



**2025 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS  
SEASON PREVIEW**

# DRIVEN DUO

Vrabel and Maye  
hope to emulate NFL's  
winning formula:  
The relationship  
between head coach  
and star QB

ABBIE PARR/AP

BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

Friday, September 5, 2025



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# 2025 NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS SEASON PREVIEW



ABBIE PARR

Optimism abounds in New England, with former Patriots star Mike Vrabel returning as head coach for the 2025 season.

## BOTTOM LINE

Bill Burt's column on the real expectations for 2025, saying "Eight is Enough," as in wins.  
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## COVER STORY

The relationship between head coach and quarterback is tantamount in the NFL and Hector Longo says the Mike Vrabel-Drake Maye duo have a lot to learn about each other.  
*Page 6*

## FIVE GUYS!

Hector Longo looks at five new, young faces you should know heading into their first year with Patriots. *Page 8*

## TOP TO BOTTOM

Ranking the 32 NFL teams, Hector Longo has the Kansas City Chiefs back in the winner's circle with Patriots at No. 19. *Page 10*

## SIGNING ON

The Patriots spent a lot of money in free agency in March and Bill Burt notes that crew, not draft picks, will be key in keeping this team together in 2025. *Page 13*

## BY THE NUMBERS

The Patriots offensive stats from 2024 as well as the NFL standings from a year ago. *Page 15.*

# 2025 PATRIOTS SCHEDULE

WK	DATE	OPPONENT	TIME/TV
1.	Sun., Sept. 7	Las Vegas Raiders	1 PM, CBS
2.	Sun., Sept. 14	At Miami Dolphins	1 PM, CBS
3.	Sun., Sept. 21	Pittsburgh Steelers	1 PM, CBS
4.	Sun., Sept. 28	Carolina Panthers	1 PM, FOX
5.	Sun., Oct. 5	At Buffalo Bills	8:20 PM, NBC
6.	Sun., Oct. 12	At New Orleans Saints	4:25 PM, CBS
7.	Sun., Oct. 19	At Tennessee Titans	1 PM, CBS
8.	Sun., Oct. 26	Cleveland Browns	1 PM, FOX
9.	Sun., Nov. 2	Atlanta Falcons	1 PM, CBS
10.	Sun., Nov. 9	At Tampa Bay Buccaneers	1 PM, CBS
11.	Thu., Nov. 13	New York Jets	8:15 PM, Prime Video
12.	Sun., Nov. 23	At Cincinnati Bengals	1 PM, CBS
13.	Mon., Dec. 1	New York Giants	8:15 PM, ESPN
14.	Week 14 (Bye Week)		
15.	Sun., Dec. 14	Buffalo Bills	1 PM, CBS
16.	Sun., Dec. 21	At Baltimore Ravens	1 PM, CBS
17.	Sun., Dec. 28	At New York Jets	1 PM, CBS
18.	TBD	Miami Dolphins	

Note: Beginning Week 5 (Oct. 5), all games are subject to flex scheduling.



SAMANTHA CHOW

Pete Carroll's long NFL journey brings him back to Foxborough Sept. 7, as head coach of the Las Vegas Raiders.

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# Eight is enough

## Patriots goal in 2025 should be to set up rest of decade

### Bill Burt

I'm stepping back, a bit, from "The Mike Vrabel Euphoria."

Sorry to disappoint a lot of people a few days before the opener.

Yes, I too was engulfed in that euphoria, as in the new, tougher new-sheriff-in-town, moving on from the 2024 clown show, the emphasis on "accountability" and, of course, the Patriots schedule, one of the easiest – only two, barely ranked easier – in the NFL the next four months.

All of those things matter and will play a role in changing the course of the franchise moving forward.

In fact, I was thinking 10 wins, possibly, and nine wins probably, are there for the taking.

But with reality setting in, the Patriots are still lacking in high-end talent; as in true all-stars and, really, game-changers.

While there are a few possibilities, particularly top draftees Treveon Henderson (RB) and Will Campbell (LT), and a few, new and interesting highly-regarded free agent adds in Carlton Davis (CB) and Milton Williams (DT), the guess is no Pro Bowls for any of them just yet.

Of course, the key is "The Big Guy," quarterback Drake Maye.

At least for this fall, Maye is a question mark. He has top eight qualities, but also "top 25" in accomplishments



CHARLES KRUPA

**The Patriots are counting on first-round draft pick offensive tackle Will Campbell to be a key building block on the offensive line.**

(one win).

Basically, so goes Maye, so goes the Patriots season.

What I seem to be hearing, and I disagree with, is comparison with the Washington Commanders of 2024 and their then-rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels and coach Dan Quinn.

They shocked the pro football world by not only finishing 12-5 and winning the last five games, but they KO'd the No. 1 seeded Detroit Lions (45-31) before losing in the NFC Championship game (55-23) to the eventual Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles.

The Patriots are not

"there" in terms of on-field talent just yet. Unlike the Commanders, the Patriots roster was completely overhauled on both sides of the trenches.

Those changes usually take time. The fact the Commanders got a big-time Pro Bowl effort from Bobby Wagner, keyed an under-rated defense.

The Patriots need to develop a few more A-level players, which would put them in another category altogether.

I'm also concerned about the Diggs addition. It was a big risk, not only with his ACL injury, but his attitude.



BRUCE KLUCKHOHN/AP

**Rookie running back Treveon Henderson (32), here celebrating after scoring a touchdown in a preseason game in Minnesota, is a potential game-changer for the Patriots.**

He has played for four NFL teams now, including three pretty good ones in Minnesota, Buffalo and Houston.

Is he going to be a throw-me-the-damn-ball guy or is he going to oversee the wide receiver room and possibly develop an eventual heir to his top spot?

Is he a one-and-doner, \$20 million in guarantees, or will he take his leadership places he's never gone before.

If Diggs is anything close to the Red Sox addition of Alex Bregman, he will be the most important player on the roster not named Drake Maye, helping a

young quarterback learn the ropes.

I'm guessing the Patriots will be somewhere in between the hype and the recent history, particularly the many bad drafts since 2019.

Eight wins, while not enough to play extra football, would be acceptable if we are talking about light at the end of the tunnel.

The Patriots were sorely bruised when Vrabel took over. But contending for championships does not happen in months, more like years, particularly with average — top to bottom — talent.

The Patriots need to show not only their fans, but the rest of the league, that future will include them.

Obviously, a playoff game or two would not only be welcome, but desired. That experience alone would mean a lot moving forward.

But if the 2025 season ends with the Patriots winning eight games, a realistic expectation, missing January football, yet we are talking about a quarterback that appears to have "It!," that would be not only OK, but a success.

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



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First-year head coach Mike Vrabel, left, and second-year quarterback Drake Maye, right, will make — or break — the Patriots this year.

# THE RELATIONSHIP

## WHERE WILL VRABEL, MAYE TAKE FRANCHISE NEXT?

**By Hector Longo**  
» Staff Writer

When the Raiders moved from Oakland to Las Vegas for the 2020 season, quarterback Derek Carr, in a show of solidarity and commitment to the franchise, bought a home right next to then-coach Jon Gruden. The move was symbolic,

but Drake Maye and Mike Vrabel might just want to think about it.

There are relationships in sports that are important. None, though, more than the one between head coach and the starting quarterback.

Together, Vrabel and Maye will either make or re-break this storied New England Patriots franchise. Get used

to it, boys. With Opening Sunday 2025 just days away, the duo is linked in the rescue of a Patriots team that is coming off back to back 4-13 seasons.

It's a fact, and a responsibility, that neither is about to take lightly. Vrabel talked about it all the way back in January.

"Drake is going to be his

own person, but I'm going to give him some things that I feel like are necessary to help us win football games," Vrabel promised. "We have to be a very efficient passing football team. When you look at statistically what wins in the National Football League, our ability to affect the other team's quarterback and our ability

to provide for an efficient quarterback and passing game is a high contributor to success."

Maye, just 1-9 as a rookie in games he started and finished, was the third pick overall in the 2024 NFL Draft. Coming off a 10-interception, 9-fumble whirlwind of a campaign — with 15 TD passes and two

rushing scores, Maye made all the visual and peripheral move in the offseason here.

It's his team now, and the 23-year-old from North Carolina knows it.

Vrabel's return to coaching, one year after he was relieved of those same duties in Tennessee, comes at one

See **FRANCHISE**, Page 9



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# 5 GUYS

By Hector Longo

» hlongo@northofboston.com

**F**OXBOROUGH – For two years, and maybe since Tom Brady officially left these parts in January of 2020, the New England Patriots haven't just been bad (33-51 combined record), they've been boring, too.

Expect that to change this fall at Gillette Stadium because of "The

## Patriots rookie quintet will be at center of offensive turnaround this fall

Rookies."

In fact, starting in the spring workouts, five newcomers have forged into the spotlight on a football team craving a spark, some life and big plays on both sides of the ball.

Here are a fistful of potential building blocks that the Patriots are counting on to make them better and make your Sunday afternoons much more palatable to watch.

### KYLE WILLIAMS

A sneaky rookie receiver, Williams was the talk of the opening two weeks at training camp. It was almost as if no Patriots cornerback could run with the third-rounder out of Washington State.

A big hit suffered in the Minnesota exhibition has shelved Williams and slowed down the hype train and his development just a bit.

But when November and December roll around, keep an eye on this kid. He's the deep threat Maye, and the rest of us, truly crave.

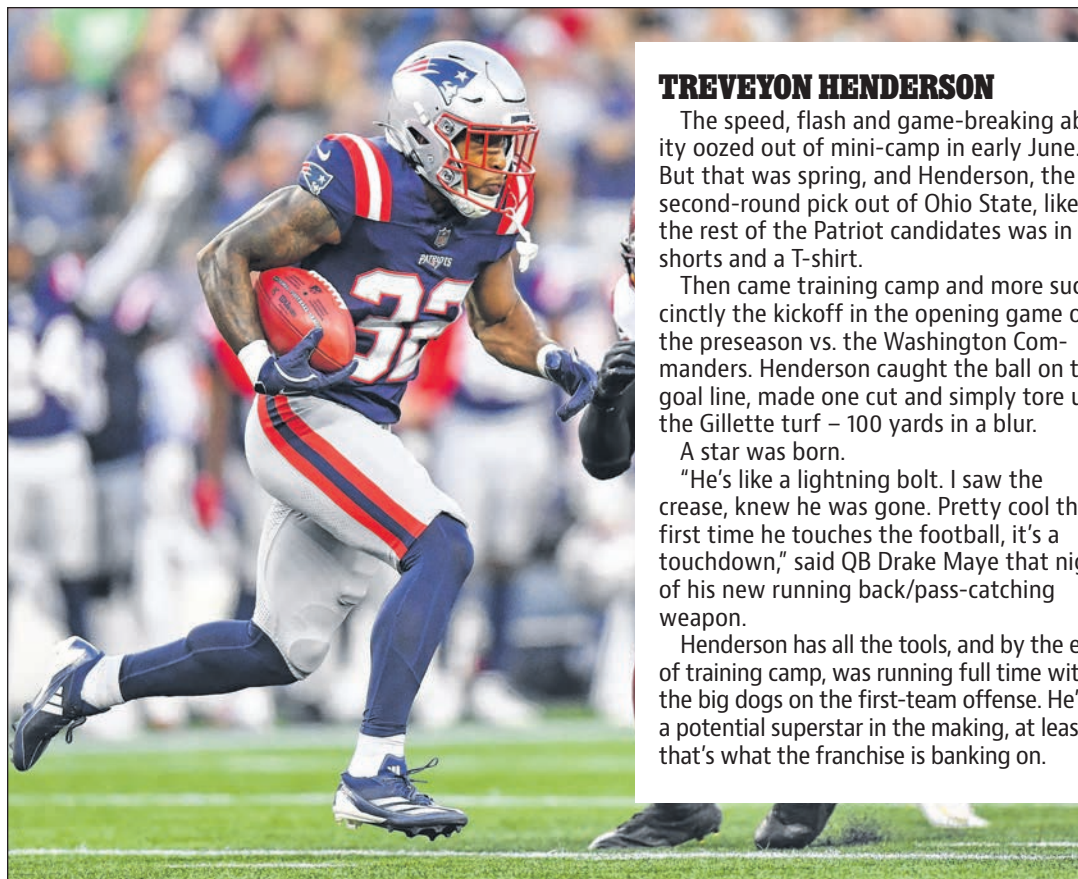


### JARED WILSON

A guard? Seriously? Absolutely.

If Mike Vrabel is going to get his wish and run the football, Wilson, a third-round pick out of Georgia, will be paving the way.

Wilson has had more than his share of "pancakes" this summer and will be a key on the left side with Campbell, building the ground game of the pre-season and future.



### TREVEYON HENDERSON

The speed, flash and game-breaking ability oozed out of mini-camp in early June. But that was spring, and Henderson, the second-round pick out of Ohio State, like the rest of the Patriot candidates was in shorts and a T-shirt.

Then came training camp and more succinctly the kickoff in the opening game of the preseason vs. the Washington Commanders. Henderson caught the ball on the goal line, made one cut and simply tore up the Gillette turf – 100 yards in a blur.

A star was born.

"He's like a lightning bolt. I saw the crease, knew he was gone. Pretty cool the first time he touches the football, it's a touchdown," said QB Drake Maye that night of his new running back/pass-catching weapon.

Henderson has all the tools, and by the end of training camp, was running full time with the big dogs on the first-team offense. He's a potential superstar in the making, at least that's what the franchise is banking on.

### EFTON CHISM III

Undrafted and unheralded when he signed as a rookie free-agent, it grew quickly apparent through the spring and summer that Chism, the Eastern Washington product, was also uncoverable.

The 5-10, 198-pounder has an opportunity early in the year with New England's receiving corps a bit banged up to gain Maye's confidence and develop some chemistry with the second-year QB. Don't be surprised if he shows up in September and has New Englanders hunting for his game jersey at the Patriots Pro Shop by Week 3.



### WILL CAMPBELL

When you swing for the fences with an offensive tackle on the No. 4 draft pick overall, "serviceable" is not an option.

Pro Bowls – plural, not singular – are expected of Campbell, New England's new starting left tackle out of Louisiana State.

Campbell has the attitude of Patriots' standout linemen of the past – Matt Light, Dan Koppen and Logan Mankins come to mind. What he lacks in arm length, one of the most tattered topics on Boston sports radio this spring and summer, he makes up for in nastiness.

Campbell will force even the most fringe fan to keep one eye in the trenches with his athleticism and penchant to punish.



## » Franchise

Continued from Page 6

of the darkest times in New England Patriots' history.

You have to go back to 1992 and 1993 – when the franchise was 2-14 in Dick MacPherson's second season and 5-11 in Bill Parcells first year coaching the franchise for a stretch this bad.

Parcells at least gave the franchise a glimmer of hope in 1993, drafting quarterback Drew Bledsoe No. 1 overall. There is similar optimism with Maye. But should there be? As a rookie, on a bad roster, Bledsoe led New England to all five wins that year, losing seven starts.

Maye did not reach those "heights" as a rookie. Regardless, he owns the room.

"We've just been trying to buy in. Coach (Mike) Vabel came here and made it clear from day one, 'Hey, drop your egos at the door.' We're here to work; we want guys

to finish, work hard and give effort," said Maye this past week. "I think we're starting to see that and build that, and we've just got to keep working and bring it to the field Week 1. So, I'm just trying to do my part, try to come out here every day and try to get better."

Vrabel's success on his previous coaching stint in Tennessee can't be overlooked.

Gruff, sarcastic and yeah, a little bit ornery, he maintains a grin and a likeable personality that surely pays dividends every time he needs to escape a tough spot.

In Tennessee, he had things rolling. Hall of Fame-bound running back Derrick Henry had a lot to do with that.

Henry ran for 8,268 yards and 85 touchdowns in Vrabel's six seasons leading the Titans.

That dedication to the running game should carry over here as Vrabel attempts to build a foundation behind his three-headed rushing



CHARLES KRUPA

**The Foxborough faithful will be watching new head coach Mike Vrabel very closely this season.**

attack with Rhamondre Stevenson, Antonio Gibson and summer sensation TreVeyon Henderson.

"I think we're trying to build a team that's bringing it every play. No plays off, no days off. What Coach is

trying to build, what the guys are trying to give into is, if you're not going to play hard, then – you can mess up and make a mistake, but do it at full speed," said Maye. "I think we're trying to bring that and play hard,

play harder than the other team, be in good condition, then from there, just try to execute in situational football. I think that's what we're preaching. So many games are won and lost by one score and situations, so

try to excel in that area, and from there, just take care of the football and give us a chance every week."

The toughness and confidence – the latter of which the previous head coach (Mayo) never had and the guy before that (Bill Belichick) overflowed with – will play well here in New England ... As long as Maye shows growth and the franchise heads in a positive direction.

And therein lies the pressure. Can the coach and the quarterback handle things when the road gets rocky?

The bond between them simply can't fray. If they do it, they must do it together.

Or they will simply go the way of Mac Jones or Jerod Mayo. And Patriots football will sink even deeper into the abyss.

Like Will Smith and Martin Lawrence promised to each other in the "Bad Boys" movies.

Maye and Vrabel ride together. And Maye and Vrabel die together.

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## CHIEFS' BEST...

## On Pro Football

Hector Longo

It's a nightmare that would petrify even the bravest New England football fan:

Patrick Mahomes wins Super Bowl LX for his fourth championship on a last-minute pass to, gulp, Tyquan Thornton.

When it was announced on Tuesday that the former Patriots second-round pick Thornton had made the Chiefs' 53-man roster, it actually became a distinct possibility.

Like them or not, the Chiefs are again a favorite in what has grown to be an absolute beast of an American Football Conference.

Without Mahomes' presence, teams like Buffalo, Baltimore and Cincinnati would all be serious threats to reach Santa Clara, Calif., in February.

But Josh Allen and Lamar Jackson have not been able to unseat Mahomes when it mattered, and while Joe Burrow did it – back in the 2021 season – his Bengals haven't sustained or mattered since.

With the 2025 National Football League season upon us, we take a look at all the NFL clubs from 1-to-32 and how we expect them to stack up.

### 1 - KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (12-5)

**Why they will win:** Mahomes is the top force in the game. And Kansas City's Super Bowl defeat left a new, bitter taste in the AFC champions' mouth.

**Why they won't:** Has Kansas City done enough in the trenches to consistently compete with the toughest teams in the game.

**Theme for 2025:** The dynasty drones on. And this time, the



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS

From left, Lamar Jackson of the Ravens, Josh Allen of the Bills and Justin Hebert of the Chargers will once again be the top candidates to challenge the supremacy of Patrick Mahomes (far right) and the Chiefs.

Chiefs do it the hard way. With the strength of the AFC West – there is no doormat and any of the other three teams in the division could find the playoffs – KC won't be able to garner the top seed and the bye. There may be two road games on tap. The Chiefs overcome, and like the Seattle Super Bowl did for Tom Brady, it galvanizes Mahomes' claim to the most elite players of all-time status.

### 2 - BALTIMORE RAVENS (13-4)

**Why they will win:** Baltimore has a score or two to settle from last year. Lamar Jackson could easily pick up another MVP trophy. He's got better weapons, and a healthy Mark Andrews will make up for lost time.

**Why they won't:** The Chiefs are in the AFC.

**Theme for 2025:** We're not second-class citizens. Unfortunately, if they can't beat the Chiefs, this could continue as a recurring theme.

### 3 - MINNESOTA VIKINGS (12-5)

**Why they will win:** Iron sharpens iron. Once again, the Vikings rise to the top in the NFC North, the game's top division. The rookie QB, JJ McCarthy, handles the heat,

and Minnesota takes the next step and unseats the Eagles in the NFC.

**Why they won't:** Can you count on the kid? He has to be better than Sam Darnold, right? Right?

**Theme for 2025:** Move over Sean McVay. The best coach and staff in the conference resides in Minnesota.

### 4 - BUFFALO BILLS (13-4)

**Why they will win:** Josh Allen might be the best player in the game, week in and week out. He's carries inferior rosters to repeated AFC title games.

**Why they won't:** Coach Sean McDermott has proven to not be ready for prime time over and over again.

**Theme for 2025:** Playing catch-up. A Week 1 Sunday night home loss to Baltimore puts the Bills in chase mode for the season. The elusive top seed, complete with a bye and homefield through the conference playoffs could be the deciding factor to send Josh Allen to his first Super Bowl. I just feel like this year Buffalo suffers a similar fate, winning the AFC East comfortably but again absorbing postseason disappointment. It would be poetic for the final game at Highmark Stadium to be the AFC title

game. Instead, it will be in Baltimore.

### 5 - DETROIT LIONS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** The Lions offense has been the football Mona Lisa – simple brilliance. The pieces on the field remain. There is talent, confidence and swagger.

**Why they won't:** The mastermind, former OC Ben Johnson, is now a head coach in Chicago.

**Theme for 2025:** It was us, not him. QB Jared Goff and the boys are ready to ring up the offensive cash register again. Keep an eye on Aidan Hutchinson and the defense, though. They were decimated by injury a year ago.

### 6 - LOS ANGELES CHARGERS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** It's Year 2 of Jim Harbaugh, and QB Justin Herbert is so due for the breakthrough.

**Why they won't:** The cornerstone has been yanked from the offense. Left tackle Rashawn Slater's season-ending injury is too much to overcome.

**Theme for 2025:** It's time for a change in the AFC.

### 7 - CINCINNATI BENGALS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** Coach Zac

Taylor finds a way to keep Joe Burrow upright, and the kid with the best toys in the business actually gets a chance to play with them.

**Why they won't:** Ted Karras is the best offensive lineman on the roster.

**Theme for 2025:** A Super Bowl championship has been Burrow's destiny since he left LSU. Live it.

### 8 - WASHINGTON COMMANDERS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** Jayden Daniels is the real deal, and now that Terry McLaurin has been paid, he's happy. Together, they keep Washington right in the thick of things in the NFC.

**Why they won't:** I have to be honest. They simply didn't look good in their three days in Foxborough this August.

**Theme for 2025:** Can we trust Dan Quinn or is he just one of the luckiest guys on earth?

### 9 - LOS ANGELES RAMS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** Sean McVay remains one of the game's top coaches. Puka Nacua and Kyren Williams are bigtime weapons on the offense, and Matt Stafford's back cooperates for all 17 weeks.

**Why they won't:** Stafford's

camp injury issues are a scary subject in LA. Dude is 37 years old and has been in the league, taking shots since 2009.

**Theme for 2025:** Keep the old man on his feet and out of traction.

### 10 - SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** Brock Purdy is better than people believe, and general manager John Lynch has done a masterful job of effectively replenishing the weapons around him.

**Why they won't:** The receiving corps has been shredded by injuries, and the young guys like Ricky Pearsall are promising but aren't quite ready yet.

**Theme for 2025:** Embrace the sleeper role and bounce back into contention after a brutal (6-11) 2024.

### 11 - TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS (11-6)

**Why they will win:** Tom Brady's commitment to winning still lingers in Tampa, where Baker Mayfield and year after year of quality drafting have made the Bucs the big fish in a tiny NFC South pond.

**Why they won't:** The Bucky Irving bubble bursts on offense, where there are



questions up front on the offensive line.

**Theme for 2025:** The division stinks, so let's eat.

## 12 - HOUSTON TEXANS (10-7)

**Why they will win:** Remember the name Woody Marks. He adds a dimension of explosiveness in the run game to an already potent Houston attack.

**Why they won't:** The Texans tried to revamp their awful offensive line, but Rome was not built in a day. They're not the Patriots up front, but they are in that sad offensive line neighborhood.

**Theme for 2025:** Find a way to get 10. That's plenty good in the AFC South.

## 13 - MIAMI DOLPHINS (10-7)

**Why they will win:** Tua Tagovailoa stays healthy. Coach Mike McDaniel sticks to task. And the Miami offense hits on all cylinders.

**Why they won't:** McDaniel's need to prove how "out of the box" he is will prove to be his final undoing.

**Theme for 2025:** Pedal to the metal. We've got the best weapons in the AFC outside of Cincinnati.

## 14 - PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (9-8)

**Why they will win:** The Eagles overcome the fatigue from 2024's run to the title. Philly might need another MVP-type year from Saquon Barkley and Jalen Hurts to continue his upward trajectory.

**Why they won't:** Talent superseded any potential Philly issues – see AJ Brown's sideline book club – in 2024. Nick Siriani can't overcome that again.

**Theme for 2025:** One title is nice, but a repeat title equals history.

## 15 - CHICAGO BEARS (9-8)

**Why they will win:** New coach Ben Johnson unlocks the greatness that resides in quarterback Caleb Williams.

**Why they won't:** Williams isn't the next Peyton Manning. He's the next Vince Evans.

**Theme for 2025:** Time to prove why Williams deserved to be the No. 1 pick in 2024.

## 16 - GREEN BAY PACKERS (8-9)

**Why they will win:** Running back Josh Jacobs has a 1,500-yard rushing year left in the tank.

**Why they won't:** They reside in one of the best divisions in NFL history.

**Theme for 2025:** Don't forget about us. We belong in the conversation with the Vikes and Lions.

## 17 - PITTSBURGH STEELERS (8-9)

**Why they will win:** Mike Tomlin is a sleeper top-10 coach in the history of the NFL. He simply won't let this franchise lose.

**Why they won't:** Aaron Rodgers. See the 2024 New York Jets for further evidence.

**Theme for 2025:** We look much different, but we're still the Steelers.

## 18 - DENVER BRONCOS (8-9)

**Why they will win:** Another team that has drafted so well to bolster its roster finally smartened up and brought in a real head coach in Sean Payton.

**Why they won't:** Quarterback Bo Nix, after a sparkling rookie year, has a Mac Jones-like sophomore season, and the Broncos bounce back a bit.

**Theme for 2025:** As fluky as last year feels, Denver is for real.

## 19 - NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (7-10)

**Why they will win:** Coach Mike Vrabel stabilizes a faltering franchise, and Drake Maye progresses up the NFL quarterback ladder.

**Why they won't:** A thin, unspectacular roster can't overcome Maye's faults, namely youth and a penchant for the turnover.

**Theme for 2025:** There's a new, new sheriff in town. And this one means business.

## 20 - NEW YORK JETS (7-10)

**Why they will win:** Justin Fields, after stops in Chicago and Pittsburgh, hits his stride in the New York. The QB is dynamic and has to be a major upgrade from Aaron Rodgers.



MATT KROHN

**Minnesota Vikings** quarterback J.J. McCarthy has shown that he can handle pressure — and win.

**Why they won't:** They're the Jets.

**Theme for 2025:** New coach Aaron Glenn is the guy to put it all together.

## 21 - LAS VEGAS RAIDERS (7-10)

**Why they will win:** Pete Carroll has taken over the program, but Tom Brady is really pulling the strings.

**Why they won't:** The oldest coach in the game, you have to wonder if Carroll has the time to work his Geno Smith-infused magic in Vegas.

**Theme for 2025:** Time to roll the dice with the Raiders.

## 22 - DALLAS COWBOYS (7-10)

**Why they will win:** Dak Prescott stays healthy. Micah Parsons is somehow made happy. And Dallas finally reaches its potential.

**Why they won't:** It's a once-fabled franchise on just a pitiful stretch of ineptitude under owner Jerry Jones.

**Theme for 2025:** Can a team nobody cares about that has lacked relevance since the 1990s still be considered, "America's Team?"

## 23 - ARIZONA CARDINALS (6-11)

**Why they will win:** Kyler Murray might have one of the



MATT SLOCUM

**Eyeing another Lombardi run? Hector Longo sees the Eagles' Jalen Hurts, left, and Saquon Barkley more in the middle of the NFL pack in 2025.**

most fun, explosive offenses on the planet ... ok, well at least west of Detroit.

**Why they won't:** The Falcons couldn't stop Arizona State on defense.

**Theme for 2025:** Ring up the numbers and try to win track meets.

## 24 - ATLANTA FALCONS (6-11)

**Why they will win:** The quarterback question has seemed to be solved with Michael Penix.

**Why they won't:** The "soft" tag, especially on the defensive side, has plagued this franchise, which seems to still be reeling from losing a 28-3 lead in the Super Bowl to the Patriots.

**Theme for 2025:** This is the year tight end Kyle Pitts puts it all together.

## 25 - JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS (6-11)

**Why they will win:** The division is a cast of have-nots. Maybe, it's just Jacksonville's turn.

**Why they won't:** Trevor Lawrence is one of the NFL's greatest disappointments since the turn of the century.

**Theme for 2025:** Time for Trevor to give it one last real run in Duval County.

## 26 - SEATTLE SEAHAWKS (6-11)

**Why they will win:** Sam Darnold continues the storybook rejuvenation of his career, coming West after a monster year with the Vikings.

**Why they won't:** Too much turnover on offense can't be a good thing in coach Mike MacDonald's second year.

**Theme for 2025:** Sam is a step forward for Seattle, not backward.

## 27 - CAROLINA PANTHERS (5-12)

**Why they will win:** After a benching in 2024, Bryce Young found a way to breathe life into his slumbering career.

**Why they won't:** The second half of last year was an aberration.

**Theme for 2025:** Time for the Panthers to prove they need to be taken seriously again.

## 28 - INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (5-12)

**Why they will win:** There are five or six potential all-pros on the roster – guys like RB Jonathan Taylor and lineman Quenton Nelson.

**Why they won't:** Coach Shane Steichen sealed this team's 2025 fate when he named Daniel Jones as his starting quarterback. Not

that Anthony Richardson is the answer, but one thing is certain, Jones has no shot to succeed.

**Theme for 2025:** Somehow, Steichen finds a QB in a haystack.

## 29 - TENNESSEE TITANS (4-13)

**Why they will win:** Cam Ward lives up to the billing of the No. 1 pick and re-energizes the franchise.

**Why they won't:** Ward steps into a situation similar to Drake Maye with little to nothing around him.

**Theme for 2025:** We've got a ton of work to do, and not enough time to do it.

## 30 - CLEVELAND BROWNS (3-14)

**Why they will win:** Somehow, they make the move early and send embattled coach Kevin Stefanski packing.

**Why they won't:** Joe Flacco is the starting QB. No, folks, this isn't 2005. It's 2025.

**Theme for 2025:** Browns can't do anything for you.

## 31 - NEW YORK GIANTS (3-14)

**Why they will win:** Rookie QB Jaxon Dart is the steal of the draft and injects some life in an offense that otherwise will waste on the game's top talents, WRs Malik Nabers.

**Why they won't:** Mismanagement and a coach that is overmatched, Brian Daboll, has left one of the game's storied franchises in disarray.

**Theme for 2025:** We've got one Dart left, and we can't settle for anything but a bulls eye.

## 32 - NEW ORLEANS SAINTS (2-15)

**Why they will win:** They won't.

**Why they won't:** The Saints have their sights set on Texas Longhorns QB Arch Manning with the No. 1 pick overall. They're not about to let winning get in the way.

**Theme for 2025:** Wake us up when it's over.

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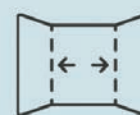
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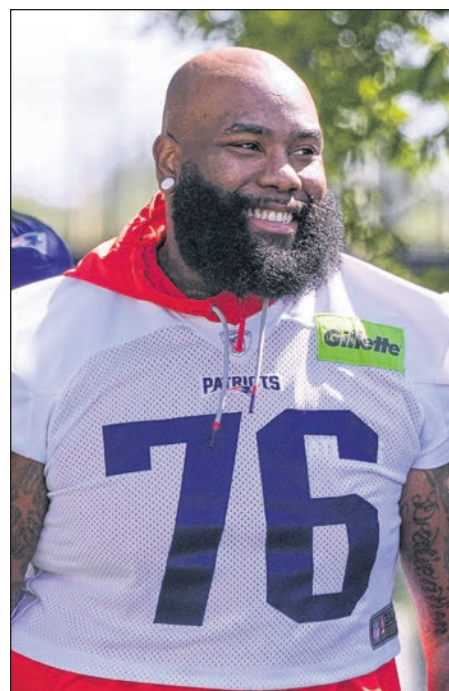
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Some notable signings from the Patriots free agent class of 2025: From left, cornerback Carlton Davis, defensive end Milton Williams, offensive tackle Morgan Moses and linebacker Harold Landry III.

# Free agents, not draftees, key to Year 1 of Vrabel Era

By Bill Burt

» Executive Sports Editor

Even New England Patriots coach Mike Vrabel got caught up in the early excitement about the 2025 season when he said, “We won free agency.”

Honestly, Vrabel’s optimism seemed a little braggadocios, out of the Rex Ryan Foot-In-Mouth mode, that week-long Patriots spending spree beginning on March 12, in which they added several pieces, almost all starters, looks like a potential winner.

Here were the key signings:

- ▶ DT Milton Williams, 4 years, \$104M
- ▶ CB Carlton Davis, 3 years, \$54M
- ▶ OLB Harold Landry, 3 years, \$43.5M
- ▶ LB Robert Spillane, 3 years, \$33M
- ▶ RT Morgan Moses, 3 years, \$24M
- ▶ C Garrett Bradbury, 2 years, \$9.5M

Then a week later, it wasn’t the most expensive, but the biggest headline grabber: Stefon Diggs, agreeing to a 3-year, \$63.5M.

All of them were paid to start for the Patriots in the opener on Sept. 7 against the Las Vegas Raiders. And all will.



The Patriots hope this will be a familiar sight in 2025: Stefon Diggs (8) hauling in a deep pass for the Patriots.

There were several other free agent additions, all one or two year deals for backups, including quarterback Joshua Dobbs (2 years, \$8M), wide receiver Mack Hollins (2 years \$8.4M) and defensive tackle Khyiris Tonga (1 year, \$2.1M), all of whom will add value to the depth chart.

The type of list is nothing new. Bill Belichick made a similar statement in 2021, another Bob Kraft

wallet-opening free agent attack.

They signed LB Matthew Judon (4 years, \$56M), TE Jonnu Smith (4 years, \$50M), Hunter Henry (3 years, \$37.5M), WR Nelson Agholor (2 year, \$2M), DB Jalen Mills (4 years, \$24M), WR Kendrick Bourne (3 years, \$22.5M), DE Henry Anderson (2 years, \$7M) and re-signed DT David Godchaux (2 years, \$21M) and DE Deatrich Wise (4 years, \$30M).

What did that big free agent frenzy yield?

The Patriots improved from 2020’s COVID season of 7-9 to 10-7 in Mac Jones rookie year, making the playoffs.

But that bump soon disappeared and the rest was history.

The problem wasn’t really the wasted money on free agents, but instead another problem was exposed: the Patriots drafting.

There is only one starter remaining on the Patriots drafted from 2017 through 2022, right guard Michael Onwenu and defensive tackle Christian Barmore.

And the 2022 draft class, which should be key in defining the Patriots three seasons later is officially a bust with not one of the 10 draftees with the Patriots after first round bust Cole Strange was released the last week of August.

While it’s too early to deem the 2023 through 2025 drafts bust or boon, the fact is that Vrabel, Eliot Wolf & Co. are banking on the new group of free agents to carry the water for the 2022 drafting disaster.

One big, central theme through free agency last March, as well as the draft, was to add character. There is no room, particularly in the beginning of the Vrabel Era, for drama queens.

This is a new era in Patriots football. Tom Brady allowed Belichick to spread the wealth around, and kept the franchise from paying big money to potential loose cannons.

That doesn’t work without Brady and Belichick in their primes. And the Patriots answered, or really had to answer, spending \$300 million in contracts during free agency in March with nearly \$192 million of it guaranteed.

They weren’t shopping at Building 19, either, paying five players over \$24 million.

The Patriots have a decent roster. They have an easy schedule (ranked 30th out of 32). They have decent depth. They have a few potential, young core guys in quarterback Drake Maye, cornerback Christian Gonzalez, and rookie left tackle Will Campbell and maybe even rookie running back Treveon Henderson.

They will be better than 4-13, their 2024 record.

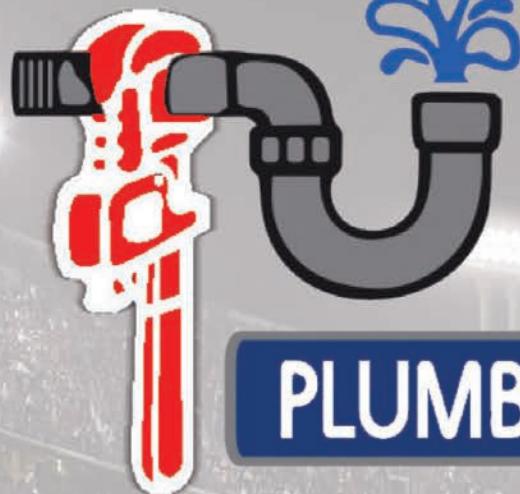
But how much better, twice as good with eight, nine or 10 wins, will depend on the money spent in March.

They are the veterans and leaders of this team as it tries to find its way.

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



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Rhamondre Stevenson, left, led the 2024 Patriots in rushing yards, while Hunter Henry, right, was the team’s top receiver. Both are back for 2025.



## New England Patriots 2024 offensive stats

### Rushing

Name	GP	CAR	YDS	AVG	LNG	BIG	TD	YDS/G	FUM	LST	FD
Rhamondre Stevenson RB	15	207	801	3.9	33	2	7	53.4	6	3	40
Antonio Gibson RB	17	120	538	4.5	45	4	1	31.6	2	0	24
Drake Maye QB	13	54	421	7.8	41	3	2	32.4	4	2	22
Jacoby Brissett QB	8	15	62	4.1	16	0	0	7.8	1	0	5
Terrell Jennings RB	3	13	33	2.5	7	0	0	11	0	0	0
DeMario Douglas WR	17	3	16	5.3	9	0	0	0.9	0	0	0
Joe Milton III QB	1	10	16	1.6	9	0	1	16	1	1	4
Kendrick Bourne WR	12	1	6	6	6	0	0	0.5	0	0	1
Marcus Jones CB	14	1	5	5	5	0	0	0.4	0	0	0
Dell Pettus S	17	1	2	2	2	0	0.1	0	0	1	
Ja'Lynn Polk WR	15	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	17	446	1,969	4.4	48	9	11	115.8	9	3	101

### Passing

Name	GP	CMP	ATT	CMP	YDS	AVG	YDS/G	LNG	TD	INT	SACK	SYL	RTG
Drake Maye QB	13	225	338	66.6	2,276	6.7	175.1	40	15	10	34	229	88.1
Jacoby Brissett QB	8	95	161	59	826	5.1	103.3	50	2	1	18	119	74.2
Joe Milton III QB	1	22	29	75.9	241	8.3	241	48	1	0	0	0	111.4
Kendrick Bourne WR	12	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39.6
Total	17	342	529	64.7	3,343	6.3	196.6	50	18	11	52	348	85

### Receiving

Name	GP	REC	TGTS	YDS	AVG	TD	LNG	BIG	YDS/G	FUM	LST	YAC	FD
Hunter Henry TE	16	66	97	674	10.2	2	35	4	42.1	0	0	268	40
DeMario Douglas WR	17	66	87	621	9.4	3	36	8	36.5	1	0	361	31
Kayshon Boutte WR	15	43	68	589	13.7	3	48	11	39.3	0	0	150	25
Austin Hooper TE	17	45	59	476	10.6	3	38	5	28	2	1	225	25
Kendrick Bourne WR	12	28	38	305	10.9	1	37	2	25.4	0	0	93	13
Antonio Gibson RB	17	23	29	206	9	0	50	2	12.1	0	0	213	11
Rhamondre Stevenson RB	15	33	41	168	5.1	1	16	0	11.2	1	0	237	8
Ja'Lynn Polk WR	15	12	33	87	7.3	2	21	1	5.8	0	0	13	4
JaMycal Hasty RB	15	10	12	59	5.9	1	16	0	3.9	0	0	72	2
K.J. Osborn WR	7	7	18	57	8.1	1	22	1	8.1	0	0	16	2
Tyquan Thornton WR	6	4	8	47	11.8	0	17	0	7.8	0	0	24	2
Jaheim Bell TE	15	2	3	20	10	0	19	0	1.3	0	0	5	1
Marcus Jones CB	14	1	1	18	18	0	18	0	1.3	0	0	25	1
Javon Baker WR	11	1	4	12	12	0	12	0	1.1	0	0	0	1
Vederian Lowe OT	14	1	1	4	4	1	4	0	0.3	0	0	0	1
Total	17	342	500	3,343	9.8	18	50	34	196.6	12	6	1702	167

# 2024 NFL STANDINGS

## AFC East

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Buffalo Bills	13	4	0	.765	5–1	9–3	525	368
Miami Dolphins	8	9	0	.471	3–3	6–6	345	364
New York Jets	5	12	0	.294	2–4	5–7	338	404
New England Patriots	4	13	0	.235	2–4	3–9	289	417

## AFC North

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Baltimore Ravens	12	5	0	.706	4–2	8–4	518	361
Pittsburgh Steelers	10	7	0	.588	3–3	7–5	380	347
Cincinnati Bengals	9	8	0	.529	3–3	6–6	472	434
Cleveland Browns	3	14	0	.176	2–4	3–9	258	435

## AFC South

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Houston Texans	10	7	0	.588	5–1	8–4	372	372
Indianapolis Colts	8	9	0	.471	3–3	7–5	377	427
Jacksonville Jaguars	4	13	0	.235	3–3	4–8	320	435
Tennessee Titans	3	14	0	.176	1–5	3–9	311	460

## AFC West

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Kansas City Chiefs	15	2	0	.882	5–1	10–2	385	326
Los Angeles Chargers	11	6	0	.647	4–2	8–4	402	301
Denver Broncos	10	7	0	.588	3–3	6–6	425	311
Las Vegas Raiders	4	13	0	.235	0–6	3–9	309	434

## NFC East

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Philadelphia Eagles	14	3	0	.824	5–1	9–3	463	303
Wash.Commanders	12	5	0	.706	4–2	9–3	485	391
Dallas Cowboys	7	10	0	.412	3–3	5–7	350	468
New York Giants	3	14	0	.176	0–6	1–11	273	415

## NFC North

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Detroit Lions	15	2	0	.882	6–0	11–1	564	342
Minnesota Vikings	14	3	0	.824	4–2	9–3	432	332
Green Bay Packers	11	6	0	.647	1–5	6–6	460	338
Chicago Bears	5	12	0	.294	1–5	3–9	310	370

## NFC South

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	10	7	0	.588	4–2	8–4	502	385
Atlanta Falcons	8	9	0	.471	4–2	7–5	389	423
Carolina Panthers	5	12	0	.294	2–4	4–8	341	534
New Orleans Saints	5	12	0	.294	2–4	4–8	338	398

## NFC West

	W	L	T	PCT	DIV	CONF	PF	PA
Los Angeles Rams	10	7	0	.588	4–2	6–6	367	386
Seattle Seahawks	10	7	0	.588	4–2	6–6	375	368
Arizona Cardinals	8	9	0	.471	3–3	4–8	400	379
San Francisco 49ers	6	11	0	.353	1–5	4–8	389	436



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