. But the first last line of defense is the blocking full-back, which is popping up more and more on NFL rosters. Johnson needs to stay healthy and

push for Pro Bowl status if the Patriots are a legit threat in the AFC.

## Mike Onwenu, left guard

It's not the same as replacing a living legend, but Onwenu taking over for Mr. Reliable, Joe

Thuney, who signed a huge free-agent deal with the Chiefs, is no easy task. While he primarily played right tackle (10 games), Onwenu was the 14th guard chosen in the draft (6th round) and was one of only four rookies who played every game. This is a big deal because this area was the strength on Pats O-line last year. If he continues his good health and goes back to his natural position at guard, with the same approach from 2020 as a rookie, the Patriots ability to be balanced, a rarity with most teams, could be the difference between 8 wins and 12 wins. He's another Michigan guy (see Uche and Chase Winovich), but this one has a mean streak. The less Thuney's name is

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Mac Jones drops back to pass against Washington during a pre-season game. Though he was the fifth quarterback taken in the 2021 NFL Draft, he had arguably the best pre-season of all rookie passers.

# THE NEXT BRADY?

## Mac Jones shares qualities with former Pats QB

BY BILL BURT

BBURT@NORTHOFBOSTON.COM

Bill Belichick is known for being ahead of the curve.

He implemented a two tight end offense a decade ago. Now everyone has two pass-catching tight ends.

A decade earlier, he made the slot receiver an offensive fixture. Now everyone has a tough, little, yards-fighting slot guy.

The term he invented for players expected to play another position or two (or three or four), “position flexibility,” is now common in football meeting rooms.

Then came April 29, 2021 when Belichick surprised many people by not angling the Patriots for a higher draft pick to snap up one of those new-wave QBs favored around the league — the big, athletic, run-pass option guys who are playmakers when a play breaks down.

After North Dakota State’s Trey Lance was taken third overall by the San Francisco 49ers, there was one of those dudes left in the mix — Justin Fields.

The Patriots needed to angle into the top 10 to get Fields, who was arguably the best proven athletic quarterback in the draft.

Instead of trading for a better pick, the Patriots, with the 15th pick, chose Mac Jones.

Mac Jones?

Here are some of the abstract qualities college scouts used to describe the former Alabama QB: Smart. Tough. Competitive. Non-athletic. Accurate. Driven. A winner.

Do those qualities sound familiar?

Yup. Tom Brady.

How ironic that the same coach who “let” Brady get away from New England

over philosophical differences — Brady didn’t want to be “ruled” anymore — would replace him with a clone.

NFL.com lists some of the technical qualities about Jones, as described by scouts:

- Won’t take unnecessary chances very often.

- Feel for pocket; slides to avoid pressure.

- Very confident making placement throws.

- Feathery touch attacking over the top of linebackers.

- Accuracy to prevent receivers from having to break stride.

- Expedites release on hot reads and in the face of pressure.

- Perfect placement with hanging it high for receiver to leap and make plays.

- Wins at the back shoulder.

- Willing to get rid of the ball rather than take a loss or make a mistake.

- Some elusive qualities when he turns into a runner.

OK, apart from the last one, this description is Brady.

It should also be mentioned that Brady and Jones showed another trait when they played in college — patience.

Both had reason to transfer.

Brady had to fight and claw his way onto the field, losing a battle to start at Michigan with Brian Griese as a sophomore.

Then, after starting as a junior, Brady spent his senior year sharing duties with a freshman, Drew Henson.

Jones spent three years playing behind Jalen Hurts and Tua Tagovailoa.

Almost any other major program would’ve started the Floridian as a freshman. But Jones, who was

red-shirted, stayed in Tuscaloosa long enough to take over for an injured Tagovailoa as a junior, when he lead Alabama to a Citrus Bowl win over ... Michigan. His national championship ring came a year later.

Survival instinct and stick-to-itiveness despite the anguish, is something to behold.

Belichick has spent a lot of time over the past decade talking about mobile quarterbacks and how tough they are to defend.

Talking about Cam Newton before the Patriots played Carolina in October 2017, he said, “When you’re talking about mobile quarterbacks, guys that are tough to handle, tackle, can throw, run, make good decisions — I mean, I would put Newton at the top of the list.”

“He makes good decisions, he can run, he’s strong, he’s hard to tackle,” Belichick said. “He can do a lot of different things, beat you in a lot of different ways.”

When Belichick looked at Brady — probably the least mobile quarterback of his generation — he saw what could be accomplished with controlled passing.

He still believes it can work, despite the league’s trend toward the likes of Justin Fields. Belichick’s message to the NFL: “We are not changing.”

It’s asking a lot — probably too much — to think Jones is “The Next Brady.” That’s not fair for anyone.

But the traits are there, they really are.

Belichick expended some draft capital to see if it is a possibility. Now we’ll see how long it takes the rest of the NFL to come around.

You can email Bill Burt at [bburt@northofboston.com](mailto:bburt@northofboston.com).



# SIX

■ Continued from Page 12

mentioned, the better the Patriots will be.

## Henry Anderson, defensive tackle/end

His is another underrated free-agent signing by Bill Belichick. A noted run-stopper – and oft-injured – over his first three seasons with the

Colts, Anderson became a tough, interior pass-rusher (7 sacks) in his first year with the Jets. He established himself as an every-down player in New York, missing only three games over three seasons. He can play inside, while his preference appears to be at defensive end. This interesting veteran signing by Belichick makes you wonder if Anderson will float around the line as a rotational player. He doesn't have to get 10 sacks to make a difference but quarterback pressures, a problem the last two seasons, could be his biggest asset.

## Jalen Mills, defensive back

While Mills is technically a cornerback, he was among

the most versatile defensive backs in the league, playing at all five positions including both

corner spots, slot corner, and both safety positions. Is he a possible replacement for Stephon Gilmore? Maybe. But his experience and the fact he signed a four-year deal says Belichick has plans to use him a lot — in a lot of different ways. His worth multiplies if Gilmore misses an extended amount



COURTESY OF THE NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS/David Silverman

**New England Patriots offensive lineman Michael Onwenu was one of the breakout stars of 2020, starting every game at tackle. This year he returns to guard, his natural position.**



Associated Press photos

**Rookie Christian Barmore is surrounded by veterans, which will give him a chance to grow into his enormous potential.**

of time or is traded. He has looked good this summer. His aggressive style, particularly with his hands, reminds some of Ty Law. While we focused more on the tight ends and pass rusher when free agents signed in New England, Mills adds grit to an already gritty defense.

## Christian Barmore, defensive tackle

Some had him as the No. 1 defensive tackle in the draft. So how did the Patriots get him at 38th, moving up from 46th overall? Well, there were alleged issues

about his coach-ability. That hasn't appeared to be the case. The 6-foot-4, 310-pounder has looked great in one-on-one drills. Could he be the next Richard Seymour, who was two inches taller, and arguably the best disruptor of his generation? That's probably too much to ask, but he's got some real pros all around him (Anderson, Lawrence Guy, Davon Godchaux) and behind him (Kyle Van Noy and Dont'a Hightower). He won't be asked to be a star — at least not in September.



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