



DYNASTY? DON'T MENTION THAT WORD TO THE PATRIOTS!

They are a starship flying above the competition, collecting Lombardi Trophies as they go. With no sign that their craft is descending, are the **NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS** a sports dynasty by winning three of the past four Super Bowls?

"When I think of that word, I think of the Green Bay Packers of the 1960s," says Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Pittsburgh Steelers defensive tackle **JOE GREENE** (1969-81). Green Bay won five NFL titles from 1961-67. "The team I was on in the '70s won four championships in six years and I don't know if that's a dynasty, but I know that we were the best in four out of six years. I'm proud of the accomplishments that our teams reached, but I don't know if we were a dynasty. That's not modesty – that's my truth.

"You could debate whether or not that was a dynasty and you could make a good debate that New England is now a dynasty, but I don't know." Green adds with a laugh, "Maybe we can call these 'mini' dynasties."

Consider the power of the Patriots:

- Winners of three Super Bowls in a four-year span; only the 1992-95 Dallas Cowboys join them in this feat.
- Winners of their past nine consecutive playoff games, tying Green Bay (1961-62; 1965-67) for the most in NFL history.
- Have not lost consecutive games in 33 weeks – the longest active streak in the NFL by nine weeks (Pittsburgh, 24).
- Have won 52 of its past 63 games (.825) including playoffs and 20 consecutive games at Gillette Stadium.
- Since Week 1 of 2003, are 22-1 (.957) against teams with an above-.500 record, including playoffs.
- **BILL BELICHICK** is the only head coach in NFL history to win three Super Bowls in a four-year span.

Pro Football Hall of Fame coach **BILL WALSH** guided the San Francisco 49ers to three Super Bowl championships and seven playoff appearances in his 10-year tenure (1979-88). His teams compiled a sterling 102-63-1 mark (.617). Does this Patriots team remind him of his 49ers?

"I think it does," says Walsh. "There's a connection between those teams. The quarterback (**TOM BRADY**) in particular plays so much like **JOE MONTANA**. New England plays as a group. It's just a force. The Patriots are heavy in teamwork and commitment."

Greene, who today works in the Steelers' scouting department as a college and pro personnel evaluator, also sees common threads between his mighty Pittsburgh teams and the defending back-to-back Super Bowl champs.

"This last team (2004 Patriots) reminded me of our 1979 team," says Greene. In 1979, Pittsburgh went 12-4 and defeated the L.A. Rams 31-19 in Super Bowl XIV. "I'm talking about veterans who knew how to win regardless of what they encountered. That was like our last two championships.

"We came to play every game," says Greene, "but you never knew how well you're going to have to play to win. Whatever 'good enough' was, that's what we were. Some weeks 'good enough' had to be better than the week before. Watching the Patriots in the playoffs against Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, I saw a veteran team who knew how to win. They have good generalship. The guys know how to play. This is a team with guys on the football field knowing what to do. They are guys who can take charge. And they've got the coaching, too. They were ready to capitalize on opportunities when the ball bounced their way and that's what good teams do. When I played, my coaches told me, 'You never know when you're going to have to step up,' and you've got to be ready to do that.

"Sometimes you have four, five, or six people that always show up, but most of the time, that hat falls on somebody else rather than one of those guys. And that's when you have a solid football team – when somebody else makes the big play."

The NFL's 32 clubs create one of the most competitive industries in the world. So, how does a team maintain long-term success like Walsh's 49ers did and the present-day Patriots?

"You have to reinvent yourself each year," explains Walsh. "You can't expect to carry a basic program in which you're just 'business as usual.' What helped us was that there was some turnover every year. Some free agents came to play for us because they really wanted to join the 49ers. They brought new energy and excitement to the team. They were hand-picked to do specific jobs. Then, it's not uncommon to lose some coaches, but then new coaches come in. That's another part of it. That gets you energized. These new coaches want to win a Super Bowl and they see themselves as having a great chance to do that.

"Your work ethic has to be sustained and you have to make sure that you are just a little firmer than the previous year," Walsh continues. "There are people who self-destruct when they have success – it happens in business as well as sports. You have to be a little tougher, a little more firm, and add new personnel every year to reduce the chance of getting complacent."

Another New England hallmark is unselfish play. Greene believes that this characteristic is essential to collecting Super Bowl rings.

"If you see a championship football team, you see a team that is unselfish," says Greene. "To tell me that the Patriots were the champs in 2004 and that they were unselfish, that's kind of redundant. A championship football team is unselfish. You can't be champions if you're selfish – something will derail you, I assure you. Sometimes as fans we think that the great individual player wins championships. Maybe that's good for someone's fan club, but it's not necessarily going to win a championship – and I don't mean to demean great individual play."

